

Dawn at Tell Tamir: The Assyrian Christian Survival on the Khabur River

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“I am thinking of seventy thousand Assyrians, one at a time, alive, a great race. I am thinking of Theodore Badal, himself seventy thousand Assyrians and seventy million Assyrians, himself Assyria, and man, standing in a barbershop, in San Francisco, in 1933, and being, still, himself, the whole race.”

William Saroyan, “Seventy Thousand Assyrians”

The twentieth century has not been kind to the Assyrian people. It has brought dislocation and change to this ancient community unmatched since the high-water mark of Assyrian history in the 13th century when the invading Mongols first favored and then encouraged the persecution of the Assyrian community under Il-Khanid rule.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a preliminary overview of the current status of the Assyrian Christian community in the Syrian Arab Republic. It is based largely on three field trips to the Khabur in 1993-1996 as well as meetings with Assyrians in Damascus. Syria presents an interesting case because it may be the only Middle Eastern country where the parent Assyrian Church of the East, the so-called "Nestorians," is larger than its Uniate Catholic counterpart, the Chaldean Catholic Church whose head, after the Pope, is the *Catholicos of Babylon and the East* Raphael I Bidawid (b. 1906 in Alqosh) and based in Baghdad. In most other Middle Eastern countries where they are present - Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Turkey - Assyrians are greatly outnumbered by the Chaldeans. Another exception may be the small Assyrian communities in the Republic of Armenia and other parts of the former Soviet Union (Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Southern Russia), where, as far as I can ascertain, there are no Chaldeans. The Khabur settlements, as modest as they are, probably represent the densest concentration of Assyrians anywhere in the world.

No comprehensive survey of the Assyrian community in Syria has been done since Bayard Dodge published in the July 1940 issue of the *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* his article on "*The Settlement of the Assyrians on the Khabur.*" Dodge, the President of the American University in Beirut, had been appointed to the League of Nations' Trustee Board for the Settlement of Assyrians of Iraq, based in Beirut, in 1936. While the Syrian Jezira has been the center of sustained and intense archaeological research for decades, relatively few have bothered with these living communities in the area.

Indeed, recent works on Assyrians, or by Assyrians have focused either on other countries (Iran, Iraq, Turkey, the United States), or on that period from the

19th to the early 20th century when the Assyrians of the Hakkari were "rediscovered" by Europeans and Americans, most of them Christian missionaries. Even Al-Hasaka-born Franco-Assyrian activist Joseph Yacoub, in his 1986 work on "*The Assyrian Question*," looks mostly to Iraq with hardly a word about the land of his birth. This is perhaps due to the fact that Iraqi and Iranian Assyrians, even if only incidentally, have been unwilling observers to some of the region's most dramatic recent events: the Iranian Revolution, the Kurdish Insurgency in Iraq, the Iran-Iraq War. The Khabur Assyrians, a small and recent community in a marginal area, have played no role in modern Syrian political history. Unlike Syria's heterodox Muslim communities - Alawites, Druze, and Ismailis - they have not been particularly well represented in those two vehicles of power, the military and the Ba'th Party. But then, no ethnic group in the Jezira, with the possible exception of the Kurds, has played much of a national role.

The question arises as to how the Assyrians got to the Khabur River where they live in about 35 villages stretching between Al-Hasaka and Ras al-Ain. Although Christian settlement in the Jezira, located so near to such very ancient Christian sites as Nisibis and Edessa, is very old, it is clear that by the beginning of the twentieth century there were very few if any Christian communities in the territories of what is now known as the Syrian Governorate (*muhafiza*) of Al-Hasaka. The coming of World War One exacerbated difficult relations existing between the Muslim and Christian populations in Anatolia and resulted in the flight/massacre/expulsion of historic Assyrian communities in the highlands of the Hakkari during the 1915-1918 period and the relocation of most of the survivors to camps in Iraq and Iran. Indeed, between 1915 to 1920, many of the future Khabur Assyrians would be driven from the Hakkari Mountains, to Urmiyya in Iran, to the safety of the British lines at Hamadan, also in Iran, then to Baquba in Central Iraq, and then Mindan in Northern Iraq.

