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# **LEST WE PERISH**

## **A FORGOTTEN HOLOCAUST**

The Extermination of the Christian Assyrians in Turkey and Persia

1996

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## **Holocaust of the Assyrians through the present day**

Foreword to the 1st edition, by Tilman Zülch

It was a frightening image which will remain in my memory forever: about 3,000 people, Christian Assyrians and Kurds, were herded together in the Baze gorge at the end of August 1988. The camera wandered over the faces of suffering refugees marked by persecution and hardship. There were children of all ages, women and old men. They had fled towards Turkey to escape the poison gas attacks of the Iraqi Air Force. With the border tangibly close, the presence of Iraqi tanks blocked them from crossing the border road. Only one day before the terrible last attack of the Iraqi Air Force, a Kurdish cameraman had been able to photograph these refugees. This record was then given to the British television writer Gwynne Roberts and became part of his film on the poison gas crimes of the Iraqi Baath dictatorship. From a nearby hill, fifteen young Kurds were eyewitnesses of the Iraqi plane attack. As the Iraqis didn't fear any more resistance, they dipped down low, spreading the deadly gas throughout the entire gorge. Several hundred including many children, were still alive the next morning—though for the most part severely injured. Then an Iraqi Army "task force" arrived, about 2,000 men, piled together both those who were still living and the dead, poured kerosene over them and lit them.

For three decades Christian Assyrians have been resisting what is at present one of the cruellest dictatorships of the world together with the Kurds, and they have both repeatedly been victimized. An unknown, but not insignificant, number of them are among the 15, 000 civilians killed by poison gas in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1987/88. But they are also victims of German economic politics since West German companies were the Baath dictatorship's most important partner when building up the Iraqi poison gas industry. The German government failed to take any significant action through these past years—despite many warnings from the Society for Threatened Peoples which were definitely not unheeded by the media—to hinder segments of the German exporting economy from their atrocities.

The German military and German politicians were already involved from 1915-1918 guiding and co-ordinating the Turkish military and then "keeping silent, justifying and denying the truth" when the majority of Turkey's Christian Assyrians were annihilated by a planned genocidal crime. Thus German politics has learned nothing from this part of our history. That should fill us Germans with sorrow, but also with anger, and cause us to stand up for the persecuted Assyrians even more intensely. Iraq, Turkey and Iran have also learned nothing from the history of the Assyrian persecution. Already in the thirties thousands of Assyrians were massacred in Iraq. In Turkey, the holocaust at the beginning of this century

was followed in the sixties by the flight of the Syrian Orthodox Assyrians from the mountainous country of Tur Abdin to Western Europe—they could no longer tolerate the discrimination by Muslim neighbors and the Turkish authorities. And finally, Khomeini's Islamic fundamentalism set in motion a new mass flight of the Assyrian population into western countries. Only the Kurdish freedom movement learned from this—be it in Iraq, Iran or in individual exile parties: they accepted the Assyrians as partners, as fellow representatives of a persecuted people. They thus drew consequences from the involvement of Kurdish tribes in the genocide of the Assyrians.

Somewhat tolerated in Syria, but persecuted and confronted with physical annihilation elsewhere, much of the Assyrian people has gone into Western exile, forming communities and institutions in the Diaspora from Canada to Argentina, from Sweden to Australia. The history of a people which stretches over several millennia, who resided in the Near East many centuries before the Arabs and the Turks, is in danger of being wiped out. Aramaic, an ancient Semitic tongue, the mother tongue of Jesus, would also be wiped out in the process. For this reason friends of the Assyrians should not only speak up against violations of human rights and for Assyrians refugees, but over and above this support the entire range of cultural, linguistic and religious initiatives of the Assyrians in exile.

A few years ago, no one would have imagined possible the breathtaking changes in Eastern Europe from the Baltic to Hungary through Slovenia. The antiquated dictatorships of the Near East will also fall some day. The longed-for homeland of the Aramaic-speaking Christians, of the Assyrians, in part of ancient Upper Mesopotamia could then become reality. For that reason too Assyrians care for their language and identity when they are in exile—including in West Germany, Switzerland, and Austria.



## Introduction

It remains a difficult task to link an event in world history like the First World War with the little-known historical facts about the genocide of a people largely unknown in the West, the Assyrians. While the genocide was perpetrated at the same time as the war occurred, it hardly left any traces in historical writings. The backdrop to this drama includes the World War from 1914 to 1918, the emergence of the German-Turkish alliance on the basis of 19th-century policy-making in the Orient, and the course of the war in the Middle East. It is in the context of these events we must seek out Assyrian strands of evidence in what the West has inadequately termed the “genocide of the Armenians.”

Vast documentation exists on the Armenian genocide perpetrated by the Young Turks, headed by the murderous triumvirate of Enver, Talaat and Jamal. But the numerous volumes provide few clues about the annihilation and expulsion of the Christian Assyrians in the same area at the same time. Numerically much smaller than the Armenians, two-thirds of the Assyrians were killed. Research and analysis are rendered more difficult by the fact that the word “Assyrian” is rarely found in the title of the various reports and documents treating the question.

This fact can be illustrated on the basis of two important works of documentation. The first one was edited by James Bryce: The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire (London 1916, 684 pp.). This documentation was published during the war by the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs, James Bryce. It consists of eye-witness reports to the genocide, and includes 21 documents substantiating the crimes committed against the Assyrians in Turkey and in Persia. The material was assembled for the Foreign Office by Bryce’s assistant, Arnold Toynbee, later a distinguished historian. The original title of the Toynbee papers was “The Treatment of the Armenians and the Assyrian Christians in the Ottoman Empire.” Bryce was co-founder of the English-Armenian Society, and when he published this collection in late 1916, he changed the title to mention only the Armenians, although the work still contained more than one hundred pages of detailed reports on the Assyrians. The French translation presented at the Paris Peace Conference (1920) omitted the documents on the Assyrians altogether. A new and complete English edition of the documentation was only published in 1972 (in Beirut). There have been no translations into other languages, but the collection of materials has been used by many historians researching the Armenian genocide.

The second work was edited by Johannes Lepsius: Report on the condition of the Armenian People (Potsdam 1916 and Germany and Armenia 1914-1918; Collection of Diplomatic

Files; Potsdam 1919). The German theologian, missionary and founder of the German Mission to the Orient (*Deutsche Orient-Mission*), Johannes Lepsius, produced two publications containing unique documentary material about the political links between imperial Germany and the extermination policy of the Young Turks. A considerable number of the reports and documents concern the Assyrians. (I published a selection of these in 1980, in *pogrom*, No. 72/73). Because the focal point of his efforts and his life-long mission was to rescue the Armenians, it is not out of the question that, hitherto unpublished documents exist in German material archives, though ignored by Lepsius. In any case, his documentation and reporting are representative enough to support the thesis that the Armenians and the Assyrians suffered the same fate.

In addition to these two works of documentation, added evidence of the forgotten genocide can be seen in the founding of the *American Committee of Armenian and Syrian Relief* (ACASR). The committee was created in the wake of the terrible news from American missionaries who worked among the Assyrians in Northwest Persia. Under siege at their mission for four months beginning in January 1915, they experienced inhuman conditions alongside 18,000 Assyrians, while 25,000 to 30,000 Assyrians fled towards Russia to escape from the Turkish army. It was not until the summer of 1915 that the American missionaries were able to send extensive reports to their mission committee in Boston. Their letters, reports and diary entries would later be included in the Toynbee papers.

Persecution of the Assyrians on Turkish territory began as early as December 1914, reaching its first high point between January and April 1915. It would be several months before the start of actual deportations from the Armenian provinces, where parishes of Syrian Christians also resided. The Armenian uprising in Van (May 1915) occurred at the same time as the Assyrian tragedy in the Hakkari highlands, barely 100 kilometers south. Only half of the 160,000 people in question managed to escape to Persia.

In 1916, and again in 1917, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson appealed to his countrymen to donate to both of these needy Christian people.

The American relief organization ACASR, for which two Assyrians also worked (Paul Shimmon and Abraham Yohannan), published several works on the annihilation and expulsion of the Assyrians in Turkey and Persia.

In his extensive report on refugees (*The Refugee Problem: A Report of a Survey*, London 1939), John H. Simpson, High Commissioner of Refugees for the League of Nations, would devote Chapter IV to the Assyrian refugees. His predecessor, Fridjof Nansen, fails to even

mention the Assyrian tragedy in his well-known book A People Deceived - a Study Trip through Georgia and Armenia as High Commissioner of the League of Nations, Leipzig 1928, which was translated into several languages.

A number of shorter texts and articles on the fate of the Christian Assyrians were published during and following the First World War. The Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian mission was committed to awakening a sense of political responsibility in the consciousness of the English public. Influential politicians such as Lord Curzon presented the Assyrian question to Parliament and to the press. Lord Curzon made every effort to ensure that Assyrian representatives would be admitted to the Paris Peace Conference.

At the same time, books by Assyrians were also published in English and French; personal experiences were described and collections of eye-witness reports were published (see, *inter alia*, Bibliography: J. Naayem, Paris 1920; Y. H. Shabaz, Philadelphia 1918; P. Shimmon, London 1916; Surma d-Bet Mar Shimun, London 1920; A. Yohannan, London 1916). Politicians and important personages in England, France and America encouraged Assyrian authors to write and sponsored the publication of such works. These acts were motivated by political interests, linked with upcoming decisions on how territory would be divided and who would influence regions of strategic and economic interest in the Near and Middle East, including areas of settlement from which the Assyrians had been expelled. After these decisions were made in the years that followed, Assyrian publications were completely forgotten; they can now be found in only a few of the world's libraries.

Writings by the German Lutheran mission from Hermannsburg and other small German aid societies which had contact with the Assyrians between the turn of the century and the First World War had disappeared. During a research visit in 1983, I discovered the complete collection of these materials as well as unpublished correspondence in the archives of the Hermannsburg mission. A portion of this has been included in the present documentation.

On the other hand, a source which would otherwise have been very difficult to get hold of, an Assyrian war diary containing detailed reports on the regional events in the First World War's most out-of-the-way sites, the Hakkari Highlands and the border area between Turkey and Persia, was available in German. Rudolf Macuch published a translation of this diary in summary form in his History of Late and Modern Syriac Literature (Berlin, 1976). It forms the basis of the excerpt included here, along with the original Assyrian text which appeared in Teheran in 1964.

Unfortunately, that valuable documentary material in the state archives of the former Soviet Union was inaccessible until recent years.

The documentary material in Turkey is still not accessible for historical evaluation. The Turkish government announced in 1989 that it was ready to open up and grant access to the Ottoman archives for international science and historical research. Turkey has not yet come to terms with its past with reference to the annihilation and expulsion of the Christian population during the First World War.

### **The Question of German Culpability**

To date, neither German nor Turkish historians have reappraised the question of shared guilt or responsibility for the catastrophe of the annihilation and expulsion of two million Christians (Armenians and Assyrians) in Turkey during the First World War. Memoirs by German diplomats and military officers, as well as contemporary political writings by German pacifists, are no substitute for careful and precise historical research on this period.

Ulrich Trumpener researched this issue using U.S. archival material. In his book Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914-1918 (Princeton, 1968), he exonerates the German political and military leadership from shared responsibility in the formulation or implementation of the extermination policy pursued by the Young Turks. In Germany's attitude to these events, Trumpener perceives only moral indifference and an inability by German officials to make a balanced judgement about the reports provided by responsible diplomats and personages.

In fact, even Johannes Lepsius, the most important observer, had come to the same conclusion. In his own overwhelming collection of evidence collected on behalf of the Foreign Office shortly after the war, he would discern only "inadvertent German shared guilt." He was reproached by many for his ambivalent approach: it was said he used the collection of diplomatic files only to morally exonerate the imperial German government.

It is indeed true that there is no evidence which incontrovertibly implicates the German government. No German soldier participated personally in the annihilation campaigns executed by Turks and Kurds. No German general issued any field orders, nor received any orders from the Turkish Minister of War. The German army headquarters, which had reorganized the Turkish Army, had no political say in decision making and no influence on decisions made in Berlin and Constantinople. They were—like all armies—an amoral institution used as an instrument of power.

But none of this can exonerate the imperial German government, where the emperor pursued autocratic colonial policies against the judgement of many. Nor can one overlook the significance of the fact that Germany's Oriental Propaganda Department in Berlin

counselled and urged the government of the Young Turks to declare a “Holy War.” Certainly the attitude of the German government and its Foreign Office, once the extent of the Turkish annihilation of the Christians became known, hardly argues acquittal or exoneration from shared responsibility. This attitude consisted of maintaining silence, rationalizing the events, and denying them altogether. German public opinion was manipulated according to government instructions, while a standard of “blind obedience” was expected of German diplomats and generals in Turkey. Those who spoke up for the victims were recalled or publicly defamed as “traitors to their own country.” Whether the Young Turk government could have been deterred from their annihilation plans if the German allies had exerted pressure is mere speculation, and not the task of historical analysis.

We judge the events of that time based on our knowledge of ensuing German history. Thus, the fact that Adolf Hitler mentioned in passing in 1939 the Young Turks’ policy of extermination while seeking to legitimize his own plans can be related to Germany’s refusal to pass moral judgement on the first genocide of the 20th century. By now, of course, the annihilation and expulsion of the Armenians and Assyrians between 1915 and 1918 has been overshadowed by Hitler Germany’s genocide of the Second World War.

Today, tens of thousands of Christian Assyrians live in the four corners of the globe, having fled in recent decades from the various parts of the former Ottoman Empire. They are descendants of the survivors of a genocide that still is not part of our historical consciousness. This documentation is offered in honor of these unknown victims. It is also intended to serve as a link in the history of repression, persecution and expulsion of the Assyrians in Turkey, Iraq, Libanon, Syria, and Persia, a process which continues to date.

**PART 1 HISTORICAL SETTING**

## 1. Assyrians

### History

Today's Assyrian people date their existence to the ancient Assyrians, Chaldeans and Aramaeans, who inhabited Syria and Mesopotamia for millennia. At present, they live throughout the Middle East, notably Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Turkey and, since their emigration, in Western Europe, the Americas and Australia. Following the break-up of their empire, a large part of the population went through an assimilation process, gradually adapting religion, language and culture to that of their new rulers. Cyrus' great Persian empire, the dominance of the Parthians, the Sassanids, the Byzantine empire, the Arab caliphate, the Seljuks, the Mongol hordes and finally the dominance of the Turkish Ottomans from the 15th to the beginning of the 20th century shaped the destiny of a people subject to ever changing sovereignty.

A minority withstood the melting process through the millennia and, until 1915, they comprised a linguistic and religious community in a geographically relatively homogeneous area, Upper Mesopotamia, with extensions into the Mosul and Urmia plateaus. Until the beginning of the 20th century, this settlement area was within the territories of the Ottoman empire and Persia; after the First World War it was split up once again.

The idea of the modern nation-state was taken over from Europe by the Orient in the 19th century; it spread among the peoples of Asia and Africa. At the beginning of the 20th century, it also took hold in parts of the population which until then had considered themselves Syrian Christians. Their cultural heritage, ancient Assyrian and Babylonian history, Syro-Aramaic Christianity, and the still living mother tongue became the basis for a national ethos and orientation from which the present-day national and cultural Assyrian movement arose.

### Language

Syrian Christians continually inhabited an area which was the heartland of the Aramaic language since the first millennium B.C., an era when it became the lingua franca for the general region.

Within the Semitic family of languages, *Aramaic* belongs to the Western Semitic branch, together with Hebrew and Northern Arabic. It was the official language of the late Assyrian and Persian kings; their administrators used it as the language of correspondence in all

provinces of their empires. The Aramaic alphabet was easier to use than the Assyrian cuneiform script.

Aramaic developed into two major dialects: Ancient East Aramaic (in Mesopotamia) and Ancient West Aramaic (Syrian-Palestine region). Each branch produced a series of dialects.

With the decline of the great eastern empires of the Assyrians, Chaldeans and Persians, and with the advance of Greek culture after the 4th century B.C. in the previously Aramaic-speaking region, the Aramaic language slowly declined in significance. Greek influence was soon superimposed on West Aramaic and the language gradually disappeared, while *East Aramaic* underwent an evolution under Hellenistic influence resulting, in the first centuries of Christianity, in the formation of a *Syro-Aramaic literary and standard language*. In addition, Aramaic vernacular languages were spoken even then. The modern Aramaic dialects spoken by the Assyrians until the present day developed from them, not from the Syriac standard, literary and church language.

The Syro-Aramaic standard language, the most important literary vehicle of culture since pre-Islamic time, arose in the 3rd century. It had its roots in Edessa, the Syrian theological center. It gave rise to an almost incalculable wealth of works of philosophy, medicine, natural science, language and theology for several centuries after the Islamic advance. It is the most significant Christian body of literature in the Near East. Among the greatest cultural achievements are the translation of Greek philosophy and science into Arabic by Syriac speaking Christians. Ancient thought and knowledge reached the Occident in this way.

The language declined in the 12th and 13th century, but continued to exist as a church and scholarly language. Hence, it was never a so-called dead language. Even through the 20th century, it has remained a literary language.

Most recently, the modern Assyrian cultural movement has tried to shape the Syro-Aramaic standard language into a unified modernized literary language.

Two Syriac alphabets which deviate only slightly from one another have developed, corresponding to geographic and political splits and to the schism between the churches: the cursive Serto and the East Syrian alphabet. The primary difference between the two scripts is in the way the vowels are represented. Like all Semitic alphabets, Syriac is a consonant alphabet. The West Syrians used three letters from the Greek alphabet (alpha, epsilon, eta) to represent the vowels a, e, i, o, u graphically; they were written above the Syriac consonant

script. The East Syrians, who did not come under Hellenistic influence, developed a system of dots with which even long and short vowels could be expressed. These dots are placed above and below the Syriac letters.

The modern Aramaic dialects were not written until the 19th century. A modern Syriac written language was developed by the American missionaries, based on the city dialect of Urmia (Persia) and written with the East Syriac alphabet. This written language is accessible to only a portion of the Assyrians.

The numerous modern Aramaic dialects have been categorized by western Semitic linguists according to geographic distribution:

1. Jewish Modern Aramaic
2. Christian Modern Aramaic (= Modern Syriac)
  - a) Modern East Syriac (Aturaya)—Urmia (Persia), Hakkari (Turkey)
  - b) Modern Central Syriac (Surat)—Mosul Plateau, Bohtan region
  - c) Modern West Syriac (Turoyo)—Tur Abdin (east of Mardin, Turkey)

Each dialect is divided into numerous sub-dialects; each village usually had its own, slightly different from the others within a major dialect. The dissolution of the modern Aramaic linguistic enclaves due to this century's waves of annihilation and expulsion, the emigration of the remaining Aramaic-speaking population from villages to cities, and various other influences, have to a great extent levelled out the dialects into a unified colloquial language.

Since the First War the Assyrian national movement uses the name "Assyrian" for its classic and modern written language and for the colloquial language. This can be described as a socio-linguistic term, analogous to the modern designation of peoples. It cannot be justified on a linguistic basis. Discussion about the controversial language names has not yet reached an end in the Assyrian cultural area. On the other hand, the name that is actually correct (from a historical-linguistic point of view)—"Syriac" (like "Syrians" or even "Syrian Christians")--has been taken over by a new entity, whose chiefly Arab-Islamic people identifies itself with this ancient geographical and cultural term for the land, legitimating themselves in the same way all modern nationalism does.

While Western specialists on the Near East have worked with the surviving Aramaic dialects for more than a century, even they have yet to agree on a standard name. Within their academic disciplines, they continue to use varied labels for these languages and dialects. If

there is to be an appropriate and unambiguous term for their modern language, most likely it will be up to the Assyrians themselves to establish it.

### Religion

The Assyrian Christians belong to the Syrian Churches. They never actually formed a national church. This can be explained by political circumstances in the 4th and 5th centuries, when the two churches broke away from the Byzantine church.

The Jacobite - West Syrian Church of Antioch, which today calls itself the *Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch*, was situated on Byzantine empire territory, while the Nestorian - East Syrian Church, which calls itself the *Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East*, was on Persian territory.

As early as the second century, Syrian Christianity gave rise to a church in Asia Minor centered in Antioch. Its focal point stretched further to the east towards Edessa, which became the most significant cultural center of the Syriac language. In Northern Syria and Upper Mesopotamia, Christianity then spread into regions on the edge of or even outside the borders of the Byzantine Empire. Syrian asceticism arose here from the 4th century on, with hundreds of monasteries which later became centers of Syriac literature. This included *Tur Abdin* (east of Mardin in modern-day Turkey), where remains of this early Syriac Christian culture have survived until the present day.

As for Syrian Christendom within the Persian Sassanid empire (which included Mesopotamia), it became politically necessary for it to separate and assert its independence. This was achieved formally in a council decision in the year 424. This gave rise to such theological centers as the *School of Nisibis* in northern Syria and the celebrated *Academy of Gundejapur* in Persia. The Eastern Syrian Church in Persia came under the influence of the theological teachings of Nestorius, and the theological centers adopted Nestorianism in the 5th and 6th centuries.

Thus, the separation into two churches within originally unified Syrian Christianity took place very early. Both had renounced genuine orthodoxy because of doctrinal differences on the person of Christ. With respect to doctrine on Christ's person and nature, the two churches took up completely conflicting points of view. One stressed Jesus' nature as God, and the other the doctrine of Nestorius, the former Greek patriarch from Constantinople (5th century), which placed greater emphasis on the human nature of God's son. These two opposite points of view, as well as geographical and political separation, and the Syriac

language helped give rise to the terms West Syrians - Monophysites (accepting only one nature of Christ) and East Syrians - Diophysites (teaching two natures of Christ), terms that are still confusing today.

Another later term was to call the East Syrian Diophysites *Nestorians* and the West Syrian Monophysites *Jacobites* (based on a church reformer from the 7th century). Both terms were given to the church communities by western theologians. The common church language, Syriac, allows for the name *Syrian Churches*, notwithstanding their sharp doctrinal differences.

From the start, both were minority churches; they were sometimes violently persecuted by Byzantine-Greek Orthodoxy and Sassanid Zoroastrianism, and then tolerated once again. Geographic, political and religious conditions made it impossible to form a single national church, as the Armenians did at this time. The West Syrian church was more self-contained and expanded less. Thus, it was closer to a national church than the East Syrian church, which was more universal due to its expansion into Asia through the 12th century.

When in the 7th century the Arabs conquered the central region of Syrian Christianity, bringing Islam with them as a new political and religious force, another process of assimilation took place among the Hellenized and Iranized peoples of Mesopotamia and Syria. To a considerable extent, the Syro-Aramaic people were also subject to this assimilation. When large segments of the population accepted the new religion, a process of Arabization, of linguistic assimilation, took place at the same time. Over time the two Syrian churches lost large portions of their dioceses and parishes, but were able to maintain themselves in enclaves and, in the case of the East Syrian Church, even to extend its mission to Asia. Realistically, this expansion occurred in discrete and isolated locations, within large territories which continued to be dominated by other religions. It manifested itself mainly in the creation of parishes, sees, metropolises, monasteries and theological schools.

The adherents to the two Syrian churches resisted total Islamization and were able to preserve their cultural traditions through the modern era under the protection of their churches, though to a diminished extent.

Catholic missions were particularly active among the East Syrian Christians from the 17th and 18th century on. Large sections of the East Syrian church broke away and formed a union with Rome, maintaining their own rites. Those who did this lived for the most part in the Mesopotamian Mosul plateau; Rome named them the Chaldean Church, and their

patriarch received the title the "Patriarch of Babylon." This Chaldean Church grew stronger in the 19th century, and it has become numerically the largest Syrian Church. In the middle of the 19th century, a smaller part of the West Syrian Church also converted to a union with Rome, while preserving its West Syrian rites. Thus this fourth Syrian church acquired its own patriarchate. Both East Syrian and West Syrian rites are identical with the original rites of the mother church, except for a few additions that were included in the Christian creed in the Councils following the schism of the Syrian churches. One of these is the name "Mother of God" for Mary, which the Nestorians refuse, as well as the addition to the Nicene creed, according to which the Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son (Latin "filioque"). The Catholic union movements thus gave rise to two more autocephalous Syrian churches with their own patriarchs, existing through the present day.

Protestant Syrian communities emerged in the 19th century through the influence of American and German missions.

#### Islam and Syrian Christianity

Arab Islam unified its adherents, of whatever ethnic origin, under one law (the Koran) and one leader (the caliph). Thus, non-Muslims were not subjects of the Islamic code. Their relationship to the state had to be regulated with special protection treaties. The Koran itself was the guiding principle for this. Among those who resisted conversion by "fire and sword," only those adhering to a "book religion" (*ahl al-kitab*), i.e. Jews and Christians, were allowed to maintain their faith.

The Christian communities came under special religious protection under the Arabic term *ahl al-dhimmi*, meaning 'peoples under protection'; their right to practice their religion and follow their own church laws was guaranteed by treaty. In exchange, they had to pay a special tax (*Jizah*). The Christian religious leader was the contracting partner; he received an official document (*Berat* = liberation) from the caliph, firmly guaranteeing that the community could practice its religion. Under the Abbasid caliphate (750-1258), whose seat was in Baghdad, the East Syrian patriarch had the highest standing; he was the most influential personage among the Christian leaders. Besides representing his own community to the caliph, he also represented the Orthodox, the West Syrians and the Melkites. The seat of his patriarchate was in the Abbasid capital.

In the first centuries of Arab-Islam dominance, there was a tolerant relationship with the Christians; with a few isolated instances of persecution. It was only in the 9th century that there was a sustained period of repression and persecution.

This was the time for two significant cultural achievements, associated primarily with East Syrian Christianity: missionary activity and the simultaneous spread of Syrian script and language to the interior of Asia (e.g. the Uigurs took over the Syrian alphabet; in China the monument of Sian-Fu was constructed by Nestorian Christianity); and the imparting of Hellenistic culture through translations and commentaries of Greek and Syriac works into Arabic. These latter were then handed down to the West and have shaped our entire culture.

From the 11th century on, Arab dominance gradually receded due to the invasions of Turkish peoples and tribes from Central Asia, Seljuks, Shwarezians, Turkmenes and Mongols. There was a shift towards East Syrian Christianity for short periods of time under several Turkish tribal dynasties such as the Il-Khans. In the 13th century, however, the new rulers conclusively accepted Islam, destroyed the Syrian seats of metropolises and the bishoprics, and annihilated the Aramaic-speaking population, leaving only remnants behind. The Mongol prince Hülägü's invasion in 1258 of the Abbasid capital of Baghdad, also the seat of the East Syrian patriarchate, was the final blow for the Nestorian-East Syrian church and for the Christians living in Mesopotamia and Northern Syria. The church would never again recover. Its surviving adherents fled to join their fellow-believers in the mountains north of Nineveh and Mosul. From the beginning of the spread of the Persian church, i.e. since the 5th century, there was an Aramaic-speaking Christianized population there. Numerous churches and monasteries attest to an earlier asceticism, similar to the areas further west in Tur Abdin and in the East Syrian diocese Nuhadra (Hakkari area).

The political events and power shifts wrought by the invasions of the Turkish tribes and Mongols invading from Central Asia led to similar decline for the West Syrian Church. Only a small portion of its adherents spoke Aramaic and as far back as the Middle Ages they lived in inaccessible reserves, e.g. the highland Mount Izla (Tur Abdin), the former spiritual center with hundreds of monasteries and churches that gradually fell into decay. The Occident received a last reminder of Syrian Christianity when, at the end of the 13th century, the Mongolian-Nestorian monk Rabban Sauma visited Rome and the European courts in an extended voyage west, serving as patriarch Mar Yavallaha III's envoy from the Il-Khan court in Central Asia.

At the end of the 14th century, the hordes of the conqueror Tamerlane from Samarkand invaded Persia, Syria, India and China, destroying countries and cities. With few exceptions, Syrian Christianity was similarly destroyed. The survivors withdrew into the inaccessible

Taurus mountain chains, where they lived in enclaves in isolation for centuries. It was only in the last century that they would be rediscovered by western travellers and missionaries.

### The Millet System

At the end of the 15th century, the Turkish Ottomans conquered the last fortresses of Byzantium. Thousand-year-old Constantinople fell and it became the center of power of the Ottoman empire, where neither religious nor ethnic unity prevailed. The Islamic-Arab system was adapted to new needs. This was the origin of the *millet* system: each religious community constituted an administrative unit. This first affected the Greeks, Armenians and Jews, whose religious heads (Milletbashi) received an official document of recognition. With this, the Christians--as under the Arab caliphs--were not equal to the Muslims, but they could regulate their civil and family law according to their own religious code of laws.

All Syrian patriarchates were situated within Ottoman state territory. The West Syrian Christians were (nominally) represented by the Armenian patriarch. It was only in 1882 that their patriarch, who resided in the monastery *Deir ez-Za'faran* near Mardin, received his own letter of protection.

The East Syrian patriarchate was situated even more remotely in the Hakkari highlands. The residence in Kochanes, high in the mountains, was hardly accessible to Ottoman government officials. Supposedly, the patriarch received his letter of protection from the prophet himself. It is said that he kept this together with a dagger. While the exact date is uncertain, the letter dates back at least to the Abbasid period.

The two Syrian churches that had embraced Catholicism in union with Rome had their patriarchates respectively in Mosul (the Chaldeans) and Aleppo (the Catholic Syrians). France assumed the role of protector of all of Oriental Christianity, and it made sure letters of protection were issued.

The small and rather insignificant Protestant Syrian communities, arising from American missions in the 19th century were represented by British and American consuls.