As tough mountain people used to defending themselves, these Assyrians made excellent soldiers and were employed as such by the British authorities in the famed "Assyrian Levies," and other auxiliary forces, on and off, until the 1940s. Many older men still living on the Khabur served in these forces. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that service in the British Army was an important supplementary source of income for Tell Tamir men in the 1930s and 40s. The seventy-one year old deacon of the Church of Mar Kyriakos in the small village of Dimchij on the Khabur, Yuhanna Yunnan, served in the Levies from 1942 to 1945 in Iraq and then had the misfortune of being drafted into the Syrian Army during its ineffective participation in the 1948 war against Israel.

Tensions between Assyrian and Iraqi nationalists eventually led to open fighting and horrific massacres of Assyrians in Northern Iraq in 1933 at the hands of Iraqi Army units and the flight of Assyrian refugees into French Mandate Syria. The first 415, led by chieftains Malik Yaco (Upper Tiari) and Malik Loco (Tkhuma) crossed the Tigris on July 18, 1933. The young Patriarch of the Assyrian Church

of the East, Mar Shimun Ishaya XXI, was stripped of his Iraqi citizenship and became a stateless person eventually moving to Cyprus and then America. After much discussion between the French, the British, and the League of Nations, the decision was taken to settle the Assyrians in the sparsely settled Jezira where they would join other recent Christian arrivals, Syrian Orthodox and Armenians mostly, who had also escaped the destruction of their communities in Anatolia. Although some thought was given to settling these Assyrians in the more fertile Ghab valley in Western Syria, British Guiana, Niger, or even on the banks of the Parana in Brazil, the Khabur River basin in the extreme Northeast corner of the country was eventually settled upon. Some of the Iraqi Assyrians were already near there, living in refugee camps. Lt. Colonel Stafford noted that *“their settlement here, however, cannot be, and is not intended to be, other than temporary.”*

As new settlers, the Assyrians on the Khabur stayed largely aloof from the political ferment going on in the Jezira in the 1930s and 40s as nationalists and separatists struggled to maintain the upper hand. For instance, the 1937 tribal violence between nationalists, Kurds, and elements of the Shammar tribal confederation which resulted in the anti-Christian pogrom at Amuda in August of that year never touched the Khabur settlements even though they are only a scant distance from Amuda. Today, there are no Christians in Amuda and the Christian cemetery has been converted into a dump. The violence that did occur during that period involved disputes over livestock raiding by the Assyrians' closest neighbors, the Baggara Arab Bedouin. Other Muslim tribal groupings - the Sherabin, Shammar Zor, and Ageidat Jubur lived only slightly further away. The Assyrians did not actually acquire Syrian citizenship and title to their land until late 1940.

The isolated Khabur region was not to be a particularly popular destination. When informed that they were to be settled there instead of the more accessible Ghab, many of the Assyrian refugees expressed an interest in returning to Iraq, an option that was not possible (because in the interim, a special law had been passed stripping them of any right to Iraqi citizenship). And yet through the next fifty years, Assyrians would leave these villages looking for work in Lebanon, Iraq, the Gulf, as well as Europe and America. Nimrud Sulayman left Northeastern Syria decades ago for the bright lights of Damascus, eventually becoming a member of the Central Committee of the Syrian Communist Party. Ibrahim Nano left his village of Tell Sakra in the 1950s to find work in Lebanon (Nano was the first child born in Tell Sakra, after its founding in 1936). He had no intention of ever returning, but the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 drove him back to the Khabur where he now works as Deputy Director of Antiquities for Al-Hasaka Governorate. Nano is extremely unusual in that all of his seven children remain with him in the Jezira; many Assyrian families have relatives in Sweden, America, or Australia. This is especially true of young males who are finding wives in arranged marriages among the Assyrian emigre

communities in Scandinavia or the United States, especially Chicago where there is a large Assyrian community dating back to the 1920s and where the current Patriarch resides.