### The Areas of Settlement

Until 1915 about half a million Christian Assyrians, followers of the aforementioned four Syrian Churches, lived in Upper Mesopotamia. Their exclusively Christian settlements were situated within a triangle with sides each about 250 km long. The westernmost boundaries were the highlands of Tur Abdin, an early Christian countryside that was given the Assyrian

name "Nirbu" (center) in antiquity due to its central position between Mesopotamia, the Anatolian highlands and the coastal areas along the Mediterranean.

Tur Abdin is a limestone and sandstone plateau, a mountainous massif 900 to 1400 meters high, between the Upper Tigris in the north and the Syrian-Mesopotamian plains in the south. The dry high plains are cut by river valleys that are rich in water. Midyat was the economic center of the region. About 150 villages with almost exclusively Christian residents, and hundreds of churches and monasteries, in part ruins from early Christianity, formed the unified area of settlement of this Aramaic-speaking people. They can be considered the original population, and it was only in the first millennium A.D. that the Kurds advanced this far from the east. Both groups were active in agriculture and raising livestock.

The west-east axis Mardin - Midyat - Jazir Ibn Omar and the north-south axis Hasan Kef (Cepha) - Nisibin form the outermost points of Tur Abdin.

The upper Tigris and Bohtan area are located in the Northeast. This is a highland area bordered in the west by the Tigris and in the north by the Bohtan-Su (river). The principal town is Jazir Ibn Omar, formerly Beth Zabdai, where bishops belonging to the West and East Syrian churches resided as early as the 5th century. From the 10th century onwards Kurdish dynasties ruled the town, although up until 1915 it was also the residence of a Chaldean bishop.

This is where East Syrian Christianity was preserved. It had formed a union with Rome in the 18th century and belonged to the Chaldean church. Armenians and Yezidi also lived here, in addition to the Syrian Christians and a significant Kurdish population. Until 1915 there were numerous Chaldean villages whose Christian inhabitants suffered greatly under the Kurds.

The alpine high mountain range Hakkari adjoins the Bohtan highlands. From the time of the Mongol invasions, this area was the East Syrian Nestorians' retreat and central homeland. It was their ancestors who adopted Christianity in the early centuries and this is where the Aramaic dialects were preserved most purely. These Christians lived in tribal associations in the inaccessible high mountain valleys, while in the Turkish-Persian border areas to the east their fellow-believers settled in clans and village associations, partly subjugated to the Kurds, partly under protection of the Christian tribes.

The tribal districts were Tiari, Tkhoma, Jilu, Baz, and Diz comprising about two hundred villages whose inhabitants were mostly Christians. The patriarch resided in the north in village of Kochanes. There were seats of bishoprics in Jilu, Gawar and Shamazdinan.

South of Bohtan and Hakkari, the highlands form a plateau, named the Mosul plateau due to the provincial capital. The villages extending from Zakho to Mosul are primarily East Syrian Christians. Most of them joined the Union with Rome in the 18th and 19th century and are called Chaldeans. The seat of the Chaldean patriarch was for a long time the monastery Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh. The East Syrian-Nestorian patriarch resided here until the schism in the 16th century. In addition a West Syrian Jacobite Christianity emerged, and its followers spoke the same Aramaic dialects as the believers in the Old East Syrian Church.

The easternmost ridges of the area settled by Assyrians are in Northwest Persia in the province of Azerbaijan. The chain of highlands, ridges of the Hakkari mountain massif, becomes a highland plateau in whose center can be found the city of Urmia. In the region between the western bank of Lake Urmia and the parallel course of the Turkish-Persian mountain border, an approximately 30 km wide basin irrigated by three rivers, there was an Aramaic-speaking Christian population as early as the 5th century. Until 1915 there were some 110 more villages settled exclusively by Christians. In addition to the Moslem population of Azerbaijani and Kurds there were also Armenian and Jewish communities. All these groups of population were also represented in Urmia.

### Missions

The expansion of the East Syrian-Nestorian church into Asia and of the West Syrian-Jacobite church into Arabia and Abyssinia shows that these churches were themselves mission churches. After the 12th century these mission communities and bishoprics declined. Syrian Christianity was only preserved in the Upper Mesopotamian area and in the Urmia basin in Northwest Persia. It had a miserable existence in Islam's shadow, and by the end of the 17th century it had itself become the target of various western missions. These actually wanted to convert the Muslims, but none of the numerous missions had been able to establish a single community of converts among the Muslims. For this reason they always devoted themselves to the indigenous Oriental Christian communities. By their own admission, these missionaries sought to reform or convert these Christians to "true Christianity" through use of their charitable and social institutions. The result was the emergence of the two Syrian Catholic churches, Protestant parishes of various evangelist churches and, for a brief period, even a strong Russian Orthodox conversion movement.

These missions were allied with political efforts on the part of France, England and Russia to assert their own interests in the Ottoman Empire and in Persia.

### *Catholic Mission*

The French order of the Capuchins was active in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan beginning in the first half of the 17th century. Mission stations were maintained in Mardin, Mosul and Amadia starting in 1632. The missionaries' high standing was based particularly on their medical knowledge, which impressed the ruling pashas and governors. Next to come were the Italian Dominicans, who took over the mission stations after 1750 and maintained the stations in Mosul and Amadia until 1856. Their missionary activity consisted primarily in smoothing the way for the Roman Catholic pope's efforts to form a union with the Syrian Churches. For the most part, Nestorian Assyrians lived in the Mosul plateau and in Mardin. These came under Catholic influence and shifted their allegiance towards Rome. The West Syrian parishes in this region followed suit in 1758. The Chaldean church is the result of this mission period.

In Persia, the French Lazarists started up a mission station in Khosrawa in 1840. It was not able to establish itself to the same extent among the Nestorians of the Urmia plateau, particularly since the American Protestant mission had established itself in the town of Urmia shortly before.

The Chaldean Patriarch Mar Eliya received his own "letter of protection" (*ferman*) in 1844 from the Porte (Bab 'ali). When a priest or bishop, often due to disagreement or rivalry within his own clergy, shifted his allegiance towards the union with Rome, the entire parish or diocese usually followed. Such mass conversions particularly took place in times of persecution of the Christians, as it was hoped that the protection of the great power of France could be won in this manner. In Persia, the Catholic Lazarist mission was particularly supported by the French envoys in Teheran. As a consequence, the Persian government issued a ban forbidding foreign missions to create communities of proselytes within the indigenous Christian communities.

### *Protestant Mission*

In the 1820's the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missionaries (founded in Boston in 1810) studied the situation of the Syrian Christians in Persia and in the Ottoman Empire and decided to send a research mission. In 1834, missionary Justin Perkins, together with a mission doctor, Dr. Asahel Grant, reached Persia and founded a mission station in Urmia which remained for more than eight decades and had a great influence on

the Nestorian Christians. The American mission considered its main task to be the spread of Protestant culture. In Persia and in the Ottoman Empire, where decades later they also were active among the Jacobite Assyrians and Armenians, the missionaries founded schools, hospitals, colleges. They displayed intensive activity in the literary sector and initiated the creation of a modern Syriac literary standard language for the East Syrians in Persia. In this vein, they first translated the Bible (1841) and other theological literature, as they saw themselves primarily as a tool to revive the Ancient Apostolic Church of the East. A few years after the mission arrived, a printing house was started up. Later, a mission periodical was founded which appeared in the modern literary language, as did numerous book publications. Although all mission institutions were also open to Muslims, they did not make use of them, so that the American mission remained an exclusively Christian one.

After 1870, the first parishes of proselytes arose. In the long life of this mission they did not number more than 3,000 Protestant converts. They were not able to gain any important influence over the Nestorians on the Turkish side. The education at the American mission schools and the college studies, used only by the Christians, provided for the growth of an educated class, though a small one. By the end of the 19th century, this been achieved, and some had even studied in Russia (Tbilisi, Georgia) or in America. The articles in the mission periodical also reflected the changing intellectual attitudes, as influenced by western thinking. Ultimately, the Assyrian cultural and national movement grew up under this influence. This development led to intense alienation between the Christians and the indigenous Muslims.

In addition to this most significant Protestant mission, there were various contacts between Assyrians and other European Protestant missions.

The missionary Joseph Wolf travelled on behalf of the British Bible Society to Mesopotamia and Persia in the years 1823 to 1825. He visited the West Syrian parishes in Tur Abdin as well as Chaldean villages in the Mosul plateau, and distributed the New Testament in the Arabic and Turkish languages to priests and bishops. He received bible manuscripts in Syriac from them, and a commission to have a New Testament printed in the Syriac church language. It was then printed in 1829 and distributed among the Syrian Christians in Mesopotamia shortly thereafter; it was thus that they received the first printed Syriac book.

Another contact was the German mission from Basel, whose missionary Christian Pfander distributed bibles in Syriac among the Syrians in Tabriz, Urmia and even to the Nestorian patriarch in Kochanes in 1831. This mission planned a station in Urmia that for political reasons did not come about. The Basel mission station in Tabriz was closed in 1836.

At the end of the century there were also contacts by the German Orient Mission (*Deutsche Orient-Mission*), which had opened several charitable institutions beginning in 1896 in Persia and on Turkish territory.

The German mission of Hermannsburg, an evangelical Lutheran organization dedicated to missionary work, trained a total of ten Nestorians from Persia 1875-1910 at their seminars to become ministers, leading to the founding of two or three Lutheran Syrian parishes in Persia.

An "Evangelical Society to Promote the Nestorian Church in Kurdistan" was founded in 1905 in Berlin. For the next decade, missionary work with native pastors took place through contacts with an influential family from Mar Bisho in Gavar.

At the turn of the century Methodist and Baptist missionaries in Urmia founded small communities that did not survive for long.

The town of Urmia was more fertile missionary territory than almost anywhere else in the Orient. Foreign missions fought and rivaled one another. Missions were also attempted by the United Lutheran Church of America, the Evangelical Association for the Advancement of the Nestorian Church, the Plymouth Brethren (England), Holiness Methodists, Southern Baptists and English Congregationalists.

#### *English Anglican Mission*

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian mission was established in Urmia relatively late. It was the only mission that did not create parishes of proselytes and that managed to maintain continuing contact with the Nestorian patriarch in Kochanes.

As early as 1842, a young missionary, G. P. Badger, was sent to gather information on the Nestorians in the mountains. Unfortunately, he ended up in the middle of the terrible massacres of the Nestorian Christians of Tiari and Tkhoma perpetrated from 1842 to 1843 by the Kurdish tribes in Hakkari, which resulted in the banning of several Kurdish sheiks. England's influential diplomat, Lord Stratford Canning, who was then the envoy at Constantinople, had been informed of the massacres by the missionary Badger, leading him to lobby for this sanction against the Kurds. In 1867 another exploratory trip took place, and once again contact was made with the patriarch in Kochanes, but it would be nearly two more decades (1886) before they established their own mission in Urmia. As with the Americans—though to a lesser extent—there were schools and a printing house. They also

protected them from Persian officials, who were more hesitant to harshly confront the native Christians under the protection of foreign missions. Mission director Arthur Maclean, who built up the mission from 1886 to 1891, was particularly interested in the vernacular Aramaic dialects. He authored a grammar handbook and a dictionary that have remained the basis for the study of modern Aramaic dialects. The English-language mission periodical contained a great number of reports on the Assyrian way of life, particularly about the Nestorians in the mountains. The English missionary W. H. Browne lived in immediate proximity to the residence of the patriarch Mar Shimun in Kochanes. For this reason, his influence for a certain time was stronger than that of all other missionaries. In 1903, the mission moved to Van in Turkey, where a British consul was also present. W. A. Wigram, later author of a series of books and smaller political writings about the Assyrians, led the mission station in Van. The English mission was called the "Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission." After 1900 the Nestorian Christians were called increasingly "Assyrians" and they started using this name themselves. The patriarch died in the same year and the mission endeavored to gain greater influence over the new young patriarch. In 1910 W. H. Browne died, after living for 24 years in Kochanes, and he was buried there. The mission moved from Van to Amadiya. The last English missionary left the station in Urmia in 1912. More than any other mission, the English mission in particular had a political task to fulfil, as can be seen from the numerous and still unpublished documents and confidential letters of the missionaries to their government, found in the Archbishop of Canterbury's archives.

#### *Russian Orthodox Mission*

One of the last missions aimed at the Nestorians in Persia was the Russian Orthodox mission society "Brotherhood of Cyril and Method." From the outset, it was politically oriented and the advance guard for the Russian regiments arriving just a few years later to occupy all of Northwest Persia. In 1898, the mission opened its station in Urmia. The Russian consul and a Russian trade society, as well as a bank, were present in Urmia and represented the tsarist empire's power. The direct presence of a protective power that was less foreign and "western" to the native Christians than the Americans and Europeans led to mass conversions of Persian Nestorians to the Russian church in the same year. In March 1898, after Bishop Yonan of Sepurghan together with several priests publicly renounced the old creed in St. Petersburg, 20,000 Nestorians followed his example. This was preceded by serious persecutions of Christians by Turks, Azerbaijanis and Kurds in 1895-96 in the regions of Van and Albaq, which led to thousands of Syrian Christians fleeing to Russia. The Russians and the Cossack regiments were now their protectors, and with government blessing the Russian church used this leverage to increase Assyrian dependence on them. They too opened several schools, a printing house, and published a periodical, but their

influence soon waned. The missionaries were frequently replaced, and they disagreed among themselves; there were also scandals. The most serious problem seems to have been that there was no figure among them who could have convincingly led the mission activity. The Russian Archimandrit Sergius would later become the mission bishop. The troops, present since 1905, and the Russian consul, later gave the Assyrians real support and help.

*Mission under the Jacobites*

As early as the 17th century intense efforts were under way to bring the West Syrian church to a union with Rome. An important center of the church was Aleppo. The French consul Piquet resided here, and he supported the Carmelite missionaries with political intrigues. A connection to the Catholic church came about temporarily, but fell through when the first Syrian Catholic patriarch Andreas Akidjan died in 1677. This union was revived in 1781. Aleppo remained the seat of the patriarchate into the 20th century. In 1845 the separation between the two church groups was introduced by order of Sultan Abdul Madjid. The first Syrian Catholic parish arose in 1840 in Mardin. Catholicism made it to the villages of Tur Abdin only in 1890; taking root in just a few villages where churches were built (Bate, Amas, Kerburan, Halah). As opposed to the East Syrians, who in the majority converted to Catholicism (Bohtan and Tigris area, Mosul plateau, Salamas plateau in Persia), only a quarter of the West Syrians converted to Catholicism. The West Syrian rite was preserved.

In the 19th century, in the Ottoman Empire, the Western Syrian Church had a total of twelve dioceses. Several bishops' seats were in monasteries in Tur Abdin.

The American Protestant mission started its work in 1850. One year later the missionary A. Smith founded the first Protestant Syrian parish in Diyarbakir. In Mardin, too, there was an American mission station, and small parishes grew up in several villages farther east. The American missionaries stayed in Azah until the First World War, but this mission did not reach the proportions of that in Persia with the Nestorians, and it did not wield a particularly large influence.

The German Orient Mission, which opened its charitable institutions in 1896 in Urfa, Van, Diyarbakir, Khoi and Urmia, was oriented primarily towards the Armenians. A boys' school was founded in Urfa for the Syrians, and there were also several Syrian Christian employees. However, this mission did not have much influence on them as for the most part they had given up their Aramaic mother tongue outside Tur Abdin in Turkey.

## 2. The 19th Century

### The Syrian Christians in the Ottoman Empire

The Christian millets were strengthened by the Ottoman Empire's foreign policy relations in the 17th century, which were an early sign of the empire's decline. The first treaties with European powers were the so-called capitulations, which legally affected only foreigners (diplomats, merchants, missionaries). For two centuries France assumed a position of supremacy, and it was a protecting power for the Orient's Catholics (Maronites, Melkites, Uniate Oriental churches), well into the 20th century. In a series of peace treaties, the foreign powers attempted to increase their influence by means of protective stipulations for certain Christian people. Such stipulations, and the advance of western missionaries regularly sending extensive reports to their government representatives, did not stop the Ottomans from treating the Christians as inferior subjects. Discriminatory laws were issued which forbade building churches, and even the peeling of bells. There was a poll tax and clothing edicts. Christians had to mark their houses with dark paint. Fanatical provincial governors were allowed to commit cruel and arbitrary acts against Christians without being punished.

The expansive Ottoman empire's decay was momentarily slowed in the 19th century by reforms imposed by the Western great powers, in pursuit of their own interests. This reform period (*Tanzimat*) was introduced under Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839). The famous reform edict (Hatti-Sherif) appeared under his successor Abdul Madjid (1839-1861), and it was intended to abolish unrestricted medieval despotism. The administrative system was organized anew according to European models and ministries were created. The legal system, hitherto based on Islam sharia, was to be modernized on the basis of European (French) patterns. However, these attempts, imposed from outside, were without consequences. The Ottoman provinces continued to be dominated arbitrarily and absolutely. The reforms pursued by France and England were directed against Russia, whose tsars since Peter the Great had been attempting in various wars against the Ottomans to conquer Constantinople and gain access to the Dardanelles. These goals affected European interests, which is why they tried to check the decay and the further weakening of the Ottoman empire.

While Russia named itself protector of the Orthodox peoples (Balkan, Asia Minor), and France spoke for the Catholic communities, England did not actually have a protective

relationship to a Christian millet. It used every opportunity in the first half of the 19th century to intervene for Christians in the Oriental provinces, that is, Armenians and Syrians, through its diplomatic representative, Lord Stratford Canning de Redcliff (1786-1880). For instance, when the persecution of Armenians and Assyrians in the Turco-Russian war of 1827-28 forced thousands to flee to Russia, he intervened on their behalf at the Porte.

From 1840 on, England seemed to direct its attention particularly to the East Syrians living in the Ottoman empire. Their area of settlement was in the Russian sphere of influence. This small mountain people, which had not yet found any foreign protector, was well-suited to be an outpost for British interests. A missionary advance guard was sent to take up contact with the patriarch in Kochanes and to provide assurances of protection. At the very time that England was pursuing these measures, the Kurds were massacring Nestorian tribes in Tiari (1843) and in Tkhoma (1846).

#### The Massacres in the Hakkari Region

After the American mission station in Urmia was founded by Justin Perkins and Asahel Grant, and once contacts were established with some Nestorian bishops, Perkins wrote the Patriarch in Kochanes in 1836 about the interest of American Christians in his people. Three years later, Grant traveled into the mountainous country and paid the patriarch his first visit. Grant, a medical doctor, established contacts with the Kurds at the same time after he offered Emir Nurallah his medical services and managed to cure him of an illness.

The local political tangle between Kurdish princes and the patriarch and his tribes was complicated and incomprehensible to the foreigners. There were alliances between Christian and Kurdish tribes, along with enmities and intrigues. The Kurdish prince Nurallah had a residence in Bashqala; his nephew Suleyman lived in the fortress of Julamerg. The emirs succeeded one another hereditarily, following a lineage of nobility in a manner similar to the office of the patriarch; some Christian tribes had an influence in the choice of the hereditary successor. A conflict about hereditary successors of this kind existed between Nurallah and Suleyman. Mar Shimun sided with the latter, thus making an enemy of Nurallah.

These local conflicts were not unusual. Tribal leaders negotiated and usually resolved their differences in lengthy *diwans* (meetings). The arrival of the foreign missionaries disturbed this delicate historical balance. While the native Christians viewed their Western counterparts as a source of strength, the Kurds considered them a harbinger of decay for their autonomous feudal power.

The Kurds sought the support of the Ottoman provincial governors. Nurallah traveled to Erzerum for this purpose and formed an alliance with the Turkish pasha. His aim was to restrict Mar Shimun's temporal power, and in this he could count on the support of several Christian Maleks, who did not want the patriarch's family power to be extended. Suleyman of Julamerg had joined together with Mar Shimun and voted against an alliance with the Turks, but was convinced of its necessity by his uncle. On Grant's third visit in 1841 he paid his respects to Mar Shimun and Suleyman--but not to Nurallah. He traveled through the Christian districts together with the patriarch and visited many villages to establish the mission in the highland. Competition with the English and Catholic rival missions was foremost in his mind. Grant did not realize that his activities were interpreted quite differently by the Kurdish tribes. Nurallah had Mar Shimun's residence burned down during his absence in order to warn him. The two Kurdish princes negotiated once again, and they united against the Syrians.

In 1842, on his fourth journey, Grant visited Nurallah and negotiated with him about establishing several mission stations in the tribal region of Tiari (Ashita). Grant did not negotiate with the Ottoman authorities, as the Nestorian millet was not officially recognized by the Porte, and he did not pay tribute. Nurallah agreed to Grant's plans, without feeling bound by them. To him, Grant was a non-believer foreigner, without any visible power.

While the enmity between Mar Shimun and the two neighboring Kurdish emirs smoldered, it did not break out in open hostility. The Patriarch himself had to look for an ally if he wanted to hold his ground against the Kurdish alliance that arose in 1842. Nurallah had in fact formed an alliance with Badr Khan, a powerful Kurdish prince in the Bohtan region further west. They planned a campaign against the Turkish governor Mohammed Pasha of Mosul, from whom Ismail Pasha of Amadia won his town back in the summer of 1842. Several Christian tribes also wanted to support this Kurdish alliance, and they negotiated with Mar Shimun on that. However, Mar Shimun preferred to reveal the undertaking to the Turkish pasha. His resolve to do so was fortified by his secret knowledge of the Kurdish conspiracy against him.

Perhaps due to Grant's influence, Mar Shimun placed greater trust in the Turks and the European protectors, whose representatives sought contact with him ever more frequently. Mohammed Pasha assured him of assistance against the Kurds in case of an invasion. The British consul in Baghdad was notified, and Grant attempted to mediate. In the skirmishes between the Kurds and the Turkish troops; the Syrians remained bystanders. Meanwhile, the American mission station was opened in Ashita in September 1842 in a building

constructed more as a fortress than a mission station. A missionary from Mosul brought eight mule loads of Syriac bibles to the town.

Meanwhile, the Kurds lost out to Mohammed Pasha and were forced to retreat. They now considered Mar Shimun their enemy, but Mohammed Pasha did not feel indebted to him. He reported to Constantinople about the secret building of a citadel.

In the fall of 1842, Mar Shimun was visited by the English missionary G. P. Badger; other missionaries followed shortly thereafter. He warned Mar Shimun about the American mission, whose church he considered dissident. During his visit, a letter from Nurallah arrived, demanding a meeting with the patriarch. Mar Shimun declined to meet, apparently on the advice of Badger. He was determined to depend only on the Ottoman government and its allies. Following Badger's departure, the disaster for the Nestorians in the isolated province took its course, and the government did not provide any support at all. Nurallah decided to set out on a punitive expedition against the Nestorian tribes, and he came to an agreement with Badr Khan of Bohtan, having obtained consent from the Turkish governor of Mosul beforehand. Though beholden to Mar Shimun for the defeat of the Kurds, Mohammed Pasha gave no second thought to keeping his promise to him.

Grant played a bizarre part in the conflict. He was in the company of Nurallah during the latter's preparations of the attacks on the Nestorians. He looked at himself as a "neutral mediator" who should not mingle in local affairs. He was not even aware that he himself had brought on the conflict. For ten days he experienced the preparations for the invasion, was privy to all plans and he simply relied on the promise that Mar Shimun's property and his residence would be spared and treated as a sanctuary.

Following Grant's departure, the allied Kurdish tribes attacked Tiari. A fifth of the entire Christian population of this mountain district was wiped out in the ensuing bloodbath, unmatched in magnitude since Tamerlane's Mongol hordes.

Just a year later, Grant died of cholera in Mosul. His mission fort in Ashita was destroyed. The American mission never arrived in the highlands. It would be forty years more before the establishment of the English mission Badger had promised Mar Shimun.

Mar Shimun Abraham, Patriarch from 1820 to 1861, would spend a decade in exile in Persia, and then returned embittered towards the foreigners. For the rest of his life he remained hostile to foreign missions and cautioned his bishops in Jilu, Gavar, Berwar and Shamsdinan

against working with them. But his influence on the diocese in Persia was too weak to prevent this.

The politics of the Ottoman empire were at this time under strong European influence, as the reform period continued. In 1856, the Porte issued a new reform edict (Hatti-Humayun), and in 1864 the entire empire was newly organized into provinces, districts and counties. Under Western influence, this also marked the birth of the nationalist Young Turk movement, a movement which would seize power some forty years later.

In 1876, with the support of England, the reform party briefly took power following the assassination of Sultan Abdul Aziz. Influenced by the minister of state, Midhat Pasha, a constitution was proclaimed. Patterned after European models, the constitution was soon dismissed as a premature experiment by the reactionary opposition. In 1878 Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1908), the "murderous sultan," seized power for another thirty years.

The Turco-Russian war broke out in 1877. The Christians in the empire were suspected of conspiring with Russia. The British ambassador Austin H. Layard, who had become famous in Europe several decades earlier with the excavation of the Assyrian capital Nineveh, spoke up for the Nestorian Syrians that year with a petition to the Porte. But in the end, the Ottoman government lacked the ability to protect the Christians from the Kurdish tribes in the isolated eastern provinces. Christian districts and villages were repeatedly attacked with impunity. The reform policy of the preceding decades did not make its way into these regions. The advance of the Russian Army threatened not only Constantinople, but led to the partitioning of the eastern sections, primarily the Armenian regions such as Kars, Ardahan, Bajesid and Batum.

This situation and the unrest among the Christians in the Ottoman areas also worried the European powers, who feared that Russia would penetrate further into the eastern provinces. The subsequent negotiations in 1878 primarily affected the partitioning of large parts of the Balkan area (Bulgaria, Serbia, Rumania). The British used the opportunity to enter diplomatic agreements with Russia for the partitioning of regions in the Ottoman Empire, while at the same time they had concluded a secret treaty with the Porte which provided for arms against Russia in exchange for the island of Cyprus. Earlier, Tsar Alexander II had declared that Russia was not interested in advancing into areas of the British empire.

Document No. 1

The Massacre of the Nestorians in Hakkari by the Kurds 1843  
*Eyewitness report by the English missionary Rev. G.P. Badger*

Early in the month of May [1843] I received a letter from Mar Shimun, in which he informed me that the combined forces of Badr Khan Beg and the Hakkari Emeer were about to make war upon the Nestorians, or to attack the Berwari district within the jurisdiction of Mohammed Pasha of Mosul, and to charge them with the invasion. On the 4th of June I received another letter in which the Patriarch thus describes the execution of this long-projected scheme: "If you inquire after our weal, be it known unto you that the Hakkari Emeer, Ismael Pasha, Badr Khan Beg, and Tatar Khan Agha, the chief of the Artushi Coords, combined against us, and on the great feast of the Ascension made a sudden irruption [sic] into our territory, carried off an immense booty in sheep belonging to Melek Ismaeel and other of our people, murdered a number of men, women, and children, cut off their ears and sent them to Bedr Khan Beg. Moreover, we learn that they are preparing for a second onslaught, when they intend to burn, kill, destroy, and if possible, exterminate the Christian race from the mountains. From this you may see that what befel [sic] Job has fallen to our lot: our sons and daughters have been slain with the edge of the sword, and our flocks, herds, and property have become the prey of our enemies."

The worst fears of Mar Shimun of a second attack upon the Christians were soon realized. The combined Coordish [sic] forces now advanced from the province of Dez into the Tiari country. Their passage of the Zab was warmly contested; but overpowered by numbers the Nestorians were obliged to give way, and the fierce invaders advanced towards the villages, burning and otherwise destroying whatever came within their reach. As an instance of the revolting barbarity of these infidels, I shall mention the following: The aged mother of Mar Shimun was seized by them in Dez, and after having practised upon her the most abominable atrocities, they cut her body into two parts and threw it into the Zab, saying the meanwhile: "Go and carry to your son the intelligence that the same fate awaits him." Many women and children were taken captive during this second onslaught, most of whom were sent to Jezeerah to be sold as slaves, or to be bestowed as presents upon influential Mohammedans. No quarter was given to the men, and there remained no safety for the vanquished but in flight. Numbers fled to the almost inaccessible fastnesses of the mountains, whilst others took refuge in the Berwari districts, where an almost similar fate awaited them. Mar Shimun, accompanied by one of his brothers, two attendants, Kash' Auraha and family, effected their escape to Mosul, which they reached on the 27th of July.

The Patriarch's party were hospitably received by Mr. Rassam into the British Vice Consulate, and the archdeacon and his family became part of our household.

*(Source: G.P. Badger, The Nestorians and their Rituals: with the Narrative of a Mission to Mesopotamia and Coordistan in 1842-1844. London 1852, Volume I, pp. 270-271)*

Document No. 2

Letter from the Nestorian Patriarch Mar Shimun Abraham to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London after the Massacre of 1843 (Mosul, Jan. 1, 1844)

*(through G.P. Badger)*

From Mar Shimun, Patriarch of the Chaldeans, to his beloved brethren in the Lord, Mar William, Catholicos of all England, Mar James, Matranan of London, and all the worshipful Bishops,—may the Lord preserve them.

After the kiss of salutation we inform you, beloved brethren, that previous to this present epistle we sent you another to which [we] are now waiting an answer; may God grant the delay to be for the best. You are undoubtedly acquainted with the combination of misfortunes, calamities, and evils which we have suffered from the enemies of the Christian faith. These have massacred large numbers of our people, and carried into captivity very many of our women and children. They have burnt and destroyed our villages, our habitations, and our churches, and plundered us of all we possessed, so that the prophecy of Jeremiah has been fulfilled in us: My people have fallen into the hand of the enemy, and there was none to help them; the enemy saw them and laughed at their calamity. They pursued us in the mountains, and in the wilderness did they lay wait for us. Mine eyes are dimmed with tears, my bowels are troubled, my glory is poured out upon the earth for the destruction of my people; because the women, and children, and sucklings, have been sold as slaves in the towns and villages. The heart of our adversaries, namely, the Romanists or Papists, rejoiced when they saw what had befallen us, because we would not give ear to their words when they would have turned us away from our old and righteous path.