In a speech to the Royal Central Asian Society in 1953, the then Patriarch noted the decline in the Assyrian population from 1940 to the early 1950s and that in 1948, because of severe drought, the Khabur settlements were "*in danger of dispersing*" if not for the timely assistance of the Syrian government which provided "*grain for food and seed to be paid for later*". He also added that conflict with the Bedouin had greatly diminished since Syrian independence from France. During that time frame, only one government school, in Tell Tamir itself, existed in the villages and the first major irrigation scheme began on the east bank of the Khabur.

Most members of both the Assyrian Church of the East and the Uniate Catholic Chaldeans in Syria are still centered in the North and especially, Northeast of the country. Archimandrite Atnel, the Assyrian religious representative in Syria, is based in Al-Hasaka. He reports directly to Mar Shimun Denkha XXIV, Patriarch since 1976, who lives in Chicago. The only Chaldean Catholic Bishop in Syria, Msgr. Antoine Audo, S.J. (b. 1946 in Aleppo), is based in Aleppo. There are no Assyrian churches that I am aware of in Damascus, Aleppo, or anywhere else in Syria outside the Jezira. The Chaldean Catholics have only one parish in Aleppo (St. Joseph) and one in Damascus (St. Theresa) but four in the Jezira: Christ the King (Hasaka), St. James (Qamishli), St. George (Al-Malkiyah) and Arbouche/Tell Sakra among the Assyrian settlements on the Khabur River. According to the *Annuaire de L'Eglise Catholique en Syrie (1993)*, there are 12,000 Chaldeans in Syria. This would give a conservative estimate of the Assyro-Chaldean population in Syria of about 30,000.

Miriam Ismail, descendant of Patriarchal bodyguard Daniel D'Malik Ismail and wife of parliamentarian Zaya Malik Yaco, notes that Assyrians are now only about 20% of the village of Tell Tamir, the largest of the Khabur settlements. The Assyrians of this bustling little town on the crossroads of two highways leading west to Aleppo and north to Ras al-Ain are mostly clustered around the high ground of the original settlement near the banks of the Khabur River. Most current Tell Tamir inhabitants are either Kurds or recently settled Arab bedouin. The very large land holdings of the Assyrians established in the 1930s through the League of Nations, described by Dodge as "*strips of land twenty-five miles long and over three miles wide on both sides of the river,*" have largely been whittled away as young people emigrated and the land was sold for moving expenses. Many heads of families maintain two jobs - work in the towns of Qamishli and, especially, fast-growing Al-Hasaka, and farm labor. Small rural settlements of Arab Muslims and Kurds have sprung up between what had been a solid belt of Assyrian villages. Cotton, wheat, and fruit trees such as plums and apricots are the important crops.

In Tell Tamir, the Italianate-style Church of Our Lady, completed in the early 1980s, still serves as the center of the Assyrian community. The original church built of mud-brick in the 1930s was demolished when the new building was completed. Some 500 meters away from the new church stands a large green domed brick mosque built in the 1970s to serve the burgeoning Muslim population.

The lavish, modern two-story house of Zaya Malik Yaco with a lovely veranda overlooking a bend in the Khabur still dominates the old town, just like the Yaco's living room is dominated by a large framed photograph of Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad with the Assyrian deputy. Although a member of Syria's parliament, Yaco holds a Canadian passport and his sons live in California. He is the son of the hereditary chieftain of the Tiari tribe, Malik Yaco. Malik Yaco was a controversial, larger than life figure for many Assyrians, described by a British officer that knew him as "an ex-Levy officer, who had shown good service, a brave man but hot-headed to a degree." The elder Yaco's nephew was responsible for one of the most spectacular events in recent Assyrian history, the murder of the head of the Assyrian Church, the Mar Shimun Ishayi XXI, in San Jose, California on November 6th, 1975. He was killed supposedly because he had broken church law and tradition by marrying. Some still discount this story believing that it had more to do with a struggle for power or money.