But because that God is plenteous in compassion and merciful, and with the temptation maketh a way of escape, He so ordered it that the presbyter George Badger and his colleagues should be in these parts to gather together such as had escaped the edge of the sword, and to provide them with food and clothing. Indeed, had it not been for the presbyter just mentioned, and his exertions on our behalf, we know not what would have become of us, for after God he has been our supporter and help. May the Lord recompense you abundantly for having sent him unto us.

We are not as yet delivered out of troubles and calamities, but have strong hope in the Lord that we shall soon be saved from all our afflictions through the medium of Sir Stratford Canning, who is endued with godly zeal, a noble diligence, and sound policy on our behalf. May the Lord recompense him also for what he has already done for us; for undoubtedly had he not stood in the breach before us our enemies would have destroyed us utterly. The Lord God prolong his days, prosper his pious designs, and give him an incorruptible crown in His everlasting kingdom.

But now our calamity has increased, and the trouble of our heart has been doubled, since we heard that the brethren are thinking to recal [sic] the presbyter George Badger to your country,--a measure we never expected, nor did we ever anticipate such a thing from them, especially while it is our lot still to be beaten about by the waves of adversity, and knowing that you are a refuge even for strangers, how much more then for those who are of the household of faith. And now that we have found a little respite, must we lose the chief foundation of our support, and become a prey to our spiritual enemies who mock us for having placed our dependence, after God, upon our English brethren, and taunt us by saying: The English only laugh at you, nor can they give you any assistance, neither do they keep their promises. Moreover, I am certain it will be a source of deep regret to you, brethren, should you hear that so ancient a Church as ours, viz., the Chaldean Church, is destroyed or broken up into sects; and so much the more because you yourselves have tasted of the cup of divisions in your own country. And shall this also befall [sic] our Church after it has continued one for so long, even from ancient time?

Therefore, I entreat you, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you do not reject this our petition, seeing that it is not a great thing with you, that you should continue to us the presbyter George Badger to assist us, and because the whole is for the glory of God and for the welfare of men. Nor can I think that this is a hard matter to a nation holding the true faith, and which sends forth so many messengers among the people and brethren, so that in you is accomplished the saying of the Psalmist: "Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the end of the world." Is it not a small matter to such a nation to give up one person to those who are in so much need of his assistance? Moreover God has said: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee." We are now in great trouble, and shall our brethren betake themselves far from us? This is contrary to our hope. I therefore entreat you, and not I only, but all my bishops, priests, and deacons, nay, all my people join with me in the same request, that you will continue the presbyter George Badger to us until our urgent necessity is removed.

Moreover, we would acquaint you that we have made arrangements, when it shall be the Lord's will to deliver us out of our troubles, to open schools for the instruction and education of our people, and to take many other measures for their benefit, such as rebuilding the churches which have been destroyed, and bringing together and establishing the numbers who have been scattered about in Persia, in the mountains, in the plains, and in the villages and cities of the stranger; for great diligence is required to restore things to their former state, nay, but as we hope, even to a better condition.

And now, brethren, I commit this matter into your hands, and expect an answer from you, that you will leave with us the presbyter George Badger and his colleagues. This is our great hope; and may the Lord prolong your life, while we in parting repeat a second and a third time the kiss of brotherly salutation.

Written on Saturday, the first day of January, in the year of our Lord 1844, in the town of Mosul, in the house of the presbyter George Badger, by the hand of Kash' Auraha, the Archdeacon and servant of Mar Shimun.

*(Source: A. Riley, Report on the Foundation of the Archbishop's Mission to the Assyrian Church in 1886. London, pp. 22-24, Appendix I)*

### Document No. 3

A. H. Layard, report on the massacre of 10,000 Nestorians in Tiari (Hakkari) in 1843 by the Kurd prince Badr Chan

It may be remembered, that Bedr Khan Bey, in 1843, invaded the Tiyari districts, massacred in cold blood nearly 10,000 of their inhabitants, and carried away as slaves a large number of girls and children. But it is perhaps not generally known, that the release of the greater part of the captives was obtained through the humane interference and generosity of Sir Stratford Canning, who prevailed upon the Porte to send a commissioner into Kurdistan, for the purpose of inducing Bedr Khan Bey and other Kurdish chiefs, to give up the slaves they had taken, and advanced, himself, a considerable sum towards their liberation. Mr. Rassam also obtained the release of many slaves, and maintained and clothed at his own expense, and for several months, not only the Nestorian Patriarch, who had taken refuge in Mosul, but many hundred Chaldeans who had escaped from the mountains. (. . .)

Lizan stands on the river Zab, which is crossed by a rude bridge. I need not weary or distress the reader with a description of desolation and misery, hardly concealed by the most

luxuriant vegetation. We rode to the graveyard of a roofless church slowly rising from its ruins--the first edifice in the village to be rebuilt. We spread our carpets amongst the tombs; for as yet there were no inhabitable houses. The Melek, with the few who had survived the massacre, was living during the day under the trees, and sleeping at night on stages of grass and boughs, raised on high poles, fixed in the very bed of the Zab. By this latter contrivance they succeeded in catching any breeze that might be carried down the narrow ravine of the river, and in freeing themselves from the gnats and sandflies abounding in the valley.

It was near Lizan that occurred one of the most terrible incidents of the massacre; and an active mountaineer offering to lead me to the spot, I followed him up the mountain. Emerging from the gardens we found ourselves at the foot of an almost perpendicular detritus of loose stones, terminated, about one thousand feet above us, by a wall of lofty rocks. Up this ascent we toiled for above an hour, sometimes clinging to small shrubs, whose roots scarcely reached the scanty soil below; at other times crawling on our hands and knees; crossing the gullies to secure a footing, or carried down by the stones which we put in motion as we advanced. We soon saw evidences of the slaughter. At first a solitary skull rolling down with the rubbish; then heaps of blanched bones; further up fragments of rotting garments. As we advanced, these remains became more frequent--skeletons, almost entire, still hung to the dwarf shrubs. I was soon compelled to renounce an attempt to count them. As we approached the wall of rock, the declivity became covered with bones, mingled with the long platted tresses of the women, shreds of discolored linen, and well-worn shoes. There were skulls of all ages, from the child unborn to the toothless old man. We could not avoid treading on the bones as we advanced, and rolling them with the loose stones into the valley below. "This is nothing," exclaimed my guide, who observed me gazing with wonder on these miserable heaps; "they are but the remains of those who were thrown from above, or sought to escape the sword by jumping from the rock. Follow me!" He sprang upon a ledge running along the precipice that rose before us, and clambered along the face of the mountain overhanging the Zab, now scarcely visible at our feet. I followed him as well as I was able to some distance; but when the ledge became scarcely broader than my hand, and frequently disappeared for three or four feet altogether, I could no longer advance. The Tiyari, who had easily surmounted these difficulties, returned to assist me, but in vain. I was still suffering severely from the kick received in my leg four days before; and was compelled to return, after catching a glimpse of an open recess or platform covered with human remains.

When the fugitives who had escaped from Asheetha spread the news of the massacre through the valley of Lizan, the inhabitants of the villages collected such part of their property

as they could carry and took refuge on the platform I have just described and on the rock above; hoping thus to escape the notice of the Kurds, or to be able to defend, against any numbers, a place almost inaccessible. Women and young children, as well as men, concealed themselves in a spot which the mountain goat could scarcely reach. Bedr Khan Bey was not long in discovering their retreat; but being unable to force it, he surrounded the place with his men, and waited until they should be compelled to yield. The weather was hot and sultry; the Christians had brought but small supplies of water and provisions; after three days the first began to fail them, and they offered to capitulate. The terms proposed by Bedr Khan Bey, and ratified by an oath on the Koran, were the surrender of their arms and property. The Kurds were then admitted to the platform. After they had taken the arms from their prisoners, they commenced an indiscriminate slaughter; until weary of using their weapons, they hurled the few survivors from the rocks into the Zab below. Out of nearly one thousand souls, who are said to have congregated here, only one escaped.

*(Source: A. H. Layard, Nineveh and its Remains: with an account of a visit to the Chaldean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or devil-worshippers: and an enquiry into the manners and arts of the ancient Assyrians. London 1849, pp. 173-191)*

\* \* \*

These terrible events had consequences after a series of reports arrived at the British legation in Constantinople. After Austin H. Layard visited Tkhoma and other Christian districts in the highlands shortly before the devastation wrought by Badr Khan, the British archaeologist who had excavated Nineveh and who later became British envoy wrote to his government from Mosul. The British ambassador Stratford Canning used his influence with the sultan and induced him to send out a punitive expedition against the Kurds, which was successfully conducted under Osman Pasha in 1847. Badr Khan and, later, Nurallah were banished and died on his way to exile. The dominance of the Kurdish emirs came to an end and Turkish government officials took over the administration of the restructured districts.

In 1848 the British Foreign Office published a "Memorandum on Kurdistan" and supported official recognition of the Nestorian patriarch at the Porte. From the five-volume correspondence of the Foreign Office with the British vice consul in Diyarbakir between 1840 and 1876 it becomes clear that the paramount concern was the risk of the Russians becoming the protectors of the Nestorians. Thereafter, the Nestorians evidently fell into oblivion.

After the death of Mar Shimun Abraham in 1861, Mar Shimun Ruwil, Patriarch from 1861 to 1903, undertook a rapprochement and in 1863 he sent a petition to the British Queen Victoria, requesting that missionaries be sent to set up schools in the highlands. In so doing, he wanted to force back the American mission's influence. The American mission had had a great sway on the Nestorian bishops in Persia and thus also on their parishes, which were nominally subject to the patriarch but essentially autonomous.

In 1864 there were new negotiations with the Porte about official recognition as a millet. However, neither of these efforts bore any results. It was only after Mar Shimun wrote to the Russian governor in the Caucasus (Tbilisi) in 1868 that England's interest was revived. The Consul wrote to his government, reporting that the situation was difficult in the Nestorian villages. The Kurds made the area insecure: cattle rustling, looting, abduction of women and murder were the order of the day. In addition, the entire millet had an insecure legal status, and its tax burdens were oppressive. The Consul warned against leaving the Nestorians to the Russians, as this area was strategically important and they also could provide 13,000 armed men. The total number of highland Nestorians was estimated at 16,000 families (at 10 persons each).

Document No. 4

Invasion of the Nestorian district Tkhoma (Hakkari) in 1846 by Badr Khan  
*Report of the archaeologist Layard (1846)*

The reader may desire to learn the fate of Tkhoma. A few days after my return to Mosul, notwithstanding the attempts of Tahyar Pasha to avert the calamity, Bedr Khan Bey marched through the Tiyari mountains, levying contributions on the tribes and plundering the villages, on his way to the unfortunate district. The inhabitants of Tkhoma, headed by their Meleks, made some resistance, but were soon overpowered by numbers. An indiscriminate massacre took place. The women were brought before the chief, and murdered in cold blood. Those who attempted to escape were cut off. Three hundred women and children, who were flying [fleeing] into Baz, were killed in the pass I have described. The principal villages with their gardens were destroyed, and the churches pulled down. Nearly half the people fell victims to the fanatical fury of the Kurdish chief; amongst these were one of the Meleks, and Kasha Bodaca. With this good priest, and Kasha Auraham, perished the most learned of the Nestorian clergy; and Kasha Kana is the last who has inherited any part of the knowledge, and zeal, which once so eminently distinguished the Chaldean priesthood.

The Porte was prevailed upon to punish this atrocious massacre, and to crush a rebellious subject who had long resisted its authority. An expedition was fitted out under Osman Pasha; and after two engagements, in which the Kurds were signally defeated by the Turkish troops headed by Omar Pasha, Bedr Khan Bey took refuge in a mountain-castle. The position had been nearly carried, when the chief, finding defence hopeless, succeeded in obtaining from the Turkish commander, Osman Pasha, the same terms which had been offered to him before the commencement of hostilities. He was to be banished from Kurdistan; but his family and attendants were to accompany him, and he was guaranteed the enjoyment of his property. Although the Turkish ministers more than suspected that Osman Pasha had reasons of his own for granting these terms, they honourably fulfilled the conditions upon which the chief, although a rebel, had surrendered. He was brought to Constantinople, and subsequently sent to the Island of Candia--a punishment totally inadequate to his numerous crimes.

*(Source: Austin H. Layard, Nineveh and its Remains: with an account of a visit to the Chaldean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or devil-worshippers; and an enquiry into the manners and arts of the ancient Assyrians. London 1849, pp. 298-299.)*

#### Document No. 5

From the Nestorian patriarch Mar Shimun Ruwil XVIII's letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, 1867

Within the last ten years numerous appeals from the Nestorians have been received by the Archbishops of Canterbury. The most complete statement of their condition and their wishes is found in a letter addressed in 1867 to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, and sent from the Patriarch, Bishops, Clergy and Laity, through Mr. C. A. Rassam, British Consul at Mosul. The entire document may be found in the Colonial Church Chronicle for 1868, pp. 134-137. The following extracts will show the nature of its contents:

'To the most revered and zealous Fathers, the elect of the Holy Ghost . . . the holy ministers, elect primates, orthodox patriarchs, watchful shepherds, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Right Reverend the Bishop of London, who follow after the life of the Crucified One which leads to heaven, and who dwell in perfect peace and security within the dominions of her glorious Majesty, the most excellent Queen Victoria:

'We desire to represent to you our abject condition, our spiritual destitution, and our lack of the means of instruction, trusting that you may condescend to listen to the appeal, and to

relieve our necessities for Christ's sake. In so doing, we take the liberty of submitting to you the four principal causes which have reduced our community to its present low condition, and which, moreover, threaten its existence.

'First, you are undoubtedly well acquainted with the past history of our community. At the beginning it was highly flourishing . . . and continued to prosper for many generations . . . At length . . . the Eastern Mohammed [sic], assailed it in front, and the Western Mohammed, that is, the Pope, assailed it from behind and left it prostrate. The former devoured its outward substance, and the latter its internal economy, and both gloated over its misery . . .

'The second cause of our present abject condition is the spiritual ignorance prevailing among our people . . .

'The third cause is the deplorable decay of learning among us. Our ancient books have been destroyed, and we have no scribes or printing presses to replace them; no schools wherein to educate our youth. Our old seminaries have either been taken from us, or have become the resort of the vain and the wicked. The learned have perished from amongst us, and no students are rising up to fill their places . . .

'The fourth cause is our isolated and forlorn condition. The people of Israel, after a captivity of seventy years, were restored to their own land; but our captivity has lasted 700 years, and yet no one has remembered us; and now we would lift up our eyes unto the hills, hoping that help may come. But if we look to the hills of Russia, we discover that they are covered with images and idols; if to those of Rome, we see [the Western] Mohammed holding sway there; if to those of America, the prospect does not suit our views, neither is it adapted to our wants. . . Our people, moreover, are not well affected towards their peculiar tenets. But in looking to England we are all of one mind, and find comfort and hope in the anticipation of receiving succour from the great City of London. Hence we implore the Lord Jesus Christ, and cast ourselves at your feet who are His disciples, beseeching you to compassionate the condition of our people, who are wandering over our mountains like sheep without a shepherd. . . .'

*(Source: Rev. Edward L. Cutts, The Assyrian Christians. Report of a Journey, undertaken by desire of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury and His Grace the Archbishop of York to the Christians in Koordistan and Oroomiah. London 1877, pp. 35-37)*

### Consequences of Reform Policies after 1878

On June 13, 1878, Bismarck opened the Congress of Berlin. This marked the beginning of German policy-making in the Orient.

England used the Congress to obligate the Turkish Ottoman government both to execute reforms in the Eastern provinces and to protect the Christian millets against attacks by the Muslim population. These guarantees of protection were laid down in Article 61. Incidentally, Turkey did not send a Muslim to Berlin as its authorized representative; Karatheodori, a man of Greek origin, represented Turkey in the unpleasant negotiations. No orthodox Muslim could have signed a treaty ceding any portion of the caliph's territory to non-believers, i.e. Christians. For the same reason, after the Balkan wars in 1912/1913, the Armenian Gabriel Effendi Noratunkian took over diplomatic representation of Turkey at the negotiations.

The English reserved the right to oversee the reforms, and from 1879 onwards they installed military consuls in the eastern provinces. It was thought that by their mere presence these consuls would provide greater security for the Christians. Hence, English military consuls were sent to the towns of Van, Diyarbakir and Erzerum for the benefit of the Armenians and Assyrians. They were to write regular reports to their government about the Christians' situation and their relationship to the Kurds and other Muslims, record complaints, and advise the Turkish officials. The result of these arrangements was that the foreign missions, which in fact worked only among the indigenous Christians, were considered negotiators for their governments. At that time, the American mission fell under English diplomatic protection.

During the Turco-Russian War, the situation once again became dangerous for the Syrian Christians. With Turkish approval, the Kurds wanted to invade Tiari in 1877. This may have been prompted in part when a British legation in 1876 contacted the Patriarch regarding a mission station and schools he had asked for.

The Ottoman government accused him of neither being prepared to support the state in its war against the Russians nor having paid tribute to the Sultan. According to the accusation, Mar Shimun owed the Porte 1.5 million piaster. Mar Shimun and the Maleks of the tribes had paid the taxes on time to the officials in Julamerg, but had not receipts to prove it. For security reasons, Mar Shimun had to leave his residence in Kochanes and place himself under the protection of his most powerful tribe, the Tiari. He was met here on October 4, 1877, by Hormizd Rassam, previously Layard's assistant, and British vice-consul in Mosul

after acquiring British citizenship. He himself was originally a Nestorian and well acquainted with the Christians' situation.

Rassam had an official talk with Mar Shimun about the alleged tardiness in paying the taxes. For some time already, the mountain Nestorians were, with government approval, denied access to the lowlands by the Kurds; they could thus neither sell their products in Mosul nor buy those goods they needed which they did not produce themselves. Rassam took over mediating negotiations with the Kurds, thus averting the impending invasion.

France had a decisive influence in Mosul, where the Chaldean Christians were in the majority. This was also the seat of a French vice-consul, as well as of the Chaldean patriarchate and one Jacobite and one Syrian Catholic metropolis. In the years preceding, differences had arisen between the Chaldean patriarch and Rome on the recognition of the dogma of infallibility and the attempts to introduce the Latin rite as opposed to the Syriac one. It came to a schism in 1877. France favored introduction of the Latin rite and influenced the Ottoman government to support the same. The anti-papist faction of the Chaldeans no longer considered itself represented by the French consul and it turned to the English consul, as did the Jacobites. France's political interests were not in Mesopotamia, but rather in Palestine and Lebanon, where it had intervened on behalf of the Arab Christians as recently as 1860. France's diplomats and missionaries were carrying out church policy among the Chaldeans. France was very respected as a protective power by all Syrian Christians. There were mass conversions to the Chaldean church in order to attain French protection in times of persecution such as 1843-1846; this frequently proved effective.

Another possibility to escape the persecution was to emigrate to Russia. In 1876, 5,000 Nestorians from Turkey and Persia lived in Tbilisi (Georgia). The English missionary and negotiator E. L. Cutts wrote on the subject:

"I made the acquaintance of some of these Tbilisi Nestorians, and found that they had lately formed a committee for the purpose of establishing here some kind of training college in which promising young Nestorians might receive the earlier part of their education, thence be transferred to Europe for some years, and then return as teachers of their own countrymen. They purposed [sic] to send agents over Russia and Europe to collect the funds necessary for the establishment and maintenance of this scheme. The committee was good enough to hold a special meeting to hear a report from me of the object and results of my journey." (*Cutts, The Assyrian Christians. Report of a Journey to the Christians in Koordistan, London 1877, p. 30*)

The political changes after 1878 and the proposed privileges for the Christians worried the Kurdish sheiks, who believed the feudal power they also exercised over the Christians in

their territories to be acutely threatened. The rumor about the creation of an independent Armenia alarmed the Kurdish tribes. In October 1880 there was a rebellion under Sheik Ubaidulla of Shamsdinan in which several Kurdish tribes joined. From Turkey, the Kurds invaded the mountain border area of Shamsdinan (seat of the Nestorian metropolis), inhabited by Syrians, went via Berwar and Tergawar towards Persia, occupied the town of Urmia and terrorized the Christian population. Primarily the Herki tribes on the Turkish side and the Shekak Kurds on the Persian side were involved. Persian troops were brought in, and this tribal autonomy movement was suppressed in November. It was natural to suppose that the Ottoman government was not a passive bystander in the rebellion. Russia and England demanded that the Kurds be punished by the Porte, which was compelled to deal with the matter whether it wanted to or not. Sheik Ubaidulla was expelled to Mecca, where he died in 1883.

Due to foreign pressure, the Porte was compelled to execute an administrative reform in the eastern provinces, particularly in the Armenian areas. The relationship to the Syrian millets also improved temporarily. Mar Shimun Ruwil had signed a declaration of loyalty to the sultan; for this he was awarded the Ottoman medal "Madjidije." A member of the patriarch's family was included in the provincial administrative council as a representative of the Nestorians. The Syrians were now recognized as a millet. This also affected their social organization. Until then, each tribal region, each village was an autonomous unit, only loosely linked socially through the diocese bishop, the Maleks and the village elders. Together with the Maleks and the village elders, Mar Shimun founded an interregional administrative council where tax matters, complaints and disputes of more than merely local interest could be discussed. If a solution was not found, the matter was presented to the provincial administrative council. Thus, Mar Shimun was the official representative of his millet to the Ottoman government. He was paid an annual salary of primarily symbolic character by the Porte. At this time (1882), the Jacobite Syrians were also recognized as their own millet.

However, one can view these measures merely as an appeasement policy: the situation did not really calm down—indeed the differences between Kurds and Christians intensified.

In 1890, the formation of the Kurd cavalry division "Hamidiye" was officially announced. Sultan Abdul Hamid II, whose pathological paranoia resulted in the empire being more filled with spies than ever before, the prisons full to overflow with suspects, and torture and death penalties as the order of the day, had put together a Kurdish personal security force which watched over him day and night. He never travelled, and only left his palace on Fridays to visit the mosque--protected by a double fence and the bayonets of his Kurdish guardians.

They formed the core of a well-armed cavalry division that was used as an irregular force to suppress the Christians.

In the same year, a group of Armenian revolutionaries, the Dajnakzutiun, published a manifesto in Tbilisi on the liberation of Turkish Armenia. While our focus here is not the Armenian national movement, there is little doubt that it had an impact on the Assyrian (particularly the Nestorian) millets. There was no indication of any national claim until the constitutional revolution in Persia, beginning 1906. Until then, they considered themselves a millet, a religious "nation," i.e. an ethno-religious minority.

#### The English "Assyrian Mission" (1886)

When the Archbishop of Canterbury decided in 1886 after many years of preparatory work to send an "Assyrian Mission" to Turkey, directly to the Nestorian patriarch in Kurdistan, this matter was considered a political step on England's part. Rustem, the Turkish ambassador in London, answered the inquiry about sending two missionaries to Kurdistan in the following manner:

May 24, 1886

"My government has reasons to assume that the planned mission station in this distant province would not remain without serious complications, and it would be grateful if Your Excellency would postpone the project of sending spiritual leaders there.

My government's view is not based on indifference towards the well-being of the Nestorians, and I have been instructed to tell you that the Education Ministry will take steps to open the schools desired by the Nestorians." (Source: *Lambeth Palace Library, Assyrian Mission Box I, 1882-1888*)

The mission undertaking encountered negative reactions in Russia as well, where it was publicly criticized (*Novoje Vremja* of 19 July 1886):

"The Russian newspaper 'Novoje Vremja' reproaches England for extending its political influence over the Nestorian Christians (who had been under Russian protection) by sending English missionaries to spread their propaganda close to the Russian border. This refers to sending the two English missionaries, Mr. Browne and Mr. Maclean to Urmia in Azerbaijan, the Nestorian center. *Novoje Vremja* is of the opinion that Russia should take counter measures." (*Times* of 20 July 1886)

So long as plans existed for the British to open their mission station in Turkey, the situation remained tense. The Russian consul in Van, M. Kolubazin, wrote reports to his government, and a Russian agent was sent to Kochanes. Finally, the English decided to move the official headquarters of the mission to Urmia; this came about in October 1886. Missionary Browne, however, remained personal counsellor and teacher of the patriarch's family in Kochanes for more than two decades; the Ottoman government did not permit a mission to be operated there.

Document No. 6

Official complaint of the Jacobite patriarch to the Turkish government in Constantinople (August 1889)

*(Complaint of the inhabitants of the Tur Abdin villages Sare and Basebrino)*

*[original text in French]*

"The chief of the constabulary of Midyat, Mehmed Agha (Wilajet Diyarbakir, Sandjak Mardin) summoned together the entire family of Hadjo, one of the most well-known Kurd bandits of our region, and several Kurds about whom we cannot give more exact information, and soldiers called upon by the bandit chiefs, in order to take a certain Hanna Heido from the village of Sare into custody, without justification and contrary to the ban of His Majesty the Sultan. They besieged our village for days. Thirty-eight (38) of our relatives and neighbors, whose names are given above, were killed. Two women's bellies were slit open so that the fetuses spilled out; in addition, eight persons were severely wounded. And they committed unheard-of atrocities, took our possessions with them, stole our herds and our money, burned down our houses and laid our fields to waste. We have repeatedly approached the local authorities and above all the Mutesarif of Mardin because of these violent crimes, but no one has listened to us. They did not take our requests for justice into account because they wanted to hush up the involvement of soldiers, and because they wanted to protect those who incited this raid. As the violent crimes were committed against the will of His Majesty the Sultan, we most humbly ask Your Excellency to punish the wrongdoers according to the law and to defend our rights."

*(Source: Saad Lamec, Sechzehn Jahre als Quarantänearzt in der Türkei [Sixteen Years as a Quarantine Doctor in Turkey], Berlin 1913, pp. 260-261)*

Abdul Hamid's Policies of Pitting Kurds Against Christians

In the Turkish provinces of Van and Mosul, implementing the 1878 reforms was intrinsically linked to the Kurds, who made up the largest group in the population after the Armenians and Assyrians. The medieval feudal tribal system was still fully intact among the Kurds not

only to the end of the 19th century, but long thereafter. Life in Kurdish society was dominated by tribal rivalry, rather than national slogans or political factions. The leader of the tribe was a sheik (a religious and secular leader) or an emir (a tribal prince). Together with influential landowners and aghas (clan leaders), they joined to form the tribal council. The Turkish pashas who represented the Sultan's authority as provincial governors and prefects in the Kurdish regions were hardly able to impose the government's tax demands, much less to influence local conflicts between Kurds and Christians.

Turkish punitive expeditions were sent out to curb the insubordination of Kurdish tribes and of several particularly powerful Kurdish princes. However, none of these actions succeeded in bringing the Kurds closer to the Porte. One reason for this failure was the absence of ethnic unity among the Kurds. They were generally organized in individual and autonomous tribes that competed with one another or formed coalitions which later disintegrated. Under Badr Khan (1843-46) and Sheik Obeidullah (1880), there were attempts to extend and solidify autonomous tribal domination, while at the same time expelling and exterminating the Syrian Christians. This would almost have succeeded if England and Russia had not intervened at the Porte each time and demanded punitive expeditions.

The tribal leaders of Hakkari, Bohtan, Tur Abdin and the Persian-Turkish border areas feared for their power after English military consuls exercised control in the Kurdish regions in 1879 and Turkish garrisons were strengthened in accordance with the resolutions of 1878. The presence of an English vice-consul in a regional capital hardly deterred them from intensifying their oppression in order to express their hatred of the Christians, whom they blamed for this situation.

Sultan Abdul Hamid II found a way to neutralize the danger posed by the Kurds while at the same time using them against the Christians. He manipulated many Kurdish chiefs of smaller tribes in order to weaken the more powerful feudal lords. He did so by providing them with gifts, and by awarding or promising them medals and insignificant posts. This practice played to their ambitions and kept them from allying with the major feudal lords, which would have strengthened them. The creation of the Hamidiye regiments in 1890 provided yet another control over the Kurds. It was the Sultan's intention that these regiments would not only counterbalance the Cossacks, but would also provide an irregular army ever ready to act against the Christians. In fact, Kurdish tribal rebellions against the Turkish government came to an end after 1880. The situation of the Christians in the eastern provinces, particularly in the Assyrians' areas of settlement, which were hardly under control, worsened dramatically after 1890. Fearing a development similar to that in the Western provinces, the government intended that the Kurds would suppress the Armenians

here in particular. In 1890 there were fierce battles between Armenians and Kurds that also spread to other Armenian provinces. Between 1894 and 1896, major massacres by the Kurds took place. Reports and documents show that the Assyrians were also affected by the persecution.

### The Syrian Christians in Persia

From the 5th century on there was an Aramaic-speaking Christian population in Northwest Persia, and the Persian Church of the East was strongly influenced by them both theologically and linguistically. In the 6th century, Maragha on the southwest side of Urmia Lake was the seat of a bishopric, while in the 12th century Urmia and Tabriz were seats of bishops for the West Syrian Church. From the 11th to the 13th century Afshar Turkic tribes emigrated from Central Asia to Azerbaijan, where an East Syrian Nestorian diocese flourished at the time. The Il-Khan rulers put up their center here with the capital Ushnu. The Nestorian patriarch also temporarily moved his residence here after he was expelled by the Mongols (1258) from Baghdad to Arbil in the north of Mesopotamia. For about a hundred years there was a tendency among the Il-Khans to adopt Nestorianism; several princes probably married among them, thus coming under this influence. However, in the end Islam was victorious. The last wave of Nestorian Christianity spreading to Asia also took place in the 12th and 13th centuries; this was the end of the heyday of the Church of the East. At its peak, the church included about 80 million believers in 30 metropolises and 240 eparchies throughout Asia.