Zaya Malik Yaco defeated the Syrian Orthodox deputy Bashir Asadi in the 1994 Syrian parliamentary elections. Many Assyrians on the Khabur felt that Asadi, who promoted unity and common goals among Syriac-speaking peoples, was the better person and that his victory four years before had been a genuine one. They felt that Yaco had won through fraud as with so many elections in Syria. The other hereditary princely family of the Assyrians, that of Malik Loco, overlord of the Tkhuma tribe, still lives in Tell Hormiz but is much less actively politically than Malik Yaco's offspring. The current Mayor of Tell Tamir is also a relative, a nephew of Malik Yaco.

Unlike Tell Tamir, most of the original villages on the Khabur remain entirely Assyrian. Tiny Tell Goran, for instance, has one Arab-owned house. The decaying village of Lower Tell Rouman has one Arab Muslim family (from Homs) which bought the farm of a departing Assyrian in 1991. The village of Arbouche (or Tell Arbouche) has become entirely Chaldean Catholic, Assyrians who have come into union with Rome. That village also contains St. George's Chaldean Catholic Convent which currently has two nuns from Iraq in residence. The large village of Tell Hormiz on the isolated west bank of the Khabur is the stronghold of the old-calendar schism of the Assyrian Church which began in 1965. Instead of pledging loyalty to the Mar Shimun in Chicago they look to a rival Patriarch based in Baghdad, Mar Addai II Givargis who was elected in 1972. In addition to Tell Hormiz, two or three families in Tell Tamir are old-calendar Assyrians.

According to Archimandrite Kivarkis Atnel, there are still about 20,000 Assyrians on the Khabur living in 33 settlements. This is partially borne out by Syrian government statistics for 1994 which show a population of 19,729 for the original 31 villages mentioned by Dodge. However, this includes the total population of Tell Tamir (5216 persons in 1994) which is only about one-fifth Christian giving a more realistic total of about 15,000 for the Khabur Assyrians (as opposed to 8,744 in 1940 according to Dodge). Of course, like most places in the Middle East, the Muslim population in the Jezira has grown much faster than the Christian one in the last fifty years.

Atnel, the Patriarchal Representative in Syria based in Al-Hasaka, is from Tell Tawil and both the son and father of a priest (Assyrian priests, like the Eastern Orthodox, can marry). While he entered the priesthood in Qamishli in 1970, his son studies for the priesthood at a Catholic college in Chicago. Atnel noted that the Assyrian community has been growing rapidly in Al-Hasaka city as families have moved from the countryside and from Qamishli to Al-Hasaka, the capital city of Al-Hasaka Governorate. Al-Qamishli's community has declined from 200 to 50 families while the Al-Hasaka community now numbers 500 families, including some recent Iraqi Christian refugees, and boasts a large new church building under construction for the last decade. Across the street, a local Evangelical Protestant group has built an equally impressive sanctuary with funds from American co-religionists. Its congregation is made up of former members of Assyrian, Syrian Orthodox, and Uniate Catholic churches. Both churches are in a new development on the outskirts of town away from the old part of Al-Hasaka built in the 1930s which hosts the Syrian Orthodox, Chaldean Catholic, Armenian Catholic and Syrian Catholic churches.

A typical Assyrian young man's life provides insight into the development of the Khabur communities at the end of the 20th century. Sami Hitler Darmo, son of Hitler Darmo, worked as a barber in Tell Tamir at the Urnina Barbershop and lived in a mud-brick home in Tell Goran when I first met him in 1995. His grandfather, who fought with the Imperial Russian Army in World War One and felt betrayed by the newly Sovietized Russians, named his son who was born in the 1930s after "the Communists' greatest enemy." Sami's own son, an American citizen, holds the more traditional Assyrian name of Ashur. Sami's wife was a first generation Assyrian-American from Chicago. Darmo noted that Syriac is not taught in the government schools but in church schools and summer courses. All Assyrians speak Syriac although some younger men seemed to have trouble reading it easily. Bayard Dodge's recommendation in 1940 that the Assyrians should learn "some Arabic" has been fulfilled with a vengeance.

By the time of my last visit to Tell Tamir in June 1996, Sami had succeeded in emigrating to the United States. When I first met him at that barbershop, Assyrian pop music was being played loudly on a cassette player. Both local bands, which record in Aleppo or Al-Hasaka, as well as international Assyrian singers are popular. The most popular Assyrian singer is Evan Agassi,

born in Iran and living in the United States. He is often described as a cousin of the famous tennis player Andre Agassi. The local Assyrians say that Ewan claims he is not related to Andre, who himself is the son of a former boxing champion of Iran.

Religious controversy is never far from Middle Eastern churches. The dynamic Georgetown-educated Eusathius Matta Rouhm, Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of the Jezira and Euphrates is the most compelling churchman in Northern Syria. The large dome of his cathedral in Al-Hasaka, St. George's, dominates the skyline of that city. A similar colossal project is rising in the unlikely site of the tiny Assyrian village of Tell Wardiat. The massive yellow stone walls of a new Syrian Orthodox church/monastery/conference center dwarf any other building on the Khabur, a region that contains no members of the Syrian Orthodox Church. Many Assyrians view the St. Mary's project with suspicion, others cheerfully admit that they believe that it is an attempt by the more numerous and better organized Suryani to eventually absorb the Assyrians. The Syrian Orthodox disavow any ulterior motive describing the site as a conference center that can be used by Christians throughout Northeast Syria.

Not only are the Syrian Orthodox more numerous, but they tend to have more priests per congregation. Assyrian *kashas* are in short supply. The village of Tell Sakra has no resident priest but shares him with four other villages. Yet religious life is still vibrant, the traditional event of the year in the Assyrian villages is the festival of the saint of the village church. In Tell Sakra, October 15th is the festival of Mar Hanania (Tell Chame has the same saint). A local wine festival is held in honor of the saint with blind-tastings and much music and celebration. Tell Kefji, Tell Maghas, Tell Massas, and Tell Baz all have churches named in honor of St. George (Mar Givergis) whose feast day is the 24th of April. Tell Djemaa, the largest purely Assyrian village on the Khabur, has a church dedicated to the female saint, Brai Shimoni (the mother of the Maccabees). Tell Tawil has Mar Sawa, the great saint of the Hakkari Tiari, Um Keff has Mar Tuma, Dimchij/Tell Faida has Mar Kyriakos (July 15), Tell Hafian has Mar Shallita (Mar Shallita was the saint of the patriarchal church in the Hakkari village of Kotchanis where the villagers of Tell Hafian originally came from), Tell Talaa has Mar Awdisho (August 6). Mar Awdisho, "the anchorite," is still another Hakkari saint. According to Fiey, his site there was one of the last of the extant Assyrian monasteries. Lower Tell Rouman has the Church of Rabban Petion while Upper Tell Rouman has a Church of the Virgin.

Tell Nasri's Church of the Virgin contains one of the very few relics on the Khabur. A gold gilt reliquary contains a portion of cloth of the robe of the Virgin Mary, an item that was carried into exile in the 1930s from a village church in Northern Iraq. During the feast of the Virgin on the 15th of August Assyrians from throughout Syria gather at Tell Nasri. The village church committee of Tel Nasri is one of the most active and best organized on the Khabur. Committee member Zaya Lazar learned his love of Assyrian lore and tradition from his

grandfather Benyamin Lazar who died in 1987 at the age of one hundred. Lazar fought in World War One as well as serving with the Assyrian Levies in World War Two. Some years before he died, Benyamin Lazar secretly crossed the border into Turkey and made his way to his birthplace in the Hakkari mountains and stood among the trees and springs of his ancestral village which still stands abandoned and ruined. The grandson gave his grandfather the ultimate compliment, noting to me that "he was a true Nestorian" ("kan nasturi haqiqi").