When in 1390 Tamerlane (1385-1405), Mongolian leader and rebel, burst forth with an army from Samarkand and against the dynasty of Hülägü's successors and laid waste to the landscapes and cultures of China, Persia, Mesopotamia and Syria, the Nestorian communities also fell victim to the storm. By retreating into the mountainous country between the Van and Urmia lakes, a remainder of the East Syrian Christians survived in the diocese of Azerbaijan—an inaccessible area bypassed by the Mongols. Once the Mongol assault subsided, it appears that parts of these East Syrian communities returned from the mountains to the high plateaus of Urmia and Salamas and set up new communities in the fertile region.

The Timurid dynasty was only in power for a short period (1390-1499); the Persian Safavids (1501-1722) then took over at about the time that the Ottoman empire finally succeeded the Byzantine empire after the conquest of Constantinople (1456).

Under the Safavids, Shia Islam became the state religion, and an independent state emerged with territorial boundaries approximating those of modern-day Iran. The border to the Ottoman empire remained without fortification for a long time. However, Urmia lake and the region west of it were probably part of Persian state territory, as it was ceded by treaty to the Ottomans in 1590, who wanted to expand in an easterly direction. In 1615 the Persians reconquered the area. The exact delineation of the border between Turkey and Persia remained uncertain into the 19th century. Various groups of people, nomadic Kurdish and Turkish tribes, went back and forth over the indefinite border. The mountainous country and regions such as Tergawar, Mergawar and others where Syrians lived were along the border.

The Christians were repeatedly persecuted under the Safavids. Armenian and Georgian Christians were deported under Shah Abbas the Great (1587-1628). After diplomatic relations with the European powers were established, Nadir Shah (1736-1747) had the Bible and the Koran translated into the Persian language. The Old Testament was translated into Persian by Persian Jews, the New Testament by indigenous Armenians.

Russia won the Russo-Persian war of 1828, which took place during Feth Ali Shah's reign. Persia had to give up territory in the treaty of Turkmanshai. Many Armenians and Nestorian Syrians were inhabitants of the ceded area, and for this reason a number of them emigrated from Persia to Russia. The Russians temporarily occupied Urmia and Khoi; even after their troops retreated they considered Northwest Persia their area of influence.

The condition of the Assyrians in Persian Azerbaijan in the 19th century was that of pariahs. The owners of the villages were mostly Turkic Afshar. In the province as a whole, only the civil service officials were of Persian origin, while the rest of the Muslim population was of Turkic-Central and Kurdish origin. Assyrian and Armenian Christians, and Jews lived among these groups.

A system of absolute despotism and feudalism dominated; the Christians were completely helpless within it. Their village communities were exploited by Muslim property owners and their tax collectors. The Christian village speaker was a mediator between the landowner and the Christian tenants. The bishops of the four dioceses that still existed in Persia until 1915 constituted the only authority. The patriarch was head of the church, and the bishops were obligated to pay taxes to him. But because the followers were usually poorer than the mountain tribes, these taxes were only rarely paid. The bishops sometimes travelled to Kochanes, but Mar Shimun hardly ever travelled to his Persian dioceses.

The Kurdish tribes posed the greatest threat to the farming population, both Christian and Muslim. The Shekak Kurds, who fell into seven sub-tribes, ruled in Northwest Persia, while the Herki Kurds lived on Turkish territory in the mountains, and the Begzadeh Kurds were south of Urmia. These tribes and sub-tribes did not form a social unit. They fought for supremacy among themselves, and formed coalitions against one another. But all the tribes together adopted a predatory nomadic attitude towards the Christian farming population. They regularly raided villages, stole the harvest and livestock, and destroyed vineyards. The age-old differences between nomads and settled farmers reappeared. In the 19th century the Persian central government hardly had any influence in this province.

Incidents of religious fanaticism between the Muslim and Christian farmers were rare. They usually lived in their own separate communities, but came together in the larger towns. However, there was the social conflict that exists between landlords and their tenants. Each group respected the other's religious festivals and came together on these occasions. Muslims also made pilgrimages to some of the Christian holy sites when these were associated with healing the sick or sacrifices for fertility. The educational level of both groups was about the same when the American missionaries arrived in Urmia in 1835. During the 19th century these and other western missions changed the balance of education in favor of the Christians.

The arrival of the American mission was welcomed by the Persian government. It received a ferman from Azerbaijan's governor-prince, and the shah promised protection to the mission founder Justin Perkins and encouraged him "to teach knowledge to our subjects."

This attitude of good will later changed due to rivalry between the various foreign missions, as well as the splitting off of parts of the indigenous church and the formation of communities of proselytes. Indigenous priests sometimes called on the Persian government for help against the foreign missionaries. Following massacres in the mountainous country in 1843 and 1846 by the Kurdish emirs, particularly Badr Khan, for which the American mission also bore responsibility through missionary A. Grant's efforts, Mar Shimun Abraham lived for many years as a refugee in Urmia, Persia, where he arrived from Mosul in 1847. The American mission viewed him as irrelevant and it ignored him in favor of a small number of bishops who were of use to it in Urmia. The American snub of Mar Shimun earned them his enmity, and on his return to the mountains he broke off all relations with them.

The first Syrian Protestant community was formed in 1855 under the influence of the American mission. There was no official separation from the Church of the East, because in

the meanwhile the Persian government had issued a ban on founding proselyte communities.

Foreign influence in Persia increased in the second half of the 19th century after England declared war when Persian troops occupied the city of Herat (Afghanistan) in 1856. British troops landed in the Persian Gulf. In the north and northwest, Russia began to assert her influence under the pretext of helping the Christians. At the request of English and Russian diplomats, the Persian government installed a special governor (Sarparast) to address Christian complaints. His particular task was to protect Christian tenants against discrimination and unjustified demands by Muslim Aghas and tax-collectors. However, the institution of 'Sarparast' hardly made a difference in the context of the thoroughly corrupt local administration.

The landowners bribed the officials; the Christians bribed the Sarparast. The situation escalated and the Christians were the losers. They pinned their hopes on the American missionaries, whom they considered their mediators, putting their trust in the extensive American connections to English diplomats. The first American ambassador, appointed in 1883, was S. G. W. Benjamin, the son of a missionary in Teheran. Complaints from the missionaries in Urmia in fact even reached the Shah, at that time Nasir ed-Din (1848-1896), but his interference rather turned against them. During Shah Nasir ed-Din's long reign, official policy towards the Christians was one of tolerance, as could also be seen in the fact that numerous foreign missions worked here. The Americans opened further stations in Teheran, Tabriz, Hamadan and Rasht, besides Urmia.

America itself had no direct political interest in Persia, unlike England and Russia. Since the American mission in Urmia was located in the Russian sphere of influence, it was also used by the English to advance their own interests against Russia. After the Presbyterian Church took over the American mission work in Persia in 1870, the mission separated itself from the Nestorian church. The Protestant Syrian community set up on its own in 1880 with its own spiritual leader. However, only a small group of several hundred Nestorians who left their old church was involved. The great majority stayed in the old church, which was also part of their identity. This development seems to be what finally prompted England to send its own mission, whose purpose was to maintain a measure of control rather than to sway the Nestorian Assyrians away from their own church.

From 1886 on, confidential reports from the missionaries were regularly channelled to the English government through the Archbishop. The aforementioned protests by the Russians could not change that. Although mission work took place, particularly in the border

highlands region, this seems to have been of comparatively secondary importance. The leader of the mission confined himself to research on language and dialects, which was of particular benefit to European scholars. Also, they did not pay their native assistants any salaries as other missions did. Mar Shimun expected to strengthen his position through the English presence. The immediate proximity of a missionary who was considered an agent by both the Ottomans and the Russians, and who probably was one from time to time, averted at least one acute threat to the Syrians of Tiari and Tkhoma. The English consul general in Tabriz, W.G. Abbott (1875-1890), was able to prevent the Kurds from invading these areas by timely use of his diplomatic connections to Turkey.

Through the mediation of the English ambassador, two Persian laws that discriminated against Christians were modified in 1881:

1. If a Christian converts to Islam, his family's property belongs to him alone.
2. A Christian cannot testify in court as a witness against a Muslim.

An improvement in the legal status of Christians in Persia was supposed to take place through the fact that legal matters between Christians and Muslims were from then on to be dealt with before civil courts and not Islamic courts of law. (*Persian Regulations respecting the Nestorian Community in the district of Oroomiah 1864, Brit. and Foreign State Papers 78 (1881-82), pp. 336-340*)

The Syrian Christian's situation in Persia was relatively secure in the vicinity of the town of Urmia, while the settlements in the highlands were particularly unprotected against the Kurds, on whom the Persian government had no influence. An incident in the year 1896 so shook the Assyrian communities in Persia that it resulted in a mass conversion to the Russian Orthodox church under the leadership of one bishop, an unprecedented political demonstration.

The Nestorian bishop Mar Gabriel, who was responsible for the diocese south of Urmia in the Baranduz and Solduz regions (the seat of his bishopric was the village of Ardishai), journeyed into the highlands to visit the Matran of Nochea with a retinue of fourteen priests. On the return journey, they paid a courtesy visit to the house of the Kurdish sheik of the region, where they spent a night. The following day, the sheik provided them with a protective escort of about twenty Kurds, who led them into a remote valley and cruelly butchered them and mutilated the corpses. The corpses were found shortly thereafter. This incident was unparalleled because an important church leader was involved. To whom should the Syrians turn? The Persian officials had no authority over the Kurdish tribes who

caused the trouble in the border country. Even foreign diplomats could not achieve anything in these regions through their protests, and the missionaries themselves were in danger. An American missionary was also killed in 1904.

#### The Alliance with the Russians (1897)

A pro-Russian movement emerged among the Assyrians in Persia. In 1897, Mar Yonan, Bishop from Sepurghan, established contact with the Russian church in Petersburg through a mediator, Mirza Joseph Arsanis (Mirza Yusuf Khan). Syrians who were converts to the Russian Orthodox church resided there because of the aforementioned waves of emigration to Russia. In May 1897, two priests came to Mar Yonan's diocese in the northern Urmia plateau region as envoys of the Russian church. The Russian priest Victor Michailovich Senatsky, with his wife Maria, and the Assyrian priest Shimun Alaveranov of Koilassar, were warmly received by about 10,000 Syrian Christians in Gavilan. These priests moved from village to village and, under the direction of the bishop and his ministers, they collected signatures for official acceptance into the Russian Orthodox church. No one hesitated to give his signature. For most, this was a vote to place themselves under Russian protection, since the English and the Americans had not been able to provide them with the requisite protection.

On March 25, 1898, at a synod in the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral of St. Petersburg, at which Mar Yonan was present, and in the presence of the high Russian dignitaries, such as the metropolitans of Petersburg, Moscow and Kiev, Mar Yonan and a number of his priests, speaking for 15,000 of his followers, renounced their errors, and they were thereupon received into the Orthodox church.

It can be assumed that the political aspect of this church event has been adequately acknowledged. In ecclesiastical history this spectacular conversion of one of the oldest Orient churches remained an episode of only slight significance even a few years later. It was decided that a mission would be founded, and a group of missionaries was sent to Persia. The Russian general consul in Tabriz gave a reception for the missionaries. The Persian general governor Amiri Nisam, supporter of the Russian mission, was also among the guests. The Russian mission legation moved from village to village and carried out individual conversions for each person in the Syrian Christian population. About 20,000 people joined the movement, renouncing their old creed. A Nestorian priest who sympathized with the German Lutheran church and did not convert to orthodoxy wrote to Germany:

“This entire movement basically has a secular character, not an ecclesiastical one. The essential issue is Russia’s protection against the Mohammedans, and Russia’s influence has become dominant in the north of Persia. The Christians from the old Syrian church have fallen under Russia’s spell and expect a great deal from Russia.” (*Source: Priest Jaure Abraham’s letter to the mission in Hermannsburg, 1899, Gögtapa, Persia*)

In the course of a decade this was the first step for Russia towards dominating the province of Azerbaijan. It would remain only nominally under Persian sovereignty until 1917. The mission existed with the support of the Syrian Christians and in exchange it protected them. Throughout this period, the Russian mission remained a tool of Russian policy.

Another event clearly illustrated how politically explosive foreign missions in this region were. In 1904, the American missionary Benjamin W. Labaree was killed by Kurds during a journey into the mountainous country. The American consul at Tabriz, Arthur C. Wratlaw, demanded that the Persian government punish the Kurds categorically and pay \$30,000 in compensation. Persia paid the sum and seized a Kurd, a well-known villain named Ghaffar, who was sent to prison on behalf of his clan. However, the Americans were not satisfied with this solution. The diplomat threatened that America would send out war ships against Persia if Persian troops failed to take punitive action against the Kurdish tribe responsible. The Persian government had to submit to this demand; however, the result of the troops being sent was only that the Kurds retreated to what was clearly Ottoman territory and asked the Turks for help. Ensuing clashes between Persian and Turkish troops led to the expulsion of the Syrians who had settled on the Turkish side of the border, and the Turks then occupied a portion of the Persian border area. The disputes on the issue lasted for years. Ghaffar was finally captured and sent to Teheran, where he died in prison two years later. The widow Mrs. Labaree received a compensation of \$30,000.

When a revolutionary movement to install constitutional monarchy arose in Persia between 1906 and 1909, fighting broke out in Tabriz between the Persian revolutionaries and the shah’s faction. Howard C. Baskerville, an American missionary who had joined in the revolution was shot dead in the fighting.

Because of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, Russia was for a short time not as intensely involved in Azerbaijan. In connection with the constitutional movement, England and Russia signed the Anglo-Russian agreement on control in Persia in 1907, according to which Russia was assured control over Northwest Persia (a de facto status of long standing already). Also, a Russian consulate was opened in Urmia, a bank and Russian firms opened branches, and the Russian mission built a large church along with a school with an impressive mission building.

In the summer of 1907 the Turks tried, together with irregular Kurdish troops, to extend the border area. The Christians were expelled from their villages; many died or at least lost all their property. They fled to Urmia and the nearby Christian villages. The Russian consul saw to it that the refugees received material aid.

Mar Shimun Ruwil died in 1903. His influence had been greatly weakened due to opposition within the patriarchal family. There had even been attempts to deprive him of his power. His brother Nimrod led the opposition and maintained contact with the Russians. Thus one may assume that the disagreements in the patriarchal house were also connected to the mass conversions of the Nestorians in Persia, especially since the patriarch, Mar Shimun Benjamin, 1903-1918, took up contact with the Russians in 1906 shortly after his consecration, when the situation for the mountain Assyrians had once again worsened considerably.

The Turks' threatened occupation of Urmia and the entire region up to Lake Urmia put Russia in the long-desired position of providing a military presence in north Persia. From 1909 to 1911 eight infantry battalions and a Cossack division were stationed in Tabriz (1909), Urmia, Khoi, Diliman, Maku, Maraga and Saujbulak. The Russian consul in Urmia became the highest authority in the province of Azerbaijan. The constitution was swept away in 1912. Ahmad Mirza Shah, Persian sovereign, 1909-1925, remained as a puppet, compliant to foreign interests.

#### Document No. 7

Speech by the Nestorian pastor Jaure Abraham in Hermannsburg (Germany) on November 14, 1897, about the conditions of life in Persia

"I will now tell you about the region I come from and about the people in the Orient. Christians, ancient Christians, have been found in the region for about 1800 years; they have preserved Christianity until the present day, and now we are workers there and we evangelize in the church. I am from Persia, from the Urmia district, which borders on Turkey. In the area between Turkey and Persia there are about 120,000 Christians; these are the Syrian and Chaldean peoples. And there are Turks and Kurds, and you are aware that Mohammedanism is spreading far and wide; about 160 million Mohammedans live in the two empires, Turkey and Persia, and about 40,000 Christians live in Persia and 80,000 in Turkey. That means a thousand enemies for each Christian. The Christians call themselves Apostolic Christians. They were mockingly called Nestorians after Nestorius, who lived around 400; but we call ourselves Apostolic Christians or Thomas Christians. Since the time

of the apostles, they tried very diligently to spread the Christian doctrine through their teachers, although they were often persecuted by the Persian kings. When Mohammed rose up, terrible persecution broke out over the Aramaic people in Syria and Chaldea. Later they were sometimes able to live undisturbed in peace, but were often persecuted and suffered difficult times. When a great persecution came about 400 years ago they were dispersed throughout Asia.

About 80,000 of them inhabit the Kurdish mountain ranges. These are great rocky mountains. Some of them have small pieces of land; the residents can sow and harvest a bit, and they may also have a few sheep. They tenaciously retain their Christianity, and they believe in the Trinity and in Jesus, the Son of God, redeemer of the world. The rest of these people live in Persia. Mohammedanism also causes them great suffering. They have no land; it belongs to the Mohammedan landlords. These poor Christians work in part for their landlords, in part for themselves. They journey to Russia, Tbilisi and other places and work on the streets and railroads, thus earning something so they can live with their families. These have even greater misfortune than those who inhabit the mountains; they also have neither teachers nor schools, so that in a large parish only a few can read and write. We have missionaries from America with us; they visited our land about 60 years ago. That was all well and good. But they do not possess the right doctrine: they are Presbyterians and they do not baptize these poor Christians' children. We believe, however, that every one must baptize his children right away. However, they only consist of about 3,000 people (converted Syrian Christians). About 50 years ago Catholics also arrived, and they have many churches and schools and pastors in every village, but no parish yet.

The language there is Aramaic, and our books are in this language. It is the language in which the Lord Christ on the cross called out "Eli Eli lama asabtani!" or to Jairu's daughter: "Talitha kumi!" I was first a deacon for Pastor Pera Johannes, and from him I learned to speak German and learned the evangelical Lutheran doctrine; I was then ordained by the patriarch and appointed pastor in Gutapa [Gögtapa]. Pera Johannes is in Wasirabad, about twenty minutes away from there.

We suffer great affliction because of the persecution. There are about 10,000 refugees from Armenia in Persia, and with us in Gutapa we have about 400 refugees who live with us, and they are poor and we are too. These are hard times.

We Christians there are despised by the Mohammedans. According to their doctrine they consider us godless and impure. They say that Christians and pagans must be killed, and that there must be great enmity between Mohammed and other peoples in the world who do not believe in Mohammed. Many Christians are very poor and naked and hungry, but the

Mohammedans have power. Twenty Christian families live together with 150 Mohammedan families. The Christians are despised, they may not sit together with nor eat with the Mohammedans. A Mohammedan will not pick up anything that we have touched because we are impure. There is great enmity from the Mohammedans because we believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the redeemer of the world. The Mohammedans say Christ is a prophet, but nothing more. That is why the persecution has been particularly intense in recent times.

Our bishop wanted to travel to Kurdistan and visit our patriarch there. Pera Johannes and I were also supposed to join them. But Pera was busy building the church and I wanted to travel to Germany with Luther, Pera's son. He was travelling with eleven pastors and his brother's son. Two and a half million Kurds live under a sheik on the border between Turkey and Persia. The sheik had invited our bishop and his retinue to his home, but he intended to kill them. They came into his house and sat together at the table. One of the servants told them: "This is the last time you will eat bread." Then one pastor who was a very capable preacher and skilled in the Aramaic language had his tongue cut off. They cut off the bishop's finger which bore the bishop's ring. Then his clothes were removed, his hands tied together behind his back and the servants took all thirteen to a mountain in the mountain range where the peaks are always covered with snow. There they were brutally killed. They remained laid out in the snow there for three days and no one knew about it besides the Kurdish servants. After three days a herd of sheep came by. The shepherd saw that birds had settled in to roost up there and took a look. He found the thirteen corpses and immediately thought: those are Christians. He informed the people in the next Christian village and they came right away. There was great wailing and misery. But what were we to do against it?"

*(Source: Hannoversches Missions-Volksblatt [Hannover Mission Newspaper], February 1898)*

Document No. 8

Letter from the Deacon Yohannan min Beth Kelaita from Marbisho in Tergawar (Kurdistan) to his son Toma min Beth Kelaita in Berlin dated 1 September 1905

My dear son Toma, peace be with you!

After greeting you, we would like to express our thanks that God has preserved and protected you. And now I would like to respond to your request that I tell you something of the homeland:

Because of the raids by the Kurds, crop failure and many other troubles which we have had to suffer in these years, and which have very much saddened us, our letter will seem very painful and sad to you. Firstly, in the fall of last year the grain went bad because of the continuous heavy rainfall on the barns during the threshing time. [The barns in Kurdistan are round, open squares on the fields without roofs, on which the oxen thresh out the grain at the time of the harvest. There are no barns as in Germany, where the rain cannot reach the grain, but where the wind probably separates the wheat from the chaff.] As a result, the ears began to sprout, so that we could not use it any more. The people also could not work outside under these weather conditions, with such intense rainfall as had rarely, if ever, been seen before. After that, a load of grain increased in price to 10 Toman (about 50 marks), that is, three times more expensive than it had been before.

People then feared that the seed which the poor had saved from their food would be useless, because nothing could thrive in such wet conditions. In the spring they only sowed a little, and when the first ones ripened, part of it went bad due to sennek (grain leprosy); we saw many rotten ears. The other portion was destroyed by mice. A load of seeds still costs 10 Toman, but people fear that after threshing the prices will increase even more, since the grain which was in good condition seems to be without seeds, although we can't be exactly sure yet.

Secondly, the potato harvest this year is also very bad; worms have almost completely destroyed it.

Thirdly, the sheep which otherwise provide us with what is necessary to live have been stolen by the Kurds very often, and the others which we had acquired after the raids starved to death in the winter because of the lack of feed. Hay and straw were destroyed in the rains described above. In addition, we had an unusually severe winter, where several meters of snow covered the mountains for six months; thus we couldn't bring the animals to the pastures. In our land the people are terribly afraid of famine; the people do not know what to do to save themselves and their families. They have no stock of livestock and money to help them stay alive, and there is no work with which they could earn something against the hunger. You yourself know that in our country there are neither factories nor places of work. We had no terrible grasshopper plague like you heard about in Germany; the grasshoppers were in the Salamas district, but the damage they caused is insignificant.

The greatest adversity we suffer under here in Tergawar, as you already know from my first letters, is the following: the Kurds who live among us raided our area in 1903. In six of our villages everything was robbed, down to the broom behind the front door; three of them were

burned down after the raids. A number of people were killed in the process, some shot, some killed by dagger wounds, and the prisoners were burned alive. As a result, our people have not been able to leave their earth shacks in these three years for even half an hour to work on the fields, and now these poor people are suffering intolerably from famine.

There is still enough seed in the country so that there need not be famine; but you yourself know the situation here exactly, how the Christians are treated by our Mohammedan rulers, who have no fear of God and who are not afraid to deceive people. They mix half sand and dirt into the grain in their stores, which the poor must buy and pay for as if it were pure grain. In addition, the poor people are even more deceived by the landlord's vassals when the seed is being weighed. If someone buys five loads and he weighs it again at home, he will have at most four loads. The poor people can't do anything against this profiteering: if they speak about it they are immediately abused, punished, mistreated and thrown into prison, because they have no advocate who speaks up for their rights.

Pastor Abraham Deacon Yohannan min Beth Kelaita. Tergawar in Kurdistan, 1 September 1905

*(Source: Der Nestorianer-Bote [The Nestorian Messenger] No. 2, Berlin, December 1905, from Syriac original)*

#### Document No. 9

Report on the border war between Turks and Persians in the Tergawar district, the location of numerous Christian villages and parishes; letter from Elisabeth Wendt, a German pastor's daughter from Lerbeck, Westphalia

Charbash near Urmia, 2 August 1907

Dear parents, brothers and sisters,

I'm writing to you amidst unrest and tumult--there is war here in the surrounding area. Yesterday and the day before we heard that the Turks would come to take the land up to Urmia away from the Persians. Everyone was in panic yesterday morning. They said: Now they'll probably come to Charbash too. One saw the people packing up all their belongings in a great hurry to bring them to the city. All day long, and today too, every one is in motion, and everything's been packed away except for a few store-rooms. Only a few believe as Simon [Elisabeth's Assyrian husband, *Editor's Note*] does that it will be even more dangerous in the city. I sewed a German flag which we intend to raise in case of emergency, as the Turks are friendly towards the Germans.

Our village Charbash is now completely filled with people coming through, fleeing from Tergawar. Hundreds of people, fathers, mothers, children, old and young, arrive starving. Yesterday morning the Kurds came and every one who was not killed fled. They fled from there without bread, without clothes, with only their lives. Many hundreds have gone to the city to the Russian consul and more keep coming. We haven't the slightest news from Simon's parents about Mattheus, Yonathan and the others.

Monday. I can give you somewhat more precise news today. God be praised and thanked: they are all alive. But the conditions are indescribably sad. Just imagine, all of Tergawar has been completely robbed, including Simon's parents' house. They've taken away everything, broken down the doors and robbed whatever came into their hands. You can read about things in stories and not believe that it could happen this way and that one could experience it this way personally. They had about 70 to 80 complete sets of bedclothes in their house, many of which were their own, but which others had also brought to their house for protection. Everything, absolutely everything was destroyed: carpets, clothing, shoes, dishes, tables and chairs were broken, watches and Sulte's glass plates crushed. The large supply of flour was poured into a hole and mixed with petroleum, 40 pounds of butter and who knows how many eggs they stamped on. Then cows, sheep, buffalo were stolen and many other things—I can keep listing things and I won't reach the end. And that's the way it is for all the people of Tergawar. They were left with nothing, nothing but their lives. And so they arrive here in torn old clothes, hungry, carrying small children—no one has brought anything along.

We are currently 18 people, and everything in our apartment was completely occupied even before. But we have to make do. Many of those who ask for help are also relatives, because really, what should they do if they're not helped? They would have to die of hunger. Many did not know whether their children were alive or had been killed, and many children don't know the same thing about their parents. There must have been a terrible state of confusion.

Most of them, almost 2,000 people, are temporarily at the Russian consul's, and there they at least get dry bread. But imagine living on that alone; each person receives only half a pound of it a day. Besides, they have to sleep on cold ground without bedclothes in the rain—it has rained several times these days. Many hundred are also here in the villages. Bread has increased in price tremendously; it has become twice as expensive in ten days.

Thursday. Today we have new news once again. The Turks truly intend to fight with the Persians. They say they want to bombard the city for 24 hours if the Persians defend

themselves. We don't know where we'll go. Simon has gone to Mr. Neesan and Mr. Parry (English missionaries) to discuss the most practical solution. Parry received a telegram that in case of emergency English soldiers are to protect us. Everyone is of course in a terribly excited state, but that doesn't help at all.

The actual reason for the terribly rushed flight was that the Turks came up behind the Kurds with cannons (cannons had never before threatened the Kelaitas' solidly fortified house in Tergawar). They were all intending to fight from the roof of my father-in-law's house, and many armed men were there who would probably have taken up arms against the Kurds, but as soon as the cannons appeared they did everything they could just to save their skins. My father-in-law asked an influential Kurd who was his friend to protect his house, even offered him money--but he said: that's impossible for me, you've got to flee as quickly as you can, you're beyond help.

Greetings to the parish and also to our relations. Your Elisabeth

*(Source: Sonderdruck des Evangelischen Vereins zur Förderung der nestorianischen Kirche in Kurdistan [Offprint from the Evangelical Association to Sponsor the Nestorian Church in Kurdistan]. Lerbeck b. Porta W. 1907)*

Document No. 10

Letter from the Anglican mission pastor Rev. Browne from Kochanes (Hakkari); to Rev. Heazell in England, 10 August 1908

My dear Heazell!

On Sunday, August 1 (1908) Rashid Bey, Mir of Berwar, who had gathered around him a great number of Kurds with the help of the Sheik of Barmarni (some say 5,000, others 10,000), combined with a Turkish major, invaded Tiari by pushing through the Lizan valley on the way to Zawitha, laying to waste and burning everything up to the Zab river except three out of 500 houses. About 80 or 100 Syrian men from Tiari gathered and held on to the church and the bridge of St. George. The Kurds burned down the ripe crops, destroyed the harvest in the fields, violently opened the church, cut up the church books with their swords and removed the holy vessels. They even destroyed the wooden water-pipes.

People were killed in the fire. To be exact four were killed, twenty wounded. When describing such great destruction, it seems unimportant to tell that our small house, which is registered as a school and which is the property of a British subject, was also burned down;

but this relatively small matter grants the British consul the right to intervene and to call for the banishment of the Mir, who has long been the scourge of this part of Kurdistan. I am turning to you for love of mankind to request far-reaching and urgent assistance. More than 500 homes have been burned down; two or three families lived in each house, according to local custom. Thousands of people are completely without means. Nothing is left, no bed, no vessel, no food nor money to buy anything. The Christians in the neighboring villages are themselves poor and can hardly keep themselves alive. I doubt that any catastrophe in recent years has elicited such desperation and helplessness. The bishop of Berwar, Mar Yawalaha, left the village several weeks before these events, but Reshid Bey robbed his house of all his property, mistreated his younger sisters and had several 70-year old men beaten in the most brutal of ways. May I ask you to collect as much money as possible as quickly as possible, so that the Syrians among whom our mission works can be supported before winter arrives.

Your faithful W. H. Browne (printed in the Assyrian Mission Quarterly)

(Source: *Der Nestorianer-Bote [The Nestorian Messenger]*, Berlin, November 1908)

Document No. 11

A letter from Deacon Jonathan Saul min Beth Kelaita to Pastor Thoma Johannan min Beth Kelaita in Berlin about the events immediately preceding in the Turkish-Persian border areas, September 5, 1907

My dear Thoma!

Peace be with you through our Lord Jesus Christ.

With bitter tears in my eyes, I write to you this time about our cousin M. who was shot dead by a murderer recently released from prison. Shino, Kojja, Zaya, Butja, Yohannan Shino, Ushana, Yonan and Sheto were also shot down, Benyamin and Kanon were wounded. The villages of Balulan, Mawana, Currana and our house too were raided and completely pillaged. All the people have fled from Tergawar, the villages have been destroyed and the countryside is now desolate and deserted.

I can hardly find the words with which to describe this terrible frightening scene. The beginning of this unrest was as follows: The Persian military, under the leadership of Mir Moayed es-Salteneh, marched against the rebellious Kurdish tribe, the Bagsade. But the Bagsade had hidden all their possessions in the mountains or stowed them at their nearest

neighbors before the military came. On the day on which the Persian army came to Tulo in Tergawar, the Bagsade were already on Turkish territory. They asked the Turks to help them. They did not refuse to help, and had a regiment of soldiers and six cannons come from Van to help the Kurds. Thousands of Kurds joined the Turkish soldiers and marched to Tergawar. Once they'd arrived in Tergawar, they opened artillery fire against the Persians and the Persians ran away. In the course of this, the people named above were killed, because they didn't know that the Persians had fled and run towards the Kurds.

On the morning of the following day at sunrise our father advised us to go to the Turks and to surrender to them. Suddenly, however, the Kurds poured in to the country from all sides like swarms of bees. We hoisted a Turkish flag and went up on the roof. As a result, all the Christians gathered in our house. But shortly thereafter a Kurdish chief, a friend of your father's, sent a servant to your father to say: "I advise you to flee, otherwise the Kurds will butcher you." So we fled, like the Israelites did from the Midianites.

O how awful, how terrible the time was! O how bitter and painful it was for the parents who could not wait for their sons and daughters to take them along! The fathers fled alone and the mothers cried bitterly for their children because they could not flee with them. We too had to flee. Matthew and I went into the stable, saddled the horses and sent Sulte and the children off. I gave my horse to your mother so that she too could flee; I went into the house in order to save something. Indeed, I saw the house full of valuable things and did not know what I should save, which is why I took only a pistol to save my own life in an emergency. As I was leaving the house, the Kurds fired their weapons at me, so that I almost lost my mind in the hail of bullets. To keep it brief, with God's help I too escaped, as I was the last one who left the village.

I fled, and finally reached your mother; she had stopped on horseback and was crying for her children and for us, because we were in the greatest of mortal danger and could be shot down at any moment. Because I had lost my wits as a result of the excitement and could no longer walk, your mother gave me the horse. I sat on its back, but mother couldn't keep moving, which is why I had to give the horse back to her, but she was too weak with fear for her children to be able to urge it on. I fled onwards on foot, but so many bullets were flying around me that I gave up hope of saving my life. When I then saw that mother could not urge the horse on, and that the Kurds were following us only because of the horse, I had an idea that the Kurds do not kill a woman so easily, which is why I took the horse and rode quickly to your father and Matthew and from there we rushed to Banawate to the Turks. There we learned that the Turkish commander Arkan-Alharab was already in Mawana; we had to return that same night in great fear and mortal danger.

Well, the Turks have now occupied the land. The Christians from Tergawar have all fled to Urmia and have found a place of refuge at the Russian consul's. War broke out suddenly on August 1 (1907): quite unexpectedly the Turks shot at the Persians. The Christians have lost all their possessions; all at once they've been reduced to penury. The poor Christians now must live outdoors naked, hungry, and without hope. The grain harvest looked very promising this year, and we expected very good times. But now nothing is left of all that; part has been stolen and the rest destroyed, so that the poor Christians have an even more difficult time ahead of them because of the threat of famine. Our children are now all at Simon's in Urmia, mother also, at your brother Nicodemus'. And father is still in Tergawar with the Turks. It is a particularly difficult time for us here because we have saved nothing of all that you saw, except for the saddle-horses. We have now all become equal, there are no more rich and poor among us.

Your parents and siblings send their greetings. May peace be with you!

Your cousin Jonathan

*(Source: Der Nestorianer-Bote. Mitteilungen für die Freunde der altchristlichen Kirche in Kurdistan [The Nestorian Messenger. Announcements for the Friends of the Old Christian Church in Kurdistan], Berlin, November 1907, pp. 5-7)*

#### Document No. 12

Article on the border war from an Assyrian national periodical (Kokhva [The Star], 1907)

The land was suddenly attacked and pillaged by Turks and Kurds. The people attempted to flee as quickly as possible. Some of them jumped out of bed, completely naked, some barefoot, without being able to save anything of their belongings. To save their lives, they, together with their families, had to flee through cliffs and gorges first to Qalla', Ismael Khan's fortress, but many old women and children were left behind in the villages. Malek Atto, a local leader, was also left behind; his wife hid him under the firewood so that the Kurds didn't find him when they were plundering his house. Afterwards he was put in an old woman's clothes and was accompanied by her some of the way, until he finally escaped. These poor people were raided at peak harvest time, their cows and sheep were stolen, and they fled naked and hungry to Urmia. Almost all of the residents of Balulan, Kurrana and Mawana fled to the Russian consul. There are 487 from Balulan, 1100 from Mawana and 249 from Kurrana.

In the first two days the honorable consul Baron Charkas handed out more than 60 puds of bread a day (a pud is a Russian weight equal to 40 pounds) to thousands of poor people who were in front of his door. Among the 500 families who are staying in the Russian consulate there are currently 45 sick people who are examined by a doctor twice a day. They suggested that these people be allowed to emigrate abroad, but they haven't the means to do so. The Russian consul is happy to help the people out of his own pocket, to the extent that he can. The governor of Urmia handed out 200 marks among them. The Russian bankers collected 650 marks, the Armenians 600 marks for our robbed and suffering brothers and fellow Christians. The Syrian Relief Commission has commissioned 5 of its members to collect money, flour, barley, items of clothing, and whatever else they can find for the people among the Syrians. Bed clothing is missing completely, so that people would be very grateful if those who were robbed of their belongings were to receive old pieces of carpet and mats woven from straw as a replacement for covers. Among those plundered are many fine, educated families who now require charity.

*(from: KOKHVA, Der Stern [The Star], 1907; Source: Der Nestorianer-Bote, Berlin, November 1907)*

Document No.13

About the latest atrocities in the Nestorian mission station area

*A letter from the Nestorian pastor Pera Johannes to the Evangelical Lutheran mission institution in Hermannsburg; Wasirabad (Persia), 13 May 1908*

In these past months I saw my beloved homeland, the magnificent plateau of Urmia, soaked with blood. In one region along the river (Baranduz), which includes more than 50 larger and smaller villages, only one larger village has not been raided by the Kurds. Two thousand Syrian Christians from Tergawar had to leave their houses and all their belongings behind for the Kurds in the last Turkish-Persian border conflicts when they fled; they are now wandering around homeless, hungry and thirsty. Until shortly before Easter, the Russian consulate gave them a very small support for bread, with which they could keep their families alive. But since Easter the consulate does not give even this small payment any more. The Persian government only knows how to maltreat its subjects, but not how to keep them alive.

Before this time, these two thousand souls lived happily and satisfied in their mountains. They tended their herds of sheep, tilled their crops and cornfields. They were almost all prosperous farmers. But in the last ten months the war has made them suddenly destitute.

None of the foreign Christian powers which are interested in Persia is mediating or negotiating about the poorest of the poor's return to their mountainous home. Political affairs are looked after enthusiastically by two Russian consuls in Urmia and the English consul general from Tabriz. But they do not ask after those who are suffering and starving. Those brave Syrians from Tergawar fought with the Persian troops against the predatory Kurds and Turks. That is why the latter are so full of enmity towards them. Our refugees still do not dare to return because Tergawar remains occupied by the Turkish military.

The general deprivation makes us forget our particular troubles. Our Syrian brothers from Tergawar are not desposed to beg. They would rather die of hunger with their families. And there is no work for them in Urmia, since Urmia is under siege by the current governor and subject to Kurdish raids. Villages are attacked and plundered almost every night. We are not sure we can survive. We are expecting a Turkish attack any night. Many Syrian young men from Tergawar have come to our house. We were happy to feed them and we always gave them 4-5 kran or as much as a tuman, although since fall of last year we haven't received a penny of our salary from Germany. No matter how often we write to Hermansburg, we don't get any news.

If they were in our position, our dear German friends could hardly stand it here, even for a day. Every day for a month now, from sunrise to sunset, we see refugees passing by on the great caravan road, Christians and Muslims with wife and child and what they've rescued of their belongings, going toward Urmia. O, if only you could see these poor women and children, almost naked, suffering from hunger, trembling with fear. Their villages were raided and besieged by the Kurdish tribes, their protectors fell, their families and their belongings fell into the enemy's hands, where some were brutally killed, some kept as slaves. How did this situation arise? Our new Shah Mehmed Ali seems to have surrendered this territory to the Turks and the Kurds in order to bloodily suppress any movement towards freedom in the people.

Hoping for your fatherly, Christian charity, Pera Johannes, Evangelical Lutheran missionary

Appeal for help for the Christians who have been robbed in the Persian Urmia area. Messages from the Nestorian Syrian pastors Pera Johannes and Luther Pera to Hermansburg in 1909 (Circular no.3)

The newspapers have reported about the terrible events which caused the political confusion in Persia. Havoc has also been wrought in the Northwest province of Azerbaijan. This particularly touches us German Lutherans because our Syrian brothers, Pera Johannes and

his son Luther Pera in Wasirabad and Jaure Abraham in Gutapa, are running a Lutheran evangelization work in Gutapa[Gögtape]. In August of last year (1908), the unrest and turmoil began in that province when the Turkish troops crossed the border, first occupying and plundering the region of Tergawar. Thousands of Syrian Christians were robbed of all their possessions, expelled from their homes and their land and left to their misery. This example incited the predatory Kurdish tribes in the mountainous districts; the confusion in the countryside and the government's powerlessness and inactivity encouraged them to stage ever bolder raids. Last winter and fall one heard daily about night raids, in which usually an individual house or a few houses were plundered. The people are used to that there since the old days, and it is only the greater frequency which is unusual. But since spring the Kurds' looting has been constantly increasing in intensity. Large armed groups of several hundred to a thousand men often attacked even the biggest villages in broad daylight, robbed everything, set the houses on fire, killed many residents and committed dreadful atrocities on the poor, defenseless people. It is reported that some women first drowned their children, and then themselves, as the bands of robbers were approaching. The rich southern Baranduz region was the first to be devastated in this manner; the Urmia region, where our brothers live, was next.

"What we've feared for a long time," Luther Pera writes on June 2, 1909, "has already happened. The entire region of Urmia has been laid to waste by the Kurdish attacks; many Christians, including women and children, have been slaughtered. These terrible events have forced the people, with their belongings and their animals, to the city. Urmia has not seen such suffering for centuries. Where can one find food for the 100,000 people and their livestock? Hunger and pestilence may soon follow."

Ardishai is also among the destroyed, raided villages, where our brothers have a school and a place to preach and where there is a friend of their work in the Archdeacon Ablachat. As at this place, many suffering people in many other places are connected to us German Lutherans through our Lutheran evangelization work: they look towards us and hope we will not abandon them.

*Pastor Karl Röbbelen, Circular no.3*

### **3. German Policy towards the Orient**

While France and England succeeded in building up large colonial empires in Asia and Africa from the 17th and 18th century on, and when even small states like Belgium and the Netherlands became important colonial powers, there was no German colonial policy until the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

Friedrich II installed a Prussian legation at the Golden Horn during the Seven Years' War (1756-63). Although its representative Karl Adolf von Rexin concluded the first trade and friendship treaty between Prussia and the Ottoman Empire in 1761, this installation had no political consequences for Prussia comparable to those for France. The legation in Constantinople long remained Prussia's only representation. It was not until 1798 that there were several other German consuls and agents, and in 1828 there were Prussian consular agents in Aleppo, Beirut, Smyrna and Alexandria. From the mid-19th century onwards, consulates were also established in Baghdad and Mosul.

### Bismarck and the Oriental Question

While the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78) led to further break-up in the western part of the Ottoman Empire, and it was no longer assured that the empire would survive, the great powers of Europe were nonetheless interested in its continued existence. A third attempt was undertaken to restore the "sick man of Europe" to health by means of reforms. The imperial decrees of 1839 and 1856, dictated by England, had neither brought about equality for the Christians nor checked the limitless despotism, apart from the brief constitutional experiment by the liberal reform party in 1876.

German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck advocated the fundamental interpretation of German Oriental policy with the maxim: "Keep a low profile." In other words, Germany would not be drawn into Oriental affairs to the point of participating militarily, which would necessarily imply confrontation with Russia.

For that reason Bismarck limited the Oriental question to German interests in the rights of passage for trade and war ships through the Dardanelles, the strait between the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara. He did not consider German interests affected by the dissolution of the western provinces. In his speech to the Berlin Reichstag on 19 February 1878, Bismarck stated:

" . . . and for that reason it is important for me to specify that the peace provisions about the Dardanelles as they relate to warships are hardly as important as those relating to trade; that is, the most prominent German interest in the Orient is first and foremost that the waterways, both the straits and the Danube from the Black Sea up, remain free as they have until now."

Bismarck then also added a moral component:

"The interest which we have in a better government of the Christian nations, to protect against atrocities such as have sometimes occurred under Turkish rule, will be safeguarded through the points first named above. That is the second, less direct, but humanely

indicated interest Germany has in the affair." (Speeches on foreign policy, 19 February 1878)

In addition, Bismarck tried to use the role of mediator he intended to play at the Congress of Berlin to keep the outside world guessing about Germany's plans.

"Play the German card, throw it on the table—and every one knows how to adapt accordingly or how to avoid it. This is not practical if one wants to negotiate peace. I don't imagine mediating peace by playing arbitrator among varying points of view and by saying: this is how it should be, and the power of the German Empire stands behind this. Rather, I consider our role more modest, . . . more that of an honest broker who simply wants to provide the basis for business relations."

The last statement provoked laughter in the Reichstag during the speech itself and later, deprived of its context, went down in the annals of ironic political sayings. If one compares Bismarck's political views on the Oriental question with the German Oriental policy taken up only a few years later, his views were quite suited to the attitude of the Great Powers of Europe. They expected and hoped for the dissolution and decay of the Ottoman Empire; behind this common interest lay claims to territory, sources of raw materials, strategical bases and market areas. Basically the "sick man's" inheritance was split up while he was still alive, though the heirs disagreed on many things. Bismarck's policy was intended to influence and control this conflict of interests in such a way that even with a changing political balance in the European empire, the German Empire he had created would not be compelled to take sides and thus be drawn into the whirl of upcoming events.

Germany's political course in the Orient, set long before Bismarck submitted his resignation in 1890, was determined by expanding financial and economic enterprises. In fact, he no longer had a significant influence over it after 1880.

#### German Colonial Policy under Emperor Wilhelm II

The German colonial movement began in 1880 and first turned towards Africa (German-East African Society). But, as early as 1878 at the Congress of Berlin, where the Armenian question (Article 61) was also discussed, imperial Germany tried to have a voice in shaping Oriental policy. Until that time, France, England and Russia had been the spokesmen there.

The first German project in the Ottoman Empire was the licence to build a railway from Constantinople to Angora (Ankara), which the Deutsche Bank received on the basis of a 99-year interest guarantee when the Orient railway begun by Baron Hirsch was not completed. Sultan Hamid was interested in strengthening his power by extending the completely undeveloped transportation network, particularly into the Eastern provinces. In the fall of

1889, Emperor Wilhelm and the Empress paid their first state visit to Constantinople. It had long been planned and created a great sensation—and also suspicion. Upon his return, the emperor declared that Germany's policy was directed toward maintaining the Ottoman Empire. Thus the German empire joined the others interested in the region, setting itself up in opposition to them. After the imperial visit, a German company received the licence to build and operate Anatolian railway lines with the right of precedence to build another line, the Baghdad railway. A trade treaty was concluded in 1890. There were plans to restructure the Ottoman economy. The Deutsche Bank opened up branches in Constantinople and Aleppo, where a German school and a hospital were also founded.

From 1883 to 1895 Colmar von der Goltz ran a military mission as instruction officer, with the goal of modernizing the antiquated Ottoman army. It had little effect however, due to the Sultan's protectionism. German consulates and agencies were opened throughout the Turkish empire.

This expansive colonial policy was supported by the the All-German Association (Alldeutscher Verband). Politicians such as Hugenberg, Hasse and Class were its spokesmen. England considered its empire threatened by the Deutsche Bank's Baghdad railway enterprise, and categorically refused to give its approval that the railway could run through its sphere of direct influence (Kuwait, the Persian Gulf). There were numerous negotiations. Shortly before war broke out, a German-English Baghdad agreement was concluded when England speculated that the railway enterprise would later be internationalized.

In the summer of 1895, the English diplomatic corps tried to interest Germany in participating in the partitioning of the Turkish empire, but the Kaiser had his own plans and declined. At the same time, German diplomacy tightened its links to Constantinople.

The interests of heavy industry had the greatest say in German imperial policy; Wilhelm II was under their influence from 1890 on. The emperor's second trip to Constantinople, Palestine and Damascus took place in 1898. It lasted for five weeks and became a propaganda campaign for German-Ottoman friendship. The culmination of this state visit was the Emperor's after-dinner speech in Damascus:

“In view of the tributes which have been accorded us, I feel the need to express my thanks in the name of the Empress and in my name for the reception, for everything which we have felt in all the towns of this country, and particularly to thank you for the wonderful reception.

“May the Sultan and the 300 million Mohammedans who live scattered around the earth and who venerate him as their caliph rest assured that the German emperor will be your friend at all times!”

Upon return from his journey, the emperor brought back a ‘souvenir’ for the industrialists Krupp, Stinnes and others, in the form of a license for building the harbor of Heidar Pasha to. This was followed by contracts to build the Baghdad railway in the Asiatic part of Turkey in 1902 for the route from Nuseibin to Mosul to Baghdad. [To immortalize his memory, he endowed a fountain installed in Istanbul's Hippodrome Square, across from the obelisks. To this day, it is admired by tourists who know it as the German Fountain.]

### German Oriental Studies Serving Politics

With the onset of German colonial policy-making, intensive research into Oriental studies also began. A German branch of Oriental and Islamic studies had existed previously, founded by well-known scholars such as Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930), Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) and Ignaz Goldzieher (1850-1921). However, these professors were limited to research and university teaching, intensively working in the fields of the history of Oriental languages and religions without taking any interest in the contemporary situation in the Orient, while French and English researchers at the beginning of the 19th century were already travelling and exploring the Orient under commission from their government.

A new generation of German Orientalists explored the countryside and the people in their native surroundings, still a dangerous undertaking at the end of the 19th century due to lack of security and transportation. Eduard Sachau (1845-1930) was among these scholars. He founded the Department of Oriental Languages in Berlin in 1887, which also gave rise to the Colonial Academy. In a memorandum (1887 to 1912), Sachau reported in detail on the aims, clientele and benefits of this institution which served German colonial policy. Colonial officials and military personnel were trained here. Instruction in the Turkish, Arabic and Persian languages predominated; there were also lectures on the conditions in the individual areas and on Islam.

The purpose of the Colonial Department was “to place itself at the service of the interests of the entire German nation, not only the state, but also to be useful to private individuals, private corporations, trade and industry” (*Memorandum on the Department of Oriental Languages at the Royal Friedrich Wilhelm University, Berlin, from 1887 to 1912, p. 14*).

Eduard Sachau himself travelled through Turkey and Mesopotamia (1879) and studied the languages, religions and living conditions of the various groups in the population, particularly

of the Syrian Christians. In an essay "From Turkish Asia," which was published anonymously in the Prussian Yearbook in 1880, he reports on relationship between Christians and Muslims, as based on his own experiences:

"There are two evils to which Turkdom is subject: the nation has an absolute, incurable lack of talent and the Muslim state has an inability to guarantee a humane existence within their boundaries for subjects of a different faith. This is best illustrated by the fact that, even at this moment, the testimony of a Christian against a Mohammedan is not valid, not accepted at any Mohammedan court of law in Turkey. The Christian is 'Kelb' for the Muslim, a dog. If a Mohammedan beats a Christian, he will be declared innocent by any Turkish court of law; if, however, the Christian hits the Mohammedan back, he is sure to be sentenced, sentenced even by those who would otherwise consider it an honor to eat at his table.

"The Mohammedan's person is sacrosanct, but Europeans are barbarians, and Christendom is good enough to be trampled on." (*op. cit.*, p. 575)

On the relationship between Christians and Kurds:

"While the Kurds do observe a certain amount of consideration towards their fellow tribe members, this is not the case towards the Christians who have the misfortune of living among them. There are two divisions of Syrians: Jacobites and Nestorians, and (the) Armenians. In comparison with the Christians, the Kurds have the advantages of better understanding how to be soldiers and robbers, they are generally richer, and have the Ottoman state authorities, if there are any nearby, on their side, no matter what. Under these circumstances the Christians have been handed over hopelessly to a brutal majority of Kurds, and they would probably have disappeared from the map long ago, were it not for the good fortune that the Kurds are divided among themselves to such an extent that one agha is usually the enemy of the next. The Kurds have shed Christian blood in such streams that one could run a mill with it—and not for the last time!

In every dispute between Mohammedans and Christians, of course, the (Turkish) officials are on the former's side, and the Kurds present them with a portion of the spoils. In some regions they can only maintain their positions by completely throwing themselves into the Kurds' arms; if they want to do anything against them, they would be repelled away. And then there is also the case of the government itself appointing Kurdish aghas its officials." (*op. cit. pp. 588-89, 1880*)

This candid description of the conditions in the Ottoman Empire is in agreement with the status of German Oriental policy-making of the time. After Sachau served and actively supported Wilhelminian Oriental policy, he refrained from criticizing, although on his expedition in 1897/98 he may well have acquired new knowledge about the catastrophic conditions of the Christians in Mesopotamia. This silence on the part of German Orientalists was later transformed into apologia.

Albert Socin (1844-1899) visited the Orient as early as 1869/70, devoting even more of his energy to the area than Sachau did. He was probably the first German Orientalist who (together with Eugen Prym, 1843-1913) pursued research in the field of recording dialects of modern Oriental languages. He did pioneer work in the field of transcribing Kurdish, neo-

Aramaic and New Arabic texts; at the same time, this revealed to him the geographic, religious and social conditions. Under commission from Baedeker he travelled through the Orient a second time in 1873 to describe Palestine and Syria for the travel guide series (Baedeker, Palestine; Leipzig 1877). He was described in an obituary as “the ideal of a learned traveller.” Besides his purely scientific publications, Albert Socin also criticized the “Social Circumstances in Turkey and under Islam” (under the same title in: “Die Grenzboten,” Zeitschrift für Politik, Literatur und Kunst [“The Messengers,” Journal for Politics, Literature and Art]; 55th Set 1896, pp. 593-605).

The reason for this were the massacres of the Christian population from 1894 to 1896. One can observe in Socin a certain care to situate official German policy towards the Orient in relation to these occurrences:

“As a result of the (German) principle that intervention in this Empire's internal affairs must be avoided under all circumstances, the [German] diplomats get completely carried away in their belief about Turkey's ability to stay alive. The daily press follows them blindly, tending not to consider related questions from a general humane and moral standpoint, but only from the point of view of high politics or finance.” (*Ibid.*, p. 593)

His principal theme is the relation to the Christians, whose population he estimates to be 25% higher than given in the official statistics. In his account Socin depicts very realistically the [Armenian] Christians' higher educational level and thus their better-off economic position, the links to European Christianity and the tensions which arose accordingly with the Moslems, and the execution of reforms at the expense of the non-Moslem subjects, whose special interests were harmed by the Turks' attempts at centralization. He points out the contradiction between the reforms which endeavor to harmonize with Europe and Islam; the opposition which already exists is intensified through this. Socin takes a clear position on the massacre of the Armenians, contradicting the official German one:

“It is known that Turkish diplomats are not only equal to European ones but even superior when it comes to clever evasion and delay of uncomfortable questions and disguising facts. Based on the reports of independent eyewitnesses and our inner conviction, it is difficult for us to believe the rumor spread by the Turks that in the most recent events the Armenians began with the attack on the Kurds and the Turks. That the Kurds, with the full knowledge of the Turks, have slaughtered the Christians without reason more than once in the depths of peace will be only touched upon here; think only of Badr Khan's atrocities to the Nestorians in 1843 (see G.P. Badger, The Nestorians and their Rituals Vol. I, 1852, pp. 268 et seq.)” (*Ibid.*, p. 597)

Unlike Sachau, who criticizes the conditions in Turkey but does not draw any political conclusions, Socin points out the far-reaching consequences which could even then be

foreseen arising someday from Europe's stance (and German Oriental policy-making in particular):

“Under the present conditions, any support of Ottoman rule stands Islam in good stead: the Turkish government openly espouses Islam. Only by really staying together could the so-called Christian powers compel Turkey to organize her domestic circumstances in such a way that this kind of atrocity would not occur again. It does not of course have to matter to the diplomats whether somewhere far away a certain number of defenseless individuals have been slaughtered or left to starve; the diplomat has only to prevent greater complications arising between the European powers. However, time will tell whether this principle of non-intervention into Turkey’s internal affairs will take its toll in the end, and whether it would be appropriate to take the Christian subjects’ legitimate dissatisfaction into account, if not for humane reasons—one can’t demand that—then for political reasons. In the meantime the Turks can laugh up their sleeves.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 604-5)

Among German Orientalists Albert Socin was a “lone voice in the wilderness.”

At the turn of the century an increasing number of research expeditions were undertaken in the name of the German government to the Near East, Persia, Armenia and the Caucasus. The archaeological and topographical results were published in extensive works and received much attention. Max von Oppenheim, Ernst Herzfeld, C.F. Lehmann-Haupt and Waldemar Belck were among the most important German explorers of this period.

Between 1900 and 1915 the number of geographical and historical reports about Kurdistan, Armenia and Mesopotamia increased significantly. In numerous geographic reports the makers of German colonial policy were provided with important facts (particularly from Ewald Banse, Hugo Grothe, Baron H. von Handel-Manzetti). German business circles supported studies and analyses of markets, water and transportation management, and colonization, particularly in eastern Turkey.

The well-known Islamic specialist Karl Heinrich Becker, professor at Bonn University, became a sort of “leading ideologist in Islamic affairs” from 1910 on. Besides his historical works on Islam, he published a series of propaganda writings in which Islam was to be made “presentable to the public” in Europe—in the course of the restructuring of Turkey intended by Germany in line with its own economic interests. Both before and during the First World War, Becker had no qualms about placing his academic knowledge completely at the disposal of the imperial German propaganda machine; and he was supported in this by many of his academic colleagues (Eugen Mittwoch, Georg Kampfmayer, Hugo Grothe a.o.)

Once Turkey declared Holy War in November 1914 at the same time it formed an alliance with Germany, Becker’s main task was to assure the German public on behalf of the imperial

government that this Islamic tradition did not accord with the reality of the constitution of contemporary (1914) Turkey. The concept "Jihad" had long since been Europeanized, he claimed, and Turkey was conducting a legitimate national war. Declaring a Holy War was directed at the masses who were not yet acquainted with the national "fatherland," he continued.

But as it soon became clear, the Moslem masses understood the Young Turk nationalists' call to Jihad quite literally and traditionally as a religious war against non-Islamic believers: the native Christians became victims of the Holy War.

The Islam specialist Becker also defended the German point of view against critical foreign Orientalists, elaborating upon it in his writings (e.g. "Is Islam a danger for our colonies?" (1909), "Islam as a problem," "The Islam Issue at the Colonial Congress" (1910), "Islam and modern law in colonial practice" (1913), "Germany and Islam" (1914), (viz. Bibliography). He even maintained his position after the results of the "Fraternal Alliance with Turkey" had been made public for more than a decade. Thus in 1932 he wrote the following in the preface to his second volume of Islamic studies, a collection of essays which in part had appeared during the First World War:

"The [German] patriot will read some of these essays wistfully, but I believe that as a document of German struggle and striving, they are not worthless, although the objective historian today may judge some things differently. (...) For a moment I hesitated to reprint the wartime discussion about the Holy War; however, after my opponent of the time, Professor C. Snouck Hurgronje, also republished his essay attacking the German position in his collected works, I had no choice but to follow his example.

"At the same time, I still hold the opinion that even today I need not be ashamed of my observations." (*C.H. Becker, Islamstudien. Vom Werden und Wesen der islamischen Welt [Islamic Studies: On the Rise and Nature of the Islamic World] II., Leipzig 1923, V-VI*)

After Pan-Islamism was replaced by the Young Turks' racial purity ideology, a contradiction arose with the German political interpretation of Islam, as Emperor Wilhelm II let himself be presented by German propaganda as "the friend of every Mohammedan, whether he be Turk, Arab, Persian or Indian." A special imperial Oriental propaganda department (the "Intelligence Service for the Orient") in Berlin, with a large staff of Moslem employees, made sure that the official position reflected the new direction adopted by Turkey.