All of the villages have churches, and each year sees another of the original mud-brick structures replaced by sturdier cinder block, a few of the larger villages also have Assyrian cultural centers as well. The one in Tell Sakra, used for teaching Syriac among other activities, was festooned with four portraits: 2 Assyrian (the current Patriarch Mar Shimun Denkha XXIV, the World War One Assyrian military hero, Aga Petros of the Baz tribe) and two Syrian political icons (the ubiquitous President Hafiz al-Asad, and the late heir apparent, Staff Major Basil al-Asad, who died in a January 1994 car accident). Like many Syrian Christians, the Assyrians regard the current Syrian ruler as a bulwark against a tide of Islamist violence they see sweeping the region and, because he belongs himself to a religious minority, as a protector of the Christians against possible Sunni Muslim intolerance.

The following chart compares Assyrian village populations in 1940 and in 1994.

Assyrian Settlements on the Khabur 1940, 1994

<u>Village</u>	<u>Sub Tribe</u>	<u>Inhabitants</u>	
		<u>1940</u>	<u>1994</u>
Tell Teouli (Tawil)	Upper Tiari	331	600
Tell Um Rafa	Upper Tiari	280	829
Tell Um Keff	Timar	113	782
Tell Kefdji	Liwan	140	449
Tell Djemaa	Halamoun	489	2,006
Tell Tamer	Upper Tiari	1,244	5,216
Tell Nasri	Upper Tiari	503	1,088
Tell Chamran (U)	Eill	223	553
Tell Chamran (L)	Mar Bichou	356	
Tell Hafian	Kotchannis	243	261
Tell Talaa	Sarra	371	639
Tell Maghas	Gawar	463	319
Tell Massas	Barwar	390	320
Abu Tine	Jilu	155	419
Tel Goran	Jilu	184	168
Fouedate	Shams al-Din	363	529

Dimchij	Kotchanis	72	230
Kabar Chamie	Diz	145	611
Tell Balouet	Diz	200	377
Tell Baz	Baz	133	425
Tell Rouman (U)	Baz	158	408
Tell Rouman (L)	Tkhuma	177	108
El-Kharita	Tkhuma	111	254
Tell Chame	Tkhuma	272	213

Assyrian Settlements on the Khabur 1940, 1994: continued....

<u>Village</u>	<u>Sub Tribe</u>	<u>Inhabitants</u>	
		<u>1940</u>	<u>1994</u>
Tell Wardiat	Tkhuma	147	108
El-Makhada	Tkhuma	266	286
Taal	Tkhuma	283	468
Tell Sakra	Tkhuma	268	564
El-Breij	Tkhuma	103	179
Arbouche	Tkhuma	258	399
Tell Hormiz	Tkhuma	303	921
	Total:	8,744	19,729

(Sources: Dodge, *Taqdirat Adad Sukan al-Qura wal-Mazaria al-Mahula bil-Sukan fi Muhafizah al-Hasaka, 1993-1994* - *Mudiriyat Ihsa al-Hasaka, Al-Maktab al-Markizi lil-Ihsa*, pp. 16-23)

Members of the original five semi-independent Hakkari Mountain tribes (Upper Tiari, Tkhuma, Jilu, Diz, and Baz) totaled 5,521 out of 8,744 in 1940 and still make up the majority of the Khabur Assyrians. The remainder came from areas under more immediate control by Kurdish Muslim tribes which alternately preyed upon and protected their Assyrian raya. Tribal identification seems to remain strong among the Khabur Assyrians as practically everyone I met could recite the tribal affiliation of neighboring villages. Tribal loyalty also seems to have played a role in the election victory of Zaya Malik Yaco in 1995. The village of Lower Tell Chamran (356 inhabitants in 1940) was settled by Assyrians of the Yelader valley, very close to the Iranian border, site of the great Church of Mar Bisho. Unfortunately, this village seems to have been absorbed by its neighbors. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Upper Tiari were living in 25 villages situated on the right bank of the Greater Zab River in present-day Southeast Turkey. The Tkhuma occupied the left bank of that river. The territory of the much smaller Jilu, Diz and Baz tribes stretched northeast of the Tiari and Tkhuma. Almost no Christians remain in the medieval Assyrian homeland in the Hakkari Mountains, now largely a war zone between the

partisans of the PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party) and the Turkish Army, locked in a brutal battle for supremacy.