In 1916, the German Foreign Office assigned Ernst Jäckh, founder of the German-Turkish Association, to the task of preventing publications about the eradication of Christians in Turkey. Hans Barth was another influential journalist who polemically expressed negative opinions of publications on the persecutions of the Christians 1894/96 by writing "Turks,

defend yourselves!" (*"Türke, wehre Dich!" Leipzig 1898?*) and abusing people like the Protestant pastor Lepsius or A. Socin as "non-patriots."

If one compares German Oriental policy after 1880 with that of other European powers, a difference becomes clear. There was no interest in the Christian and other minorities, even in using them as a diplomatic pretext. France had the protectorate over the Catholic Oriental Christians and indeed strongly supported them in emergency situations, as could be seen when the Maronites were persecuted by the Druze in 1860. A Christian governor was installed in Lebanon after the French intervention. Russia undertook to relocate the Slavic and Orthodox peoples from the Ottoman empire and was successful in doing so. From the 1840's on England intervened repeatedly when the persecution of Christians in the Eastern provinces of Turkey increased alarmingly and the missionary outposts reported this to their diplomats.

Christian Germany, however, became an ally of Islam.

#### The Young Turk Revolution

The Young Turk movement was based on liberal and nationalist tendencies. After 1860 these were spread by an Ottoman elite which had mainly been educated in France. In the short period when a constitution was introduced, the movement came to the fore, but was then suppressed. Its followers went abroad to escape the pursuit of Hamid's spies in the following decades of despotic tyranny by the sultan. Paris was the political emigrants' center. Among those theorizing a new idea of polity and state were many Christians, mainly Armenians and Greeks. Their plans involved creating an Ottoman confederation, in which all nations and religions were to have equal rights, without the European powers' intervention. They also meant to bring an end to the further decay of the empire.

In reality, however, the process of dissolution could not be checked. After the island of Crete became an autonomous province in 1902, there was ferment in Macedonia. The provincial capital of Salonika was the starting point for the Young Turk revolution, led by Turkish officers among whom the idea of a new "young" Turkey had taken root. When the English king Edward VII and Tsar Nicolas met in Reval in June of 1908 to seal the Anglo-Russian treaty on the partition of Persia (1907), it was feared that Turkey's Eastern provinces could also be partitioned by the agreement between England and Russia. Border disputes had arisen there once again in the summer of 1907. It was time to launch the attack.

At the head of the plot was a committee bearing the movement's slogan "Unity and Progress." Its goal was the restoration of the constitution. The leading minds included Enver, who had been a pupil of the German military academy under Colmar von der Goltz where he had become familiar with the German military system and was posted in Berlin as military attaché, lieutenant-colonel Nijasi and the telegraphist Talaat. They received financial support from influential Jews in Salonika who had converted to Islam; these renegades, called "Dönme," dominated business life in the city.

On July 21, 1908 they proclaimed the constitution, marched to Constantinople and captured the city almost without a fight. The Ottoman parliament convened for the first time on December 17, 1908.

There was a period of internal power struggle in the ensuing years. Pan-Islamism, which had been the sultan caliphs' basis for governing, was replaced by Ottomanism, the goal of which was the fusion of all peoples within a transnational confederation, under one constitution and with a decentralized administration. The liberal wing, led by Reshad Nihad and Prince Sabaheddin, was committed to the political and constitutional autonomy of all populations in the Ottoman Empire.

There was an attempted counter-revolution in April 1909. Sultan Hamid tried to regain power and to promote Islam as a state principle by reinstalling the sharia, the Islamic system of law, and by appointing as the Grand Vizier Taufik Pasha, who was well-disposed towards Islam. Again, the army had to attack from Salonika. The sultan was deprived of power; his brother, Mehmed V. Reshad, took over his position. During the Young Turk sovereignty he remained a symbolic figure without power.

A period of liberalism began in Constantinople, and many national committees arose: Cherkessians, Albanians, Arabs and Kurds founded societies. The Armenian Dashnak party actively participated in the new Young Turk program with its liberal ideas, while the Armenian Hinjak party, whose followers mainly lived on Russian territory, was uninvolved. In any case, the politicization of the Armenians and their concept of nation, although not unified, was very advanced at this time. Syrians lived only in the eastern provinces, and none of the Syrian millet at that time took part in any national or political movement.

The liberal party "Freedom and Unity" was in opposition to the officers' group "Unity and Progress," which opposed decentralization. Talaat and Jamal were part of this group at the negotiations. This latter wing came to power only in 1913.

In the years to follow Turkey lost all the provinces in its European part through the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913 (excepting East Thrakia). In 1912, war began with Italy over Tripoli. The Arabs of Syria were revolting and Russia demanded reforms in the eastern provinces.

After the Persian-Turkish border war in 1907/8, the Russian troops in the province of Persia-Azerbaijan constituted an acute threat for Turkey. At the beginning of 1913 this crisis led to a coup d'état by the Young Turk party "Unity and Progress." This was the first rise to power for a political group which would later be responsible for the extermination and expulsion of the Christians. The ideological basis had also shifted, as a Pan-Turkism emerged. The Turks now considered themselves the ruling people and would determine the affairs of state. This agenda had a clear disadvantage: at the time there were about 10 million Turks, but 17 million members of other nationalities in the Turkish empire.

Between January and December 1913 Jamal was the military governor in Constantinople. A cabinet was formed under Mohammed Shaukat. After he was assassinated, the cabinet was reconstructed under Said Halim; it was replaced in 1917 with Talaat as Grand Vizier (Prime Minister).

In the second Balkan War the Turks at least had the satisfaction of being able to rescue the city of Adrianople (Edirne) from the Bulgarians. However, the Turkish army was almost unfit to fight; reorganization by an European power was absolutely necessary. The only question was which one to choose.

A short characterization of the three politicians who led Turkey for five years follows. In this period a segment of the population living in the most remote part of the empire—the Assyrians—was annihilated and expelled. They had not even made an appearance on the political and national scene.

Enver was born into a Bosnian Moslem family named Halibasic which made its home in Sarajevo. His father was a Turkish official in Monastir, his mother Albanian. Enver attended the Turkish military academy in Constantinople, then served as a lieutenant in Macedonia, where he joined the Young Turk movement. After the Young Turks came to power, Enver was sent to Berlin as military attaché from 1909 to 1912. He was the only member of the triumvirate who got to know Europe personally. His connections in Berlin were later influential for the Turkish-German alliance of arms. He was only thirty years old when he became general and minister of war in 1914.

Jamal, later minister of the navy and commander of the Turkish army, was somewhat older than Enver. He was born on the island Mytilene, the son of an officer and a Greek woman. He joined the army and attained the rank of captain. He was not necessarily a supporter of the Germans. He spoke French and as minister of the navy visited France in July 1914, where he took part in a naval manoeuvre. His attempt to come to an agreement with the French foreign minister on an alliance in favor of entente came to nothing. It could not have escaped the notice of the French and other parties that Turkey had long been conducting negotiations with Germany with the goal of a German-Turkish alliance; it was, however, first officially signed on 2 August 1914. Enver's and Talaat's connections played a major part in this, while Jamal claimed in his memoirs he had no idea about these negotiations.

Talaat's origin was Pomak, Moslem Bulgarian; before the revolution he was a minor telegraph official in Salonika. He then became minister of the interior and ultimately Grand Vizier.

Enver, Talaat and Jamal were political dilettantes; they had no particular training for their high military offices and hardly any experience with the subtlety of the European balance of power.

Pan-Turkism gave way to an expansionist Turanism: the new goal was a great Turkish empire uniting all people of Turk race from Constantinople to Central Asia. Under the influence of the Turkish peoples' renaissance they had forced legal recognition of Islam in Russia in 1905, and planned to extend towards the east. After Turkey entered the war, the Persian province of Azerbaijan became the first goal of this expansion. The Syrian Christians living there were its first victims.

This new concept was in opposition to the Islamic propaganda disseminated throughout Germany. Wilhelm II, the imperial "patron saint of all Mohammedans" temporarily faced a dilemma. But Becker, the German propagandist for Islam, found a way out of it in the following formulation: "The Young Turks want to be an Islamic Great Power." Germany's actual interests were not in Islam, but in Turkey's expanding economy. The All-German Colonial Associations already considered Turkey an economic backwater which they intended to dominate and exploit, in exchange for introducing German culture.

The Young Turks did not set all their hopes on the "German card." They turned to England, Europe's strongest naval power, and requested a naval mission, which was commanded by Admiral Lympus. In this manner the straits, traditionally a strategic trouble spot, officially came under full English control. The French, under General Baumann and Major Sarrou,

were engaged to reorganize the gendarmerie. This trained gendarmerie was an armed civil defense. It was an instrument for the genocide of the Christians, as were certain elements of the army which invaded Persia at the end of 1914.

The third military mission was handed over to the Germans in August 1913 after short negotiations with the German ambassador, Hans von Wangenheim. Their task was not only to reorganize the war ministry, the general staff, the military schools and military factories, but to prepare them for war. The capability to be ready for war was a central task of the Young Turk military state. One and a half months after the German military mission arrived, Enver became minister of war. This was the beginning of both military and ideological symbiosis with the Germans.

### Reorganization of the Turkish Army by German Generals

In 1913, after the power growing out of the Young Turk movement was concentrated in the hands of Enver, war minister, Talaat, minister of the interior, and Jamal, minister of the navy, Germany began to set up a military outpost. As the danger of war was increasing all the time, they dispatched a second military mission. It took up its activity under the direction of General Otto Liman von Sanders on December 14, 1913 in Constantinople. The goal was a reorganization of the Turkish army, which had proven itself unfit to fight, as seen by the war lost on the Balkans. Of course this was not an end in itself, but rather was meant to prepare participation in the war on Germany's side. A conflict with England, France and Russia threatened to break out when these powers protested against the appointment of Liman as Commander of the 1st Army Corps in Constantinople: they objected to the highest military executive power over the Turkish army being in the hands of a German general. This appointment had to be retracted. From January 1914, Liman became inspector general of the Turkish army.

Germany's military aid consisted of the following:

- reorganization of the army by German generals and officers
- instructors, formations for the front lines, flying formations, technicians, telegraphs
- truck convoys, war equipment, bridge construction through German pioneers
- loans during the war (of 300 million marks)
- direction of German warships by three admirals and German crews.

In 1914, the German military commission began with 40 officers, 500 instructors and technicians and 3,000 German soldiers. By the end of the war there were 800 German officers and between 18,000 and 20,000 soldiers who had disembarked on Gibraltar. The

highest military positions in the Turkish army were in the hands of German generals: Liman von Sanders was inspector general of the Turkish army and Lieutenant Bronsart von Schellendorf head of the Turkish general staff. The latter was deputy commander-in-chief of the German armed forces and thus closest to the war minister and commander-in-chief of the army, Enver. He had a strong influence on him. He had won his trust and was his closest adviser. In December 1914, General von der Goltz was called to Constantinople with a special military mission: to serve as the sultan's military adviser. He later took over the command of the Asia Corps (VI Army) in Mesopotamia. Lieutenant-General Kress von Kressenstein ordered the advance into Egypt (January 1915). From 1917 he was in charge of the Asia Corps. Admiral von Usedom had the chief command over the fortified straits of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

Thus it becomes apparent that the German military held important military positions throughout the system. All important functions in the general staff, in the artillery, the technical troops and the navy were occupied by Germans, as the Turks had no competent specialists.

The Turkish war industry also had to first be built up by the Germans; tools to produce war materiel were delivered from Germany. It was even necessary to import German master craftsmen, overseers and workers for the production.

The generals in the military mission were at all times fully informed of all procedures in the Turkish army, and reported on these to Berlin. There were disputes between the military mission and the German embassy about the areas of responsibility. Liman saw to it that the military attaché, Major von Laffert, was removed from office. This rivalry between the military and the diplomats led to an overlap in the reports sent to Berlin. The generals often reported directly to the military cabinet and the emperor, bypassing by the high army command, something which Ludendorff complained about bitterly. After the catastrophic defeat of the Turks in the Caucasus, Liman demanded that the German head of staff responsible, Lieutenant Bronsart, be removed. However, he was so close to the war minister Enver that the latter personally protested to the emperor, thereby assuring that Bronsart remained in office.

Many of the Young Turk officers had been educated in France; some of them had a latent sympathy for the enemy. There was also jealousy towards the German superiors who were always of higher rank. This, however, was balanced out by two things: the fact that Germany enabled the Turks to wage war against their traditional enemy Russia, and war minister Enver's strong preference for Germany, which also dated back to his time as

military attaché in Berlin. Enver spoke German very well, whereas the naval minister Jamal was very close to the French culture and language. The Turkish army was completely dependent on Germany, while Germany on the other hand hardly derived any military advantages from the Turkish army, as could be seen at the beginning of the war.

The question arises why the German generals failed to exercise their authority when in the midst of the war the Turkish government carried out the extermination of the Christians.

#### The German Embassy in Constantinople

Before the war there were eight foreign embassies in Constantinople: Germany, Austro-Hungary, France, England, Italy, Russia, America, Persia, 10 other legations, and 20 consulates. Baron von Wangenheim, a former cavalry officer, was German ambassador in Constantinople beginning in 1912. He represented imperial colonial policy and saw a great future for German expansion in Turkish territory. His mediation led to the dispatch of the military mission at the end of 1913.

Secret plans for an advance toward Persia and Afghanistan were also drafted here and secret military missions prepared. Political actions were dictated to the embassy by the Foreign Office in Berlin. The German consuls sent importunate reports from Erzerum, Aleppo, Mosul and other places to the German embassy in Constantinople in increasing quantities, while at the same time the Russians were advancing into neighboring areas inhabited by Armenians. However, military considerations were foremost in Wangenheim's mind, and he agreed to the Turkish measures of "deportation of politically unreliable people." He asserted that this was necessary for military reasons and that it constituted a legitimate means of defense. In a July 4, 1915 memorandum he asked the Turkish government to bear in mind that the enemy powers, particularly America, would benefit from these actions against the Armenians. In very poor health at this time, Wangenheim left on sick leave a few days later, and he was to die in October 1915.

Neither Wangenheim nor his deputy, Lord Hohenlohe-Langenburg, could be said to have diplomatically intervened for the Christians. The initiatives consisted of receiving the reports, carefully reacting to them as dutiful officials, and then filing them away. On August 2, 1915 Hohenlohe reported to Berlin:

"All ideas on our part have proven ineffective against the government's decision to eliminate the indigenous Christians in the eastern provinces."

The increased pressure was nothing more than a piece of paper with the pretentious name "Memorandum." It remained unanswered by the Turkish government for a long time. The answer, which came months later (December 22, 1915) was a curt reprimand to the German allies not to interfere in domestic affairs. The Foreign Office in Berlin instructed its ambassador not to pursue this matter any further. The new ambassador, Count Wolff-Metternich, who was already 70, complied only reluctantly with these instructions; he expressed his criticism, which meant he was boycotted in German diplomatic circles. When Enver met in Pless with Wilhelm II and his Imperial Chancellor Theobald von Bethman Hollweg in September 1916, he demanded that Metternich be recalled and also suggested a successor, who then indeed took over the office: Richard von Kühlmann.

It is interesting that in this same year the American ambassador Henry Morgenthau (of German-Jewish extraction), who had supported the Armenians and made himself unpopular at the Porte, also gave up his ambassadorial position in Constantinople. He was later among those who accused Germany of being partly to blame for the Turkish strategy of extermination; it was he who first accused the Germans of initiating the action.

Kühlmann was a favorite of the German emperor. His father had been general director of the Anatolian and the Baghdad railways and he had lived for several years in Turkey. Thus he knew the political situation. He assumed office as ambassador at the beginning of 1917, at the same time that Grand Vizier Said Halim was replaced by Talaat. The poker game between the Turkish government and the German diplomats continued. Talaat made vague promises when the unpleasant theme was occasionally touched on; the embassy wrote polite reports to Berlin. Nothing changed. In August 1917 Kühlmann went to Berlin as state secretary for the Foreign Office. His successor at the Embassy was Count Bernstorff, the last German ambassador for the Ottoman Empire.

At this point, early in 1918, the catastrophe for the Christians in the eastern provinces was essentially concluded. Turkish policy-makers, with Talaat at the center of power, had no intention of providing the Germans with the moral cover of concessions in the Armenian and Christian questions. In one of the first telegrams that Bernstorff sent to the German Foreign Office, he wrote:

"In line with Your Excellency's instructions, I've already spoken up numerous times, particularly in asking General v. Seeckt (who since 1917 is the head of Turkish general staff) to take care that no military reprisals are ordered." (*J. Lepsius, Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918, Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke [Germany and Armenia 1914-1918, Collection of diplomatic files]. Potsdam 1919, No. 368*)

“Your Excellency” in the Foreign Office in Berlin was at this time von Kühlmann. Perhaps the recipient was Imperial Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, who, according to the war memoirs of Erich Ludendorff, General of the Supreme Army Command, “judged Turkey’s violent measures against the Christian Armenians very disparagingly.” Ludendorff added his own opinion (in 1919): “The measures were a grave error and nothing can justify them.” (*Meine Kriegserinnerungen [My Memories of the War], Berlin 1919, p. 500*).

The situation of the German embassy in Constantinople during the Great War can be seen in the fact that between 1914 and 1918 the ambassador was changed four times. In addition, there was rivalry between the embassy’s military attaché, General von Lossow, and other active German generals in the Turkish army. Lossow was a personal friend of Enver; his relations with the Turkish military representative Zeki Pasha were also very close. Ludendorff recalled: “It was only natural that we often turned to him.” (*op.cit., p. 202*)

The telegram from Bernstorff quoted above is not clear proof that the German generals intended at this late point in time (the Caucasus army was advancing at the beginning of 1918) to exert their power over the Turkish soldiers looting among the Christians. Their power was already disappearing due to military defeats on all fronts. It can be clearly seen, however, that the German imperial government did not turn to defend the Christians, adhering to the end to the political direction it had adopted since the start.

#### 4. The First World War

##### Germany's Alliance with Turkey

Germany declared war on Russia on August 2, 1914, just one day after it secretly concluded an assistance agreement with Turkey. At the same time, the Turkish government declared its neutrality towards the Entente powers. In fact, Turkey, or more accurately the majority of the government cabinet, was not interested in entering the war. It hoped nonetheless to assert its interests with clever political manoeuvres. First and foremost, it wanted to get rid of the troublesome capitulation documents, national treaties from the preceding two centuries, concluded with European powers and granting them such privileges as tax-exempt status and favorable customs duties. In September 1914, Turkey denounced these treaties, knowing that the Entente powers most affected would tolerate the provocation so as not to jeopardize Turkey's neutrality, which they considered important.

Meanwhile, the full-scale mobilization of the Turkish army under German supervision was under way. The English naval mission had become the guardian of the Dardanelles straits, and the English also kept a close watch on Turkey's warships because its neutrality was highly suspect. Two of Turkey's new warships (already paid for) were confiscated. This led to the dismissal of the English naval mission (promptly immediately replaced by the German one), and to the closing of the Dardanelles. The German specialist Gehr had the waters mined, and the straits came under the supervision of the German fortress commander General Weber.

The Germans tried all means possible to persuade the Turks to enter the war immediately. At the end of September, Liman threatened to withdraw the German military mission. Ambassador Wangenheim was threatened with recall by the Foreign Office in Berlin if Turkey's declaration of war were not presented soon.

There was good reason for hesitation by a majority in the Turkish government. In the reorganization overseen by the Germans, over a period of only eight months, the Turkish army had somewhat improved its condition, but the stock of weapons, ammunition and uniforms remained completely inadequate, and large sums of money were needed.

Germany needed Turkey to enter so that by blocking off the Dardanelles the link between Russia and the remaining troops would be cut. In addition, the Turkish army was supposed to link opposing troops on the Balkans and in the hinterland. For this reason, the German government granted a loan of 30 million Turkish pounds (followed in 1915 by two other,

much bigger loans). When even this gesture did not yield the desired results, Germany resorted to a military stratagem.

For a short while the Turkish naval fleet had been under the supreme command of the German admiral Souchon. Following orders, he set sail for the Black Sea and attacked several Russian ports. It can be assumed that on this issue he was in agreement with the ambitious, power-hungry minister of war Enver. Grand Vizier Halim Said and a portion of the cabinet were not willing to be involved in such military action, and they tried to prevent entry into the war with an official apology to the Russian ambassador. However, it was too late for Turkey to return to its tenuous state of neutrality. Germany had attained her aims.

Four ministers resigned under protest, including the Armenian postal and telegraph minister Oskan Effendi. Said Halim did remain in his position, but the absolute power now lay in the hands of Enver, Talaat and Jamal. They were responsible for Turkey's entry in the war, and for all that would ensue.

#### Holy War Made in Germany

Germany not only had a decisive influence on Turkey's entry in the World War, but also on the kind of war it entered. The German government wanted a Holy War (Jihad) to be declared, a call directed to all Muslims. The "300 million Mohammedans" mentioned by the German Emperor in his famous speech was an exaggerated figure. It was closer to 230 million, and of these only 5% lived in the Turkish empire. The Young Turks had nominally left the sultan his title of caliph (ruler of all Muslims in the world), but the caliphate was a powerless institution, merely symbolic. The original meaning of an Islamic Holy War was to spread the Islamic area of domination, that is, it was a religious act with political results. Because any war was a war of conquest, it was also always a Holy War. After the Young Turks took power and Turkey became more secular, there was no necessity to declare a Jihad. The country did not do so either in the Russo-Turkish wars, or in the Balkan wars before that. For Turkey, the declaration of a religious Holy war was an anomaly, particularly in view of its alliances with major Christian powers (Germany, Austro-Hungary, theoretically even Bulgaria). There are no parallels to it in the entire history of Islam (or of Christianity).

Germany was motivated by a far-fetched idea. On the basis of a pan-Islamic alliance, it envisioned establishing a bridge to India through secret military missions in Persia and Afghanistan. It was hoped that declaring a holy war throughout broad stretches of the Islamic world which were under English and Russian dominance would lead to uprisings. The German war propaganda brochures and leaflets in Persia in 1915 reflects this thinking (see Document No. 14). Islamic experts in Berlin had worked out the concept of an Islamic

mobilization. As part of this, Wilhelm II publicly declared on September 9, 1914, two months before Turkey even entered the war, that Muslim soldiers serving England, France or Russia had nothing to fear from German soldiers and would not be treated as enemies. They also would not be taken prisoner, but could place themselves at the caliph's disposal. At the time, the imperial declaration was intended to increase pressure on the Turkish government. A rumor even spread among the Turks that the German emperor had converted to Islam.

In response to German wishes, Minister of War Enver and Minister of the Interior Talaat staged the call to Jihad in accordance with the European image of a medieval Islamic spectacle. Critics of the German policy to promote Islam, including the most important specialist on Islam, Snouk Hurgronje from neutral Holland, described the occurrence as a spectacle in the style of an Offenbach operetta.

On 7 November, Sheik ul-Islam, the highest theological authority, issued a five-part fatwa (religious ruling) which called upon all Muslims to fight against Russia, England and France. At the same time he announced that those Muslims who fought on the side of the Entente powers against Germany and Austria would violate the Islamic caliphate.

On 12 November, the sultan-caliph unveiled the decree on the state of war, signed by the Turkish ministers, and shortly thereafter he addressed an imperial declaration to the army and navy, demanding their participation in the great war of religion. To reconcile alliance in a Holy War with Christian allies who were "unbelievers" required some sophistry: ". . . We were compelled to take up our weapons in order to defend our justified interests, together with Germany, Austria and Hungary. (. . .) Don't forget that in the present war you have become allies with the two bravest armies in the world, and we have set out for the battlefield together. May the campaign of those among you who remain healthy be blessed, your swords be sharp." (*in: Die Welt des Islams. Zeitschr. d. Deutschen Ges. f. Islamkunde [The World of Islam: Journal of the German Society for Islamic Studies], Volume 3, No. 1 (1915), Berlin*)

The war year 1914/15 went down in history as the "Year of the Sword" for those Assyrians who survived the annihilation. The ceremony of unrolling the prophet's green war flag took place on 29 November in Medina. In Kerbela, center of the Shiites in Mesopotamia, a ceremony serving the same purpose was carried out, in which Hussein's sword carried in a procession symbolized the beginning of the Holy War. In Constantinople thousands of pamphlets were distributed which had been drafted and printed by the Oriental Propaganda Department in Berlin, praising the new armed alliance with the "300 million Mohammedans." German Ambassador Wangenheim made a speech expressing the gratitude of the Kaiser.

Among others, the London Times of 25 November 1914, blared out the headline “German domination of Turkey.” Critical voices in Germany also expressed their doubts about whether one could take moral responsibility for this alliance. A wartime discussion on the Holy War ensued, in which the Islam expert and government adviser in these questions, C. H. Becker, publicly advanced the government’s point of view:

“The modern Holy War is not a religious war, but rather a modern pan-Islamic national movement for freedom and self-determination. Only through this war could spiritual unity be produced in the Turkish army, despite the ‘racial differences’ which exist even among Turks and Arabs. The Jihad is a way to describe a defensive war for one’s own national existence, handed down over history.”

The German scholar and governmental adviser Becker answered the fears of his Dutch former teacher Hurgronje, whom he ostensibly still highly respected, with a degree of cynicism difficult to surpass:

S. Hurgronje: “Yes, but think what could arise from all that; the days of Oriental barbarism will return and terrible quantities of blood will be shed!”

Becker: “Certainly, the prospect could be frightening and should have induced Germany to restrain Turkey from expressly declaring Jihad, although it is already becoming a fact through her goading. Two things can be said against this impertinence.

“First of all, war is war and it is not a sport. Laws of intercourse which are otherwise standard do not apply in cases of self-defense. (. . .) And secondly, it has already been seen to that the trees will not grow to their full height; the Jihad will not become as intense as it currently appears. Turkey understands exactly what its situation is in the international context, knows exactly the inhibitions in the psyche of the foreign Mohammedans. Like those of the major powers involved, they block an unrestricted development of bloodthirsty fanaticism, which, by the way, is not approved of even in the Shari’a.” (*C. H. Becker, Die Kriegsdiskussion über den Heiligen Krieg. In: Internat. Monatsschrift [The Wartime Discussion on Holy War. In: International Monthly Journal], Volume IX (1915), cols. 631-662. 1932 Islamstudien Vol. II, p. 299*)

The extermination and destruction of Christian population which followed shortly thereafter showed that the concept of Holy War was taken quite literally by the Muslim participants, the Turkish gendarmerie and the simple Turkish soldiers, as well as within the Muslim civil population, up through Azerbaijan, the province beyond the Turkish border. The idea was applied completely. The Germans responsible tacitly accepted this possibility, as is made clear in Becker’s remarks.

The Holy War was not only a tool for Germany; the Turks, too, linked their war goals to it. On the one hand, there were the pan-Turanic dreams of expansion, based fundamentally on

pan-Islamism. On the other hand, Turkey hoped to reunite the Arab-Islamic countries nominally still within its empire, such as Egypt (which was under English domination) or Syria (where a national movement was pressing for independence).

Minister of War Enver, who considered his military genius equal to that of Napoleon (in fact, he was known as "little Napoleon" in German military circles) harbored great ambitions of conquest. There was a clash of interests with the German allies. After a victorious Caucasus campaign in which Enver hoped to inflict a crushing defeat on the Russians, he intended to reach India, also via Persia. For this reason the Turks also tried to obstruct the German's secret military missions in this direction. Neither of the allies would realize its military utopia. The alliance of arms would in fact come to an end in 1918, when the two armies opposed one another in the Caucasus, where each disputed the other's access to the Baku oil wells.

#### The "Intelligence Service for the Orient" of the German Foreign Office

After receiving the telegram from St.Petersburg on July 30, 1914 which indicated that peace could not be saved, Wilhelm II noted down the famous sentences which characterized his future Islam policies during the war:

"Our consuls in Turkey and India, agents etc., must inflame the entire Mohammedan world to a wild uproar against this detested, lying, unscrupulous nation of shopkeepers. If we are to bleed to death, England should lose at least India."

On August 2, 1914, Commanding General Helmut von Moltke demanded from the Foreign Office that it publish the treaty of alliance with Turkey to inspire the latter to act quickly: "Through the treaty with Turkey, the Foreign Office will be able to put this thought into effect and to excite Islam's fanaticism" (DD Vol. III, No. 876, see Zechlin (1961), p. 329).

Shortly after the war began, the Foreign Office in Berlin created the "Translation and Intelligence Service for the Orient," later shortened to "Intelligence Service for the Orient." It was first located within the Imperial Colonial Office in Mauerstrasse 45/46, and later in Tauentzienstrasse 19a, in Berlin.

As the initiator and first director of the Intelligence Service, the diplomat and archaeologist Max Baron von Oppenheim (1860-1946) supplied ideas and advice and hence was especially involved in the political decision-making processes of the Foreign Office, particularly in the early phase of the World War.

In September/October 1914 he wrote a lengthy 136-page memorandum which laid out the Intelligence Service's program and which he presented to the foreign office:

*Memorandum on inciting revolution in the Islamic territories of our enemies, by Max Baron von Oppenheim, Imperial Minister-Resident*

A copy of this document, which was significant for the war, was sent to German High Command at the beginning of November 1914.

This memorandum contains the plan for Germany's policies in the Orient from 1914 to 1918. The main objective was to revolutionize the Islamic masses from Morocco to Egypt and from the Bosphorus to India. The enemies of the German empire were to be undermined by destabilizing the imperial hinterland and opening up additional fronts.

All Oriental policy during the First World War was ultimately based on the activities of the "Intelligence Service for the Orient," which also assisted in organizing operations.

Max Baron von Oppenheim was descended from a Jewish banking family in Cologne. He was already 54 years old when the war broke out. Despite some anti-Semitic resistance, he had managed to make a career in the diplomatic service. He was assigned to the German General Consulate in Cairo, where for thirteen years he reported to the Foreign Office on the political situation in the Orient. In addition, he devoted himself intensively to archaeology and, after leaving state service in 1910, led the excavations of the Hittite town of Tel Halaf in eastern Turkey. At the outbreak of war he went to Berlin and offered the Foreign Office his expertise about the Orient, including its religion and mentality. His primary objective in so doing was "intense collaboration with the Turks in a purposeful organization," but he was not thinking of an alliance based on an equal status.

"We must provide Turkey with men, money and materiel (...), but in such a way that the Turks believe that a friendly adviser was merely standing by their side and that they can continue to consider themselves the real prime movers or pose as such."

The Turks' military objective was the Caucasus, while their propaganda work would be directed towards Egypt, India, Afghanistan and the French colonies in Northwest Africa. The strings, however, were to be pulled in Constantinople by "two or three German gentlemen well-acquainted with the pan-Islamic action and the propaganda potential," and guided by the Imperial German embassy there. Actual headquarters would be in Berlin, where the

propaganda machinery was to be set in motion with the support of the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Culture and the Imperial Printing Press.

The Oppenheim plan designated a “translation office” for propaganda activity, where, with the collaboration of German professors and “‘native’ editors, war reports and calls to action were to be written, ‘adapted to the Oriental psyche.’” These appeared regularly. Predicting in advance the consequences of such broad-scale manipulation, Oppenheim by memorandum demanded as early as the fall of 1914 that the Foreign Office discipline the German press to keep it in line with this Oriental policy.

An important component of his plan was to win Persia against the British and the Russians with the help of the Turks, particularly because of the production of oil in the south. This was to take place with the help of opposition Persian nationalists living in exile in Europe, with whom Oppenheim had made contact early on via the German embassy in Bern. The Swiss capital was considered the “most important collection point for expatriate Orientals of all political persuasions (and thus the center of espionage and counterespionage relating to the Orient),” which is why the Intelligence Service deployed an agent of its own there in August 1915.

After Oppenheim left, Karl Schabinger von Schowingen, imperial interpreter and vice consul, took over the leadership until moving on to the German consulate in Jerusalem in March 1916. The third director was the Orientalist Eugen Mittwoch. A number of respected German Orientalists in addition to Oppenheim and Schabinger were also members of the Intelligence Service. Among them were the experts and scholars Helmuth von Glasenapp, C. H. Becker, Enno Littmann, Hans Stumme, Sebastian Beck, and Eduard Sachau, founder of the Berlin Orientalist Seminar. In 1915 there were fifteen German and twenty foreign employees, besides eleven occasional translators.

The “Intelligence Service” was set up as a collegial authority with neither written statutes nor a clearly delineated hierarchy. There was a group of permanent employees and a stream of new employees.

Three personalities were mainly involved in co-ordinating the political activities in the Near East: the legation secretary and expert for Iranian studies Otto von Wesendonck, Under-secretary of State Arthur Zimmermann, formerly responsible for the Orient, and the diplomat and section head Rudolf Nadolny, who directed the Foreign Office’s Political Section for military co-ordination. As Commanding General, Helmuth von Moltke also supported

Oppenheim's idea of starting up rebellion among the Muslims, and the Emperor himself imparted in a telegram to the Turkish Minister of War:

"Turkey must strike. H.M. (His Majesty) the Sultan must call on the Muslims in Asia, India, Egypt, Africa to wage Holy War for the Caliphate." (Foreign Office to German embassy, Constantinople, Aug. 15, 1914, Tel. No. 403, Draft A. Zimmermann)

The Berlin journalist Ernst Jäckh, an expert on the Orient, was so well-connected to the Kaiser that from time to time he was given the opportunity to address the subject. In his "Report on the Constantinople Organization to Incite Revolution in Enemy Territory," Jäckh expressed full support for the ideas of Oppenheim and the Foreign Office co-ordinators. Contrary to naysayers, he considered the Holy War a "wonder weapon which will decide the outcome of the war."

The German embassy in Constantinople was a key venue, and its ambassador Hans Baron von Wangenheim decided on and led all undertakings in the first year of the war. The work of the "Intelligence Service for the Orient" was personally organized by Oppenheim. Besides the consular officials, Arabists, Orientalists and Indologists took part. They in turn were supported by their foreign co-workers. They sought out their own tasks based on personal qualifications.

The war policy of the Foreign Office with regard to the Orient was sometimes vehemently criticized. For instance, the "German Society 1914" situated near the Wilhelmstrasse became a collection point for men in public life, where members of Parliament, officials and economic leaders met to discuss the course of the war and its consequences for Germany. Employees of the Diplomatic Service were also present. One of the most important critics was the diplomat and Orientalist Friedrich Rosen:

"I would have laughed about the delusions which dominated those entrusted with the political leadership or execution of German enterprises in all Mohammedan countries if the whole thing had not seemed so serious to us. But at the time in the Foreign Service they believed just as firmly in the Prophet's green flag and the Holy War as they did several years later in the League of Nations and the blessings of the Locarno policy.

Just as Voltaire is seen as the father of the French revolution, one could consider Karl May\* the father of our Oriental policy of this time.

Several of my professional colleagues who had been dragoman [interpreters] in Turkey and Egypt voiced their concerns to me and asked me whether I might not counsel the Foreign Office against the advance, as its failure would have unforeseeable consequences."

Rosen took up contact with the Undersecretary of State Arthur Zimmermann and described his concerns. He referred to the recent report from German military attaché General von

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\* German author of adventure and travel stories (1842-1912)

Lossow; the General had just returned from Turkey after travelling in a car with Turkish War Minister Enver along the line of the intended advance. As an expert on the Orient, Rosen recognized the extent of the ignorance of the Oriental situation. However, his criticism struck deaf ears in the Foreign Office—they followed Oppenheim's instructions. Embittered, Rosen retired. Later, as the disaster he had predicted came to pass, he would turn down a post as ambassador to Persia. As he later summarized:

“At that time in Berlin they subscribed to the idea of a pan-Turanic or pan-Islamic movement which would unite all of the Near East through to China into one large empire, friends and allies of Germany. Such alliterations as Berlin-Baghdad or Hamburg-Herat sounded promising to the believers' ears. This whole Oriental policy was driven by highly imaginative casual workers who blocked out all those who were really familiar with the situation in these countries. They were never asked for advice, while the most extreme ignoramuses forged their adventurous plans.

“These individuals also seemed not to be aware that the Persians as Shiites rejected and were hostile to the Sunni Turks and that they were not at all interested in the Germans who appeared as allies of the Turks in Southwest Persia. If they had known this, their pan-Islamic dreams would probably have quickly vanished.

“I too, was not asked a single time for my opinion about what could be undertaken in those territories, although I believe myself knowledgeable about the Near East, Persia and India. Only when the issue was to carry out the nonsense dreamed up by one of these fantasists were my ‘general political capabilities,’ as well as ‘knowledge and understanding for the Oriental and particularly for the Persian psyche’ recognized.”

(Aus einem diplomatischen Wanderleben [From an unsettled diplomatic life], Wiesbaden, Vol. 3, 1935, p. 140 et seq.)

### **The German Propaganda Machine**

In the spring of 1915, Oppenheim was transferred to Constantinople, where he set up his own intelligence office for Turkey, in conjunction with the Intelligence Service for the Orient, and he called together some of his specialists. Eugen Mittwoch, who until then had led the Seminar for Oriental studies in Berlin, was at his side.

A network of more than 70 information centers and correspondent positions was built up in Asia Minor and East Arabia under control of the German embassy. At these sites, propagandistic war reports, magazines, journals, pictures, handbills and brochures were displayed. They had been prepared in the Intelligence Service for the Orient in Berlin and translated into various Oriental languages. Oppenheim also founded the Balkan-Orient-Film GmbH and rented the largest theater in Constantinople for German cultural events.

Besides propaganda activity in the Orient, in neutral foreign countries and in Germany, contacts were built up, an archive of newspapers and persons structured and a press review published for official use. In addition there was extensive translation work, censorship of

documents, letters and films, and attending to the Muslim prisoners of war lodged in the so-called 'Crescent Camp' [Halbmondlager] in Zossen, near Potsdam.

The Foreign Office generously provided funds for the propaganda according to Oppenheim's directive that money should not be a consideration. Between May 21 and December 31, 1915 alone, more than 130,000 Reichsmark were spent, and 300,000 Reichsmark each in 1916 and 1917, mostly for publishing handbills, brochures and books written in numerous Oriental languages and dialects.

The Berlin Intelligence Service for the Orient also influenced newspapers in Turkey and secretly founded its own organs in such places as Damascus and Baghdad. The "Correspondence Paper of the Intelligence Service for the Orient" influenced public opinion in the German Empire. Later it was also distributed abroad, and it would become the Intelligence Service's most important instrument during the war. More than 260 newspapers, including 15 Turkish ones, quoted material from it.

### **Handbills**

Besides the pamphlets, brochures and broadsheets produced by the German publicists and Orientalists, Holy War propaganda also included handbills, printed in enormous quantities, and addressed directly to the Muslims. They were tossed out of airplanes, aimed at Muslim soldiers, and they included Jihad exhortations, news of victory and reports on the military situation. They were also distributed among Muslim prisoners and in the Entente colonies, as well as in the states allied with Germany. They called for rebellion against the colonial powers. With the help of its translating staff, the Intelligence Service for the Orient was able to prepare these handbills in eleven Asian and African languages, as well as nine European ones. Between May and December 1915 alone, the Imperial Printing Press in Berlin published printed material on behalf of the Intelligence Service for 2.5 million Reichsmark.

At a concert which the Intelligence Service for the Orient held in Leipzig in January 1915 for the benefit of the Red Crescent, the text of a handbill was sung, dedicated by its alleged author—the German military volunteer Fritz Klopfer—to the "starving and freezing Turkos." The real author was the Berlin Arabist and professor Hans Stumme.

*Comrade, just come to me*

*I won't hurt you!*

*Do not think that I*

*do not like you!*

*I am a Christian, and you a Muslim,  
but that makes no difference!  
Our victory has been firmly settled,  
Our happiness is no dream!*

*Wherever our emperor rules,  
victory is his motto;  
And where Istanbul's emperor rules,  
worries just fly away!*

*Comrade, come! Let's be friends!  
Away with fear and hardship!  
Let us eat together the potatoes  
And share the loaf of bread!*

This propaganda activity under German administration did not go unnoticed by the allies, as can be seen in several articles in the foreign press. (Gottfried Hagen, Die Türkei im ersten Weltkrieg: Flugblätter und Flugschriften [Turkey in the First World War: Handbills and Broadsheets])

### **Propaganda among Muslim Prisoners of War**

German propaganda also aimed at Muslim prisoners of war, for whom two special prison camps had been set up in 1914, 20 kilometers south of Berlin in Zossen and Wünsdorf. In the “Weinberge” camp (Zossen), about 12,000 Muslims from Russia, particularly Kasan Tartars, but also Christian Georgians and Armenians, were interned, while in the “Halbmondlager” (Crescent camp) near Wünsdorf there were 19,000 Muslim prisoners of war from the colonies of Great Britain and France. Besides North and West Africans, there were Muslim Indians, and also Hindus and Sikhs. Those who were interned had fought as soldiers in the armies of the various colonial powers before ending up as German prisoners at the front.

The German emperor Wilhelm II had a mosque built in the middle of the Halbmondlager as a personal gift. Its minaret was 27 meters high, a wooden structure that was completed in only five weeks of construction. It was the first mosque on German territory for exclusively religious purposes. The prisoners here could carry out their religious obligations—prayers, ritual ablutions and sacrifices. The “Intelligence Service for the Orient” instructions stated:

“The Muslim spiritual leaders who will be employed within are our best opportunity to push active propaganda among the prisoners of war.”

Highly detailed information on the significance of these “special camps” and on carrying out the propaganda can be read in the files preserved on “Activity in Germany’s Prison Camps (1914-1919).” The “Intelligence Service for the Orient” instructions included the following: “Here the prisoners should be given the opportunity to live according to their religious rules and native customs. The Mohammedan, Indian and Georgian prisoners of war are to be influenced so that they leave our enemies’ cause behind them, become our followers now and if possible also in the future, and declare themselves ready to fight for us against our enemies.”

German and Muslim propagandists held lectures for the prisoners, led discussions, gave lessons and organized expeditions to the camp surroundings in order to bring their influence to bear. The most important propagandist among the Tartars of Turkish origin in the Weinberge camp was Sheik Abdurreshid Ibrahim from Tunisia, who held lectures on the Muslim duty to participate in the religious war. His brochure “The Truth about the Religious War” appeared in Berlin in 1915.

There were usually high-ranking visitors in the camp on the occasion of Islamic holy days. “The Bairam festival, where the weather was good, became an impressive meeting of the Mohammedan prisoners of war for Islam and Turkey. Almost 11,000 people took part in the great religious service, which took place outside in the presence of a representative of Sheik ul Islam who had come from Constantinople, the Turkish chargé d’affaires, officers of the Deputy General Staff and the Officers Corps of the Weinberge and Crescent Camps.”

The Kurban-Bairam, the festival of ritual sacrifice which follows 70 days later, was also ritualized into a propaganda event in the two camps. After the religious service with the ritual sacrifice of a sheep, the Turkish ambassador Hakki Pasha visited the Crescent Camp: “The visit ended with the 1st Battalion, which consists of volunteers for the Holy War, marching by to the sounds of the Torgauer March.”

In May 1916, the Turkish representative Mustafa Redin Bey paid a visit to the camp in Zossen to deliver a speech to the prisoners in the name of the German government. It was also published in the German press. He called upon them to fight on the side of the Turks and Germans:

“We bring you greetings from our lord and caliph, as you are fellow believers. You were compelled to fight in this war. Thanks to the extraordinary goodness of the eminent German government, they are considerate of your religion, your customs and habits. Even more—what you were kept from doing in your home countries, namely learning to read and write, this you are allowed here. They have called together special teachers here to teach you in your religion and language. We hope you will demonstrate your gratitude for this and disseminate what you have learned here among your brothers at home. Always remember that you are sons of the Turkish people, a people of almost 70 million souls, living in an area stretching from the Balkan to Mongolia. To conclude, I ask that in your prayers you include thanks to our exalted lord, the caliph, his noble ally, Emperor Wilhelm II, our armies crowned in glory, and the great German and Turkish peoples. Three cheers for them!”

The camp commander Baron von Hadeln had a cemetery set up for the prisoners of all nations and religions who died in the camps. On August 1, 1916, on the occasion of presenting a memorial stone for the deceased Tartar prisoners of war, a festive ceremony took place in the presence of the imam from the embassy and Turkish diplomats and officers. A memorial stone was erected for the North Africans too, on which was chiselled in the Arabic and German languages the Islamic creed, “There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet.”

### **Photography as a mise en scène**

Photo postcards, often taken by press photographers, were considered an important source of information during the First World War. By order of the Ministry of War, a series of slides with portraits of prisoners of war was taken by Otto Stiehl (1860-1940). Stiehl was an architect and professor at the Technical Hochschule in Berlin; he was appointed lieutenant at the “Weinberge” Camp in 1915 by the military command. Due to his daily presence, the photographer was able to provide “interior views” of the camps without depending on photographing official occasions. This appearance of “everyday occurrences” must have been in line with the expressed objective of communicating an apparently authentic picture of the situation of the Muslim prisoners of war.

In his 1916 book entitled Unsere Feinde [Our Enemies], he published portraits of prisoners of both camps and wrote in the foreword: “The reason for selecting these individuals was to convey a true picture of our enemies.” The book was distributed in the neutral European countries and to North America and was intended to compromise the powerful countries of Great Britain and France, who conducted the war against a “civilized people of the Occident” with “colored auxiliary peoples.”

From the entire collection of his photographs, the photographer also assembled a series of glass slides structured in terms of contents and used for propaganda speeches. The use of visual material was a form of political information, both domestically and abroad. The

photographs purport to show “truth” and “reality.” In their conscious pattern of selection, as part of the public propaganda measures authorized by the political authorities, they were mises en scène with a specific objective in mind.

### **Al Jihad—a German Propaganda Newspaper**

The idea of producing a magazine for Muslim prisoners to spread news about the military situation and pro-German war propaganda originated in the Intelligence Service for the Orient in January 1915. The Ministry of War assented on January 19 and the General Staff also gave its approval. Under the editorial direction of the head of the Intelligence Service, Karl Schabinger, the first edition of Al Jihad appeared in a four-page newspaper format on March 1, 1915. There were three different editions, in Arabic, Turk-Tatar and Russian.

In the first edition, Sheik Salih as-Sarif outlined the newspaper’s objectives in a leading article: “The newspaper ‘Al Jihad’ sets itself the task of informing you. It will tell the truth about the cause of the terrible war and impart the real news about the course of the war.”

A new issue came out biweekly, and the newspaper published through 1917. However, it remained unknown to the enemy since the prisoners were usually uneducated and only a small number of them were able to read.

### **The Failure of the Propaganda**

Setting up the “special camps” was intended to underscore and strengthen the political intentions of the alliance with Turkey. The Orientalist C. H. Becker said of these intentions: “England, France and Russia were getting nervous, compelled to dissipate their military forces, and could not be absolutely certain of their Mohammedan forces on the European battlefields.” The demonstration of good relations between Germany and the population of Islamic countries was directed at unnerving Great Britain and France with respect to their colonies. Nonetheless, it was politically naive to want to influence the course of the war with the help of Muslim prisoners of war who had deserted, or to provoke an uprising by the Islamic world against the colonial powers.

Propaganda among the prisoners was actually not as successful as desired. This was primarily because it was wrongly assumed that Islam was the unifying link among Muslim prisoners from all nations and cultures. A realistic estimate is that at most one fourth of the prisoners were ready to switch fronts, but only a small number, about 1,800, were sent to Constantinople at the beginning of 1916. The increasing tension with the Turkish General Staff and the failure of the German military mission in Persia finally led to the War Ministry’s

decision to put a halt to propaganda for the Holy War in the two special camps. In December 1916, the Ministry of War, in agreement with the Supreme Military Command, decreed that the propaganda for the Holy War in both special camps should be halted.

After the separate peace between Germany and Russia in 1917, there was a new assessment of the Islamic war propaganda:

“Those who have studied the history of the war since our Ottoman allies entered it realize that the solemn declaration of war at Constantinople did not result in a general Islamic uprising. At the same time, no one familiar with the Orient and the history of its people would have contemplated otherwise.” (Koloniale Rundschau [Colonial Survey] 1917)

### **Censorship**

When the first news about massacres of the Christian population in Turkey reached Germany, the German press was forbidden to report on them. In the censorship guidelines from October 7, 1915 it was announced:

“About the Armenian atrocities, this can be said: Our friendly relations with Turkey must not be endangered by this internal Turkish administrative issue, and, to go further, at the present difficult moment they must not even be scrutinized. For this reason it is necessary to remain silent for the time being. Later, if direct attacks from abroad should take place due to partial German responsibility, the matter must be handled with great care and reserve and one must always emphasize that Turkey was irritated by the Armenians.”

On December 23, 1915, it was also announced: “It is best to keep silent on the Armenian question. The behavior of the Turkish authorities is not very commendable on this issue.”

With their pamphlets, brochures and handbills, German publicists and Orientalists overwhelmingly sided with the German government after the crimes committed against the Christian population gradually leaked out to the public. They thus supported German government propaganda, which portrayed the annihilation of the Christian population in Turkey as a necessary measure by the partner in the alliance. Treachery, unreliability, chance raids by the Kurds, and resettlement from strategically important areas were given as reasons for deportation, expulsion and extermination.

Ewald Banse, an expert on Turkey whose writings influenced public opinion both before and during the war, referred to the Armenians as an “element of upheaval and breakdown”:

“Turkey recognized early on that only relentless suppression of the vocal minority could help the welfare of the state and its majority of Islamic subjects. It gave the green light for a series of sanctions by officials, regrettable from a humanitarian standpoint, ruthless actions by the military and bloody pillaging by the Kurds. For them there was only one basic motivation, which, in view of the situation, was unfortunately not without justification: To dispose the Armenian question once and for all, one had to settle the Armenians once and for all.”

From March 1915 to March 1917 the “Intelligence Service for the Orient” budgeted more than 800,000 Reichsmark, and had a staff of specialists and several well-equipped secret expeditions at its disposal. The propaganda writings of the Intelligence Service for the Orient reached the most distant corners of the Ottoman empire. However, weakening the enemy with Islamic rhetoric, as sought by Oppenheim and his fellow workers, was not achieved. Instead, the “Holy War,” controlled from a distance by Germany, was directed inwards against the native Christian population, who became victims of German propaganda.

### **The Theaters of War in Eastern Turkey and Persia**

When Turkey entered the war at the end of November 1914, its 300,000 trained soldiers were divided into six armies. Thirteen corps, two independent divisions and the navy were under the command of minister of war Enver.

Enver had massed his third army with three corps in Erzerum. They formed the “pan-Turanic front” and, at first, they were under the supreme command of Turkish general Hassan Izzet Pasha. The Christians soldiers in this army (Greeks and Armenians) were not armed but consisted of an auxiliary battalion to transport Turkish war materiel. Some 100,000 soldiers faced a numerically smaller Russian Caucasus army, which fought under General N. N. Judenich. When the Russians advanced toward Erzerum, Enver ordered an offensive, but it could not be carried out immediately. Although Liman warned against it, Enver personally took over command on General Bronsart’s advice, and he led the troops to a crushing defeat. At temperatures of -25° C., the soldiers had to leave their coats and knapsacks behind in Erzerum. They set out on a march through the mountains with provisions for only four days and slept outside without tents.

The battle focused on Sarykamich. Because of their defeat in East Prussia, the Russians had to give up two army corps. For that reason they withdrew Cossack troops from North Persia to use them as reinforcements; these went in forced marches to the border in the night of January 1, 1915. After a total of fourteen days—the operation lasted from December 19, 1914 through January 10, 1915—the third Turkish army was destroyed. 80,000 soldiers perished, mostly from hunger and cold. All the generals and officers were taken prisoner.

Enver handed over what was left of the third army, about 12,000 soldiers, to Lieutenant Commander Hafis Hakki and returned to Constantinople. News of this defeat was forbidden. General Liman reported on the catastrophe to the German High Command in Berlin and called for the removal of General Bronsart, whom he believed bore the most responsibility. However, Ambassador Wangenheim and Enver intervened with the emperor, and Bronsart remained in his position. Enver did not personally take charge of any more commandos for the remainder of war.

That was the end of the first pan-Turanic adventure for the Turks. But even the Russian victory had a price. The withdrawal of troops from North Persia triggered a massive flight of Assyrians. Some 25,000 of them fled the Muslims and their arbitrary use of power, thereby launching an unprecedented refugee tragedy.

As a theater of war, the Caucasus front already had become of secondary importance, and the military conflicts between Turkey and Russia in Northwest Persia were hardly noted at all in the history of the war. Persia was officially neutral. Anarchy reigned in the country; the northwest province of Azerbaijan was completely controlled by the Russians from 1911 on. The second pan-Turanic advance of the Turks was directed towards this area. The First Expedition Corps, under the command of Colonel Chalil Bey, an uncle of Enver, arrived in Diyarbakir via Mosul at the beginning of January. Enver ordered it to advance via Mosul to Tabriz, the provincial capital of Azerbaijan, and to drive the Russians out. The expedition corps consisted of 20,000 Turkish soldiers and 10,000 Kurdish volunteers.

In December, troops of the Third Army who were stationed in Choshab (east of Van) had already driven out the Christian population from the border areas of Gawar, Albaq and Nodez. They were aided by well-armed Kurds. On December 9, this volunteer unit of Kurds, reinforced by a gendarmerie division, reached the town of Somai, Northwest of Urmia, and one day later it had a military encounter with the Russian cavalry. On their own account the Shekak and Herki Kurdish tribes had invaded the villages of the Assyrians with over 3,000 armed horsemen, in order to raid and to murder defenseless unarmed small farmers. Further south the Turks were temporarily able to capture the towns of Sauchbulak and Solduz. With only a few exceptions, the Muslims of Azerbaijan, fanaticized into taking part in the religious war by the Turkish military propaganda, fell upon their Christian neighbors and took part in the attacks and atrocities.

In Urmia, which was the Russians' most important base, the Muslims were in secret agreement with the Turks. The Russians discovered the conspiracy, and the Russian consul

imposed the death penalty by public execution on the gallows on several important Muslim dignitaries. The Muslims' bitterness about this later turned against the Assyrians when their Russian protectors withdrew very suddenly, only to return months later.

Between January 2-10, seventy Assyrian villages in the Urmia and Salamas area were destroyed, and there were some one thousand killed. 25,000 panicked refugees joined the Russians who were retreating in the middle of the night. The severe winter, hunger and cold claimed many of them as victims. 15,000 Assyrians fled from the Turkish and Kurdish troops, who had occupied Tabriz, Salamas and Urmia almost immediately after the Russians retreated, filling the military vacuum. They fled to the American mission station in Urmia and were housed in crowded circumstances for months. Epidemics, scourges and hunger decimated their number by a third. The Assyrian mountain villages in the Turkish-Persian border area were deserted, and for the most part destroyed. Two Russian divisions remained in Diliman, reinforced by an Armenian volunteer battalion. Between January 10 and 15, the Turkish troops retreated further to Khoi. However, by the end of January, the Russians could re-occupy Tabriz and Khoi, thanks to troop reinforcements arriving via the Trans-Caucasian railroad.

In the following months, the Turkish army, under the command of Colonel Chalil, committed several cruel massacres of the Assyrian civilian population. It was only in early May that a part of the Turkish military was destroyed, with the rest driven back over the border. This second defeat of the Turks by the Russians coincided with the Armenian uprising in Van.

Document No. 14

German war propaganda pamphlet in Persia, 1915

Mohammedans, wherever you are, fight alongside the Germans!

The French, English, Serbian, Russian and Japanese troupes have been conquered. The Turks and the Padishah of Istanbul have beaten the Russians in many battles. They have sunk a large number of French and English ships. The French have been almost entirely driven out of Morocco.

The Italians have been repulsed by the Mohammedan troops. Our Russian enemies were driven out of Persia; the English have fled from Baluchistan and Afghanistan.

Now the sons of Padishah are beginning to become powerful. The soldiers of the Holy War are now fighting in India.

The Germans and Austrians have retaliated against the French and the Russians everywhere. In fact: their troops have been beaten. The English are not yet completely beaten, but they have lost most of their soldiers, and a great portion of their warships has been sunk.

Every Mohammedan who must die also knows he dies for Allah.

Allah has seen the banner of the Holy War with his own eyes.

*(Source: Y.H. Shabaz, The Rage of Islam, Philadelphia 1918, p. 51)*

**PART 2 DOCUMENTATION**



## **1. Azerbaijan (Persia)**

Until 1914 the Urmia College and the Fiske Seminar of the American Mission in Urmia were among the most exclusive academic educational establishments in Persia. Nonetheless, even this mission failed to achieve its actual goal of making use of native Christians for missionary work among the Muslims. From 1835 on it had been a “Nestorian” mission and emphasized educating and training the Syrians in the Urmia district. Meanwhile, many offices within the mission were taken over by indigenous Syrians who had converted to Protestantism. The American mission had purchased extensive property on which the school buildings and a hospital, as well as the church, were erected.

About 15,000 Assyrians were taken into these buildings and courtyards during the Turkish occupation of Urmia from January to May 1915. At this time all other missions had left Urmia. The English had already transferred their main mission station to Amadiya in 1911; when hostilities broke out, the Russian and English missionaries left the town. The German Orient Mission had had to close down at the end of 1914. The French Catholic mission was still present, but it had a much smaller capacity.

After 1910 the American mission station in Urmia was directed by William A. Shedd. The missionaries of this period were: Dr. W. A. Shedd and Mrs. Shedd, Dr. Packard and Mrs. Packard, Mr. McDowell and Mrs. McDowell, Mr. Allen, Mr. Müller and Mrs. Müller, Mrs. Cochran, Dr. Coan and Mr. Coan, Miss Schoebel, Miss Lamme, Miss Lewis, and Miss Burgess.

These missionaries were completely responsible for the safety, support and medical treatment of the masses of refugees who sought protection in the missionary buildings. The reports and letters they wrote and an anonymous journal later published have inestimable documentary value.

Their supervisory board, the “Foreign Board of the Presbyterian Church in America,” collected these documents and made them available for publication on several occasions. The most important reports are included in the collection “Arnold Toynbee Papers and Documents on the Treatment of Armenians and Assyrian Christians by the Turks, 1915-1916, in the Ottoman Empire and in North-West Persia.” They also became a part of the “British Blue Book” which was presented to the English public by the English State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Viscount James Bryce. However, this appeared as The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, London 1916, and failed to name the Assyrians in the title.

Of the total 684 pages, 104 pages refer to the massacre of the Assyrians in Azerbaijan and Hakkari (Chapter IV). In addition to the 19 documents presented here (Nos. 27-45, pp. 99-192 op.cit.), two more documents (Nos. 147 and 148) appeared elsewhere (pp. 577-588 op.cit.). The entire Chapter IV was left out in the French translation published in 1917. It apparently seemed opportune at the time to restrict the documentation to the persecution of the Armenians, just as the title suggests. In a second edition which was published in 1972 in Beirut, Chapter IV is once again included, as in the English original edition.