Statistical information from 1970 shows little or no population growth among the Assyrian villages compared to the 1940 figures. Those thirty years saw thousands of Khabur Assyrians emigrating with relative ease in search of a better life in the West or other Arab states. Both the statistical and anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that, while young males especially still seek their fortunes abroad, fewer Assyrians are able or willing to leave. Comparing the population figures between 1940 and 1994 one finds an average annual population growth rate of 2.32%, if one excludes the now overwhelmingly non-Assyrian town of Tell Tamir, one comes to an even more anemic 1.22% annual growth rate over 54 years. If one divides the 54 years into two periods - 1940-1981 and 1981-1994, the results are even more striking. Annual growth rates for the first period average out to .33% (with most of the growth occurring in the last decade of the period, 1970-1981), while the second period between 1981 and 1994 comes to a much more robust 4.3%. As Betts notes, "*the population of Tell Tamir (which in 1960 was a 100% Assyrian village) was 1,250 in 1960 as opposed to 1,244 in 1936*" at the same time, the Muslim population trebled. The latter growth rate of 4.3% for 1981-1994 can be endlessly debated (for instance, how long are emigrants, if at all, being included in population surveys?), but certainly is much more in line with the very rapid growth rates of the general Syrian population in the last decades. Whether Khabur Assyrian growth rates are that high deserves further study, there is no doubt that their current growth rates are much higher than the pioneer era of 1936-1960.

Despite continuing massive emigration and economic stagnation, the Assyrian villages on the Khabur have survived. What began as a temporary, desperate existence on the wild Syrian steppe has settled down to a humble and yet bucolic life centered around family, church and a life close to the soil. The relative stability and isolation of Syria since 1970, especially in the Jezira, have spared this community the horrors and upheavals visited upon their co-religionists in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Lebanon. Their history continues, their numbers may be slowly thinned but they have weathered the storm of the last hundred years and their survival into the next century seems assured.

***Population of Assyrian Villages on the Khabur River
Al-Hasaka Governorate, 1981-1995***

Village	1981	1993	1994	1995
Tell Teouli (Tawil)	382	578	600	622
Tell Um Rafa	528	799	829	859
Tell Um Keff	501	758	782	814
Tell Kefdji	276	433	449	

Tell Djemaa	1,278	1,935	2,006	2,079
Tell Tamer	2,994	5,030	5,216	5,405
Tell Nasri	793	1,049	1,088	1,127
Tell Chamran	352	533	553	572
Tell Hafian	166	251	261	
Tell Talaa	407	616	639	662
Tell Maghas	203	307	319	
Tell Massas	204	309	320	
Abu Tine	67	404	419	

***Population of Assyrian Villages on the Khabur River
Al-Hasaka Governorate, 1981-1995, continued.....***

Village	1981	1993	1994	1995
Tell Goran	107	162	168	
Fouedate	337	510	529	548
Dimchij	150	227	230	
Kabar Chamie	389	589	611	622
Tell Balouet	240	323	377	
Tell Baz	271	410	425	
Tell Rouman (Upper)	260	394	408	
Tell Rouman (Lower)	69	104	108	
El Kharita	162	245	254	
Tell Chame	136	206	213	
Tell Wardiat	68	103	108	
El Makhada	182	275	286	
Taal	298	451	468	
Tell Sakra	359	543	564	584
El Breij	114	173	179	
Arbouche	254	384	399	
Tell Hormiz	587	779	921	954
Total:	12,334	18,880	19,729	

*1995 population estimates were annotated by hand only for towns and villages of five hundred or more persons.

Source: *Taqdirat Adad Sukan al-Qura wal-Mazaria al-Mahula bil-Sukan fi Muhafiza al-Hasaka, 1993-1994* (Mudiriyyat Ihsa al-Hasaka, Al-Maktab al-Markazi lil-Ihsa), pp. 16-23.

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