In 1989 these documents were published for the first time in German translation in Ein vergessener Holocaust [the German version of "Lest We Perish: A Forgotten Holocaust"]. Indispensable as material on the history of the Assyrians in the First World War, these eye-witness reports are presented here once again in a complete version, though in a different order. They also demonstrate the unusual dedication of a small group of American missionaries. For reasons of conscience alone they were the only foreign mission to remain with the Assyrians; they tried to fend off the worst during the catastrophe which had befallen the Assyrians to rescue from total destruction without hesitating to risk their own lives. It was through their help that thousands of Assyrians could be rescued at the time.

### Statistics

1915/1916

#### **Azerbaijan (North West Persia)**

Residents before 1915 (Assyrians): 70,000

#### **Geographic Distribution**

Urmia region: three river regions with 70 villages of Assyrians (Nazlu Chai — Urmia Chai — Baranduz Chai)

Solduz: south of the Lake of Urmia

Mergawar: in the mountainous border country southwest of Urmia

Tergawar: in the mountainous border country north of Mergawar

Anzal: north of Urmia

Baradost: a valley northwest of Urmia (two villages)

Salamas district: Diliman (main town), Khosrava (Catholic mission headquarters), Ula

Sennah: several families in mixed villages

Death toll: 1915/16 7,000 (victims of the massacre: 1,000; of epidemics, etc.: 4,000; deaths while fleeing: 2,000)

*(Source: Dr. W. A. Shedd, American mission, Rev. Y. M. Neesan, English mission)*

#### List of the Assyrian Villages Destroyed in North West Persia in 1915

##### **A. Baranduz District**

1. Darbarud
2. Sardarud (Armenians)
3. Babarud
4. Ardichai
5. Teka
6. Alkian
7. Kurtape
8. Chenabad
9. Kosabad
10. Muradalovi
11. Dizateka
12. Chimchadjian
13. Satlovi
15. Aliabad
15. Tazakand
16. Diza in Baranduz
17. Saralan
18. Gulpashan

##### **C. Nazlu River District**

1. Qala d-Ismael Agha
2. Armudagadj
3. Kosi
4. Nazi

##### **B. Urmia District**

1. Gutapa (partially destroyed)
2. Wazirabad
3. Charbash
4. Sangar-Burzuchan
5. Sangar-Beglerbegi
6. Alwaidch
7. Seir
8. Haidarlovi
9. Mar Sargis
10. Hasar o kom
11. Anhar
12. Diza Agha Ali
13. Balav
14. Kizilachuk (Armenians)
15. Gerdabad (Armenians)
16. Mata d-Zaya and Karagöz

##### **D. Tergawar District**

- All villages including:
1. Quina
  2. Mawana
  3. Palulan

5. Karalari	
6. Shumbulabad	<b>E. Hakkari District</b> (Turkish area)
7. Sepurghan	
8. Ada	tribal districts:
9. Mushabad	all of Tiari
10. Yengidcha	all of Tchuma (except Mazra)
11. Sherabad	all of Berwar
12. Gavilan	
13. Djemalabad	

*(Source: Paul Shimmon, official representative of the Patriarch Mar Shimun Benjamin XXI, head of the Nestorian Church; 1908-1918)*

**Arnold Toynbee. Reports and Documents about the Actions of the Turks against the Armenians and Assyrian Christians, 1915-1916, in the Ottoman Empire and in North-West Persia (English Blue Book 1916)**

Azerbaijan and Hakkari

The province of Azerbaijan lies immediately east of Van, across the Persian border, and consists principally of another and still larger inland basin, shut in by mountains which drain towards the central Lake of Urmia.

Though Azerbaijan is nominally a part of Persia, there are practically no Persians among its inhabitants. The majority of them are Shiah Mohammedans, speaking a Turkish dialect; but the parts west of the Lake, and especially the districts of Urmia and Salamas, are occupied by a Semitic Christian population, variously known as "Nestorians" (from their religion), "Syrians" (from their language) or "Chaldeans" (from their race). They are descended from the former inhabitants of Mesopotamia, who were pushed into and over the mountains by Arab encroachment. A larger number of them is still left on the Ottoman side of the watershed, in the Hakkari district round the headwaters of the Greater Zab, and further west, again, near the confluence of the Tigris and the Bohtan. In the two latter districts they are now in a minority as compared with their Kurdish neighbors, and Kurds are also interspersed among the Nestorians in the Urmia basin, especially towards the southern end of the Lake, but also on the west (Tergawar).

When, in the winter of 1914-15, the Turks took the offensive against the Russians on the Caucasian front, they sent a subsidiary army, reinforced by Kurdish tribesmen, into Azerbaijan. The weak Russian forces occupying the province retired northwards at the

beginning of January, and the Turco-Kurdish invaders penetrated as far as Tabriz, while the Nestorian villages on the western side of Lake Urmia remained in their possession for nearly five months. The Russians were followed in their retreat by a considerable part of the Christian population, who suffered terrible hardships on their winter journey. Those that remained behind flocked into the town of Urmia, and were subject to all manner of atrocities during the twenty weeks that the Turks and Kurds controlled the place.

The Russians completed the re-occupation of Azerbaijan in May, 1916; they entered the town of Urmia on the 24th May, five days after their first entry into Van, and freed the people of Salamas and Urmia from their oppressors. But they could not save the communities in the Zab district, who suffered in June the same fate as the Armenians of Bitlis, Moush and Sassoun; and when the Russians were compelled to evacuate Van again at the end of July, the panic spread from Van to Urmia, and a fresh stream of Nestorian refugees swelled the general exodus of Christians into the Russian Provinces of the Caucasus.

Document No. 15

The events of Urmia in Northwest of Persia, Province of Azerbaijan in January, 1915

*Report by the Rev. William A. Shedd, D.D., of the American (Presbyterian) Mission Station at Urmia; communicated by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.*

Persia is not in the war, but the war has been in Persia ever since its beginning. Indeed, the military movements of Russia and of Turkey date back several years before its outbreak. The Turks in 1906 occupied a strip of territory along the Persian border extending from a point south-west of Soujboulak to a point west of Khoi. The purpose was no doubt to secure a boundary-line making it more possible to move troops from the Mosul region into Trans-Caucasia, as well as to make it easier to hold the frontier against any Russian attack. In 1911, the Turks evacuated this strip of territory and the whole boundary question was submitted to a mixed commission, on which the British and Russian Governments were represented as well as the Turkish and Persian. When war began in August, 1914, this commission had completed its work from the Persian Gulf to Salamas. The Russians, in connection with internal disturbances in Persia, occupied with their troops a number of cities in northern Persia. Tabriz was occupied 1909; Urmia and Khoi in 1910. This measure enabled the Russians not only to control Persia, but also to secure the road from their rail-head at Djoulfa to Van through Khoi. When the Great War began, Russia was therefore in occupation.

Disturbances at once began along the border and at the beginning of October, 1914, a determined attack was made on Urmia, ostensibly by Kurds. It was afterwards clear, from statements made by Persians and Turks who were engaged in the attack, that the nucleus of the fighting force was made up of Turkish soldiers and that the attack was under the command of Turkish officers. It was also clear from statements made by Persians friendly with the Turks and unfriendly towards the Russians, that the result of success in this attack would have been the looting of the Christian population, with probable loss of life.

About a month after this attack, war was declared between Russia and Turkey. About the same time the Russians closed the Turkish Consulates at Urmia, Tabriz and Khoi, and expelled the Kurds and other Sunni Moslems from the villages near Urmia. Arms were given at the same time to some of the Christians. The Turks in response expelled several thousand Christians from adjoining regions in Turkey. These refugees were settled in the villages vacated by the Sunni Moslems who had been expelled. Turkish and Kurdish forces gathered along the frontier and especially to the south in the Soujboulak region.

In the latter part of December, two engagements took place—one 20 miles south of Urmia between Kurdish and Russian soldiers, in which the latter were successful; the other was at Miandoab, at the south end of Lake Urmia, in which the Russian forces, with some Persians, were routed by Turks and Kurds. About the same time Enver Pasha invaded Trans-Caucasia from Armenia at Sarikamysh in the Kars region. This threatened to cut off Russia's communications with Persia, and orders were given for the evacuation of Tabriz, Urmia and Khoi. The evacuation of Urmia took place on the 2nd January, that of Salamas a day or two later, and that of Tabriz on the 5th. Meanwhile, the military situation in Trans-Caucasia had changed with the rout of Enver Pasha's army, and Khoi was not evacuated.

For convenience it may be well to summarize the military events from the 1st January to the 1st June. Tabriz was occupied by the Turks and Kurds, but, about the 1st February, a crushing defeat a few miles north of Tabriz led to its sudden evacuation and to the flight of the Turkish forces back to Miandoab. The American Consul at Tabriz, the Hon. Gordon Paddock, with the very effective co-operation of the German Consul, who had previously been in the American Hospital under the protection of the American Consul, kept the city of Tabriz from loss of life and to a large extent from loss of property. The Turks collected large Kurdish forces from the Soujboulak region and from districts in eastern Turkey; these, together with a smaller force of Turkish regulars, moved through Urmia and Salamas against Khoi, joining Turkish forces from Van under Djevdet Bey. This campaign against Khoi lasted until the 1st March, and was unsuccessful. In March the Russian forces drove the Turks from Salamas and occupied this region. Affairs remained in this condition until April. In April the

Van campaign of the Russians, with the aid of Armenian volunteers, began. A Turkish force of approximately 18,000 men with mountain guns under Halil Bey, an uncle of Enver Pasha, reached Urmia on the 16th April. They had come over the mountain passes from Mosul, having been sent from Constantinople by way of Aleppo to Mosul. Halil Bey was defeated in Salamas, and in May retreated towards Van. The Turkish forces were finally withdrawn from Urmia on the 20th May, and the Russians reoccupied that city on the 24th May. The region of Soujboulak was occupied by the Turks for some months longer, but the campaign in that region has no bearing on the Christian population, since there are no Christians in the region.

The Christian population in this region is partly Armenian and partly Nestorian—or Syrian, as they call themselves. The Armenian element consisted of four or five thousand in Tabriz, ten thousand or more in Salamas, a small number in Khoi, and some six or seven thousand in the Urmia district. The Nestorians, except for less than 2,000 in Salamas, all lived in the Urmia district. Including refugees from Turkey and the Armenians, there were in Urmia, at the beginning of 1915, not far from 85,000 Christians. The Syrians or Nestorians include not only members of the old Nestorian Church but also Protestant members of the Russian Orthodox Church, and Roman Catholics or Chaldeans, as the last are generally called. In Maragha there is a colony of Armenians numbering some hundreds. Excepting the Christians in Tabriz, Maragha, and the city of Urmia, the last numbering not more than 2,000, all these Christians live in villages, Mohammedans and Christians sometimes sharing a village between them and sometimes living in separate villages. These Mohammedan villagers belong to the Shiah sect but speak the Turkish language.

The evacuation of the Russians put all the Christians in peril. The Salamas Christians (except about 800), most of the Christians of Tabriz, and eight or ten thousand from Urmia fled with the retreating Russians. They left on the shortest notice, without preparation and in the heart of winter. Many perished by the way, mothers dying in childbirth, old men and women and little children falling by the wayside from exhaustion. This fleeing army of refugees, increased in numbers by several thousand from the regions in Turkey between Khoi and Van, passed over the Russian border and scattered in the villages and towns of Trans-Caucasia. Many of them died of disease due to the privations and exposures of flight and life as refugees.

This flight left some 25,000 Christians in Urmia. All of these sought shelter from massacre. On the one hand the Kurds were pouring into the plain, urged on and followed by Turkish officers and troops; on the other hand the Moslem villagers set to work robbing and looting, killing men and women and outraging the women. Several thousand found refuge with friendly Mohammedans. Great credit is due to no small number of Moslems, most of them

humble villagers and some men of higher rank, who protected the imperiled Christians. In some cases safety was bought by professing Mohammedanism, but many died as martyrs to the faith. In several places the Christians defended themselves, but the massacring was not confined to these. Villages that deliberately gave up their arms and avoided any conflict suffered as much as those that fought. The mass of the people fled to the city, and all, including the city people, took refuge in the mission compounds. The French Roman Catholic Mission sheltered about 3,000, and the compounds of the American Presbyterian Mission about 17,000. The latter were enlarged by joining up neighboring yards and so enclosing in one connected compound, with only one gate for entrance and exit, some fifteen to twenty yards. The American flag was placed over the compounds of the American Mission, and here people were safe from massacre. The villages, in the meantime, with three or four exceptions, were a prey to plunder and destruction. Everything movable that possessed the least value was either carried away or destroyed.

During the months of Turkish occupation there was never a moment of real safety for the Christians. The most unremitting efforts on the part of the missionaries secured comparative safety within the city walls, so that the people were scattered to some extent from the Mission Compound; and a few villages including two that were not plundered at the beginning kept comparatively safe through the efforts of the Persian Governor. Beyond these narrow limits the Christians could not go. This was shown by constant robberies and murders when Christians ventured forth. During this period the Turks were guilty not only of failure to protect the Christians effectively, but also of direct massacres under their orders. One hundred and seventy men thus massacred were buried by the American missionaries, their bodies lying in heaps where they had been shot down and stabbed, tied together and led out to be murdered by Turkish agents. These massacres took place on three different occasions. Once men were seized by Turkish officers in the French Mission and sent out from the Turkish headquarters to be killed; once there were men seized in a village which was under the protection of Turkish soldiers and had had its safety pledged repeatedly by the highest Turkish officials; and once there were men from just over the border in Turkey who had been forced to bring telegraph wire down to Urmia and were then taken out and killed. In each of these cases some escaped and crawled out, wounded and bloody, from the heaps of dead and dying, to find refuge with the American missionaries. Besides these, the Armenian soldiers in the Turkish army, previously to the arrival of Halil Bey, were shot. In Urmia, the total losses of this period, from the evacuation of the town by the Russians on the 2nd January until their return on the 24th May, were the murder of over one thousand people—men, women and children; the outraging of hundreds of women and girls of every age—from eight or nine years to old age; the total robbing of about five-sixths of the Christian population; and the partial or total destruction of about the same proportion of their

houses. Over two hundred girls and women were carried off into captivity, to be forced to embrace Islam and to accept Mohammedan husbands. The Salamas district suffered quite as much as Urmia, excepting that the mass of the people fled with the Russian troops, and consequently the crimes against women were not so numerous. About 800 who remained in Salamas, most of whom were old people, with some of the poorer and younger women, were herded together by Djevdet Bey before his withdrawal from Salamas and were massacred. This happened early in March. The Salamas villages were left in much the same condition as those of Urmia.

The relief work began before the evacuation. Unsettled conditions had frightened people, and many had brought their goods for safe keeping to the American missionaries. With the evacuation many more brought their property, whatever they could save from the general riot. The protection of those under the American flag and of others in the city and in Mohammedan homes was accomplished only by the most constant vigilance during all those months. It was necessary to feed thousands of the people, and over ten thousand people were fed for about six months. Many of the girls and women who were taken captive were found and returned to their homes; information was secured as to others, which led to their subsequent rescue. Conditions of life were such that it was impossible to prevent epidemics, those that carried off the largest number being typhoid and typhus. Both of these diseases were probably brought by Turkish soldiers cared for in the American Hospital. The total number who died of disease during the period of Turkish occupation was not less than four thousand. Of eighteen adults connected with the American Mission, thirteen had either typhus or typhoid, and three lost their lives. The French missionaries suffered just as severely, and were in greater peril of violence.

To assign guilt and analyze the causes of this terrible loss of life and property is not an altogether easy task. There is no class of Mohammedans that can be exempted from blame. The villagers joined in the looting and shared in the crimes of violence, and Persians of the higher class acquiesced in the outrages and shared in the plunder. The Kurds were in their natural element. The Turks not only gave occasion for all that happened, but were direct participants in the worst of the crimes. On the other hand, individuals of every class deserve credit. There were many villagers who showed only kindness. The Persian Governor made it possible, by his co-operation, for the American missionaries to do what they did; the Kurds responded to appeals for mercy and, in some cases, returned captive girls unsolicited and did other humane service. A few individual Turkish officers and a number of their soldiers took strong measures to keep order. One such officer saved the city from loot when riot had already begun. There were various causes; jealousy of the greater prosperity of the Christian population was one, and political animosity, race hatred

and religious fanaticism all had a part. There was also a definite and determined purpose and malice in the conduct of Turkish officials. It is certainly safe to say that a part of this outrage and ruin was directly due to the Turks, and that none of it would have taken place except for them.

The duty of Americans, and especially the missionaries, is not so much to apportion the blame as to repair the damage. The task in Persia is very great, but the opportunities are equally great. The number of destitute persons has been increased by the influx of forty or fifty thousand refugees from Turkey—Nestorians who lived in the mountain region between Urmia and Van, and who were forced to flee from their homes by the Turks and Kurds. In outlying districts the men have been massacred, and those who have survived are mainly women and children; but from the mountain valleys, where the bulk of these people live, they were able to escape en masse.

[27], pp. 100-104, *J. Bryce op.cit.*

#### Document No.16

Urmia, Salamas:

*Extensive description by Mr. Paul Shimmon (published as a brochure by the Rev. F. N. Heazell)*

The scene of the Assyrian massacres is the plain of Urmi (or Urumia) on the west side of the lake of that name in N. W. Persia. The city of Urmi is situated on the western side of the lake; further west are the mountains of Kurdistan, forming the frontier between Turkey and Persia. These mountains give shelter to the wild bands of Kurds (ever ready to descend on the plain of Urmi), who can easily retire to their inaccessible homes with their ill-gotten spoil. For some years past a Russian force has been stationed in the Urmi plain, with the object of keeping the Kurds under control. These troops were distributed between Khoi, Salamas, Urmi, and Soujboulak, at the extreme south of the lake. Urmi is an isolated spot, and, from a military point of view, ill suited for defense against a strong attacking force. It is easily accessible to the Kurds from the west, while the two high passes on both north and south, and the lake on the east, seal up a besieged army in a very dangerous locality.

The plain of Urmi has a charm for all travelers: in the spring and early summer it is a veritable paradise. Its running waters, its gardens, its vineyards, orchards, and melon fields, its tobacco plantations and rice fields, give a variety of color and a beauty of scene seldom met with in the East.

The plain of Urmi is the home of some thirty-five thousand of the Assyrians (or East Syrian Christians), part of whom dwell in the city, and the rest are distributed among seventy villages scattered over the plain. These people are cultivators of the soil and keepers of vineyards. Away to the west, united to them by religion and language, live the mountaineer Assyrians. First, we have many villages in the districts of Tergawar and Mergawar, both in Persia; then comes Nochea, the seat of the Metropolitan Bishop, Mar Khananishu. Still further west, over the frontier into Turkey, in the very heart of the mountains, dwells the Patriarch, Mar Shimun, at once a civil and ecclesiastical ruler, who is responsible to the Turkish government for the independent tribes of Baz, Jilu, Tkhuma, and Tiari, who are spread over the tract of country which stretches from Julamerk to Amadia and then down towards Mosul.

The proverbial 'calm before the storm' was literally true in the case of the massacre of the Syrian Christians. In the Urmi plain, the presence of Russian troops for many years past brought security and prosperity. Raiding on the part of the Kurds was stopped, and highway robbery was no longer heard of. It did not mean that the Moslems were any more friendly disposed towards the Christians: they feared them, that was all. The old hatred for the Christian race slumbered for a time, and dared not show itself, so long as the Russian troops were there to see that the peace was not disturbed.

Events began to take a different turn with the outbreak of war in Europe. The Kurds, always ready for a fight, began to plunder the rich districts of Tergawar and Mergawar; the Christian inhabitants fled to Urmi, and were distributed among the villages of the plain. In October, 1914, the Kurds made a determined effort to capture the city. A violent assault was made by them, and for a time they withstood the fire of the Russian artillery. They sacked and burned the villages of Anhar and Alwach and advanced within gunshot of the city. Reinforcements arrived, and with the help of Assyrians, armed by the Russians, the Kurds and Turks were driven back. Then it was that the Russian officers found that the Assyrians could do great service in scouting, and they employed trained Assyrians to keep open the lines of communications.

Such was the condition of affairs before the declaration of war between the Allied Powers and Turkey. After the declaration of war the curtain was withdrawn and the drama was played, the like of which has not yet been seen, even in this most cruel war.

The Turks had become aggressive on the Russian frontier near the Caucasus. In December they amassed troops at Sary-Kamish, near Kars, and sought to cut the railway to Tiflis. This created a scare in the Caucasus which was serious enough to cause a withdrawal of the

Russian forces from N. W. Persia. Orders reached Urmī on December 30th for the withdrawal of the Russian troops, but these were not made known to the European missionaries and Assyrians until three days later. The news came like a thunderclap. The Christian inhabitants are [sic] entirely unprepared: when they awoke to the fact of the danger they were in, they found that the roads were all blocked, the Russian protectors had left, means of transport were wanting, the Kurdish and Turkish armies were almost at the city gates: they were caught in a trap. A large number of the Assyrians outside the city and many Armenians were able to get away; most of these were from the Nazlu district, others were refugees from the Turkish frontier, some ten thousand in all. Two English missionaries then left, also the Belgian officials of the Persian Government, and some prominent Assyrians of Urmī. All the rest remained behind.

The Russian army left on Saturday, January 2nd, and on the next day the Persian Moslems plundered the village of Charbash, and Dilgusha, the two districts which contained the houses of the well-to-do Christian population. It was a painful sight to see the notable Moslems of the city taking part in this plunder. The whole city was out, 'blessing each other's feast' as they termed it, and carrying off everything that came to hand. Houses were stripped of furniture, and even doors and windows carried away. There was also an attempt to plunder some of the houses within the city, but this was frustrated by the efforts of the French and American missionaries.

There is no doubt that the presence of the American missionaries, and of Mr. Neesan, who remained in the English Mission-house, prevented matters from taking a worse turn. The American flag, which was flying over the American and English houses, had some influence in restraining the brutal savagery of the mob.

In the villages, however, the reign of terror had begun. The Kurds had been informed of the Russian retirement, and were soon at work plundering and massacring the Christians in the Barandus district (S. Urmia). Dizateka, Satlui, Alyabad, Shimshajean, Babarud, Darbarud, Sardarud, Teka, and Ardishai were already in their hands. Looting, plundering, massacre, and rape were the order of the day. In one village, half Moslem and half Christian, the Assyrians took shelter in the houses of their Moslem neighbors, and hid themselves under the heaps of snow in the yards. In Ardishai, Qasha Ablakhat, the Assyrian priest, was escaping on horseback with his daughter; he was killed and the girl carried off to Kurdistan, where she was married by force to a Kurd. Four months later came the sad news that she had died. During her illness she had as companion another Assyrian girl, also a captive. This other girl relates that the Moslem women came and turned the sick women's bed

towards the south, the direction to which all Moslems look on their deathbed. The invalid begged her companion to turn her face to the east, that she might die a Christian.

In another village all the male population, but three, were killed, or died of typhoid fever. One young man had just arrived from the United States after an absence of nine years; he had come home to be married. The next morning, he, his mother, sister, and an uncle were all killed. Their property was carried off and 500 tumans in cash. Most of the people were killed in their flight; their bodies were not buried, for no one dared to go and perform this office. Many of the bodies were eaten by dogs.

There is one large village—Geogtapeh—some five miles from the city of Urmi. To this place many people from the south of Urmi plain fled for safety, as they thought the inhabitants were well able to defend themselves. But on Monday night, January 4th, a messenger from the Kurds came, saying that if the people surrendered and paid a large sum of money, their village would be spared. The villagers sent to Urmia to consult the village master, but long before the messenger returned the Kurds had commenced their attack on the place. The Christians put up a magnificent fight, but could not hold out long before overwhelming numbers. The Kurds were also assisted by the Persian Moslems, who were eager to pay off old scores against their Christian neighbors. As the day wore on the situation grew desperate. The cries of women and children, who had gathered in the churches, were heart-rending. The smoke of the burning buildings from four sides overcame the defenders. Finally all took refuge in the two churches on the brow of the hill, which dominates the villages. Late in the afternoon, by God's providence, a rescue was made. Dr. Packard, the American missionary, with three Assyrian attendants, came with the American flag and made terms of capitulation. The men, women and children were to be allowed to go out alive, and the village and all the firearms were surrendered. Late that night, Dr. Packard, with some two thousand people, reached Urmi, where with difficulty shelter was found for them in quarters already crowded, in which they passed four months of untold horrors and suffering.

In Geogtapeh, one elderly woman was left behind because she could not move on account of infirmity; her husband and daughter decided to stay with her. The Kurds killed the two old people, and on the daughter refusing to become Moslem, she also was killed.

Another pathetic case was that of an old priest and his wife, who thought if they gave up everything to the Kurds their lives would be spared. These people were visited by five different parties of Kurds in succession. They helped themselves to the property of the house, and took all the money they could find. Then came another party and asked for money; they were told there was nothing left. Then the old man, with the Bible in his hands,

was murdered in the presence of his wife. They decided to kill the woman also, but in some mysterious way she avoided them and hid herself. After six days of hiding she crawled out and got to a neighboring village, where she found shelter with some Moslems, who sent her to the city.

### **Nazlu District**

The Barandus river villages and Geogtapeh are south of the city of Urmi, and so were the first to fall a prey to the Kurds as they advanced from the south. The villages of the Nazlu district, such as Ada, Supurghan, Mushawa, Sherabad, and Karajalu, some of the wealthiest, not being in the line of advance, should have escaped the horrors of the other villages; but their turn came later, and their story of their woes is equally heartrending.

Ada, one of the largest villages, had been a place of refuge for many Assyrians and Armenians late in the year 1914. Then when the Russian army passed that way many of the people followed them, to the number of sixty. The rest, however, all remained. Sunday, January 3rd, passed off quietly, but the next day their troubles commenced. The Persian Moslems began to plunder the Syrian Christians. They broke open the houses, carried off the doors and windows, and emptied the buildings. No one was however killed, although some shots were fired to intimidate the people. The Assyrians exercised great restraint, as they feared a general massacre if they opposed the Moslems who came against them. The elders of the village, while this was going on, sent to the city to ask for protection. The messengers returned with a Turkish and Persian flag and a few soldiers, thinking this would be security for them; but they were deceived. For almost at once the Kurds attacked the village from all points. They stripped every man they found, took his money, and then killed him. As the others fled to the vineyards, they were followed by the Moslems, who killed them there. It is said that one Persian Moslem had killed twenty-five persons, and said, 'I am not satisfied yet.' Some eighty bodies lay about unburied; many, who had been wounded, were left to die of their wounds, as there was no one to tend them after they fell. The women and children, who had climbed to the roofs to avoid the fury of the Kurds, were afterwards brutally treated by their attackers, who behaved with the greatest barbarity. The churches were polluted and the holy books destroyed. Many women were carried off, and forced to become Moslems, and afterwards sold or married to their enemies.

A pathetic case is reported from Karajalu. A woman fleeing with her two children—her husband was abroad—met a Moslem mullah in her flight. He took the children, stripped them of their clothing, and threw them all into a stream, which was on the point of freezing. He then offered to marry the woman. On her refusal he left the woman on the road to her fate. She returned to the stream, and, taking her children from the water, carried them to a

vineyard near by, where she placed them in a hollow place with some straw over them to try and warm them; both children died in the morning. Later the sorrowing woman found her way to Urmi, and five months afterwards the Russians caught this inhuman brute and made him suffer for his crime.

### **The Flight to Urmi**

The city of Urmia became a veritable city of refuge for the Assyrians and Armenians from the villages of the whole plain. By far the larger number found shelter in the American Mission premises, and some more in the compound of the English Mission, where Mr. Neesan was living. We have read of the flight from Antwerp in the Times, but it is a fairy tale compared with what happened in Urmi. Women arrived at the city in a bleeding condition. Some had been stripped of part of their clothes on the way, and arrived in one tunic shivering in the bitter cold of January; some told us how they had been stopped by four different bands of robbers; many were carried off, made captives and forced to become Moslems.

The French Mission also afforded another place of refuge, where the French Lazarists, with Monseigneur Sontag and the Sisters of Charity, live. The crowded state of all the houses in the city quickly bred disease, which, combined with semi-starvation, made life unbearable. The Americans threw open their College and Hospital outside the city, and these were soon overcrowded. The Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission premises and the American yard close by formed one great quadrangle, and over this block the American flag was flying. In normal times these buildings could accommodate five hundred people; now there were some ten thousand crowded into this same area. After the first rush was over, the missionaries went to the villages, to search for this or that person who was missing. In this way many young women were restored to their families and delivered from Moslem captivity. But many of the less fortunate had to remain in the Moslem houses to which they had been carried. Many were ill and could not move; others were *enceinte*, and were ashamed to return to their homes. A young Moslem was carrying his Assyrian 'wife' to another village when he met Dr. Packard on the road. The girl threw herself at his feet and asked to be freed from her captor. She was taken to Urmi, only to die after a few weeks of typhoid fever.

The problem of feeding so large a number of people was a great one, and only half a pound of bread a day could be provided. But the worst suffering was caused by the overcrowding. Every available space was filled—rooms, churches, corridors, cellars, and stables, all alike were crowded with human beings.

Under these conditions, combined with the bad water supply and the lack of sanitary arrangements in an Oriental city, it is not surprising that typhoid fever soon broke out and

carried off thousands of people. More than four thousand lost their lives from this disease, while a thousand were killed by the Kurds in the villages. An accurate statement, prepared by the European missionaries, shows that 20 per cent of the Urmi Christians perished in four months.

At the beginning of this reign of terror which we have described, the Kurds of Mamash, Mangur, Zarza, in the south, poured into the city. The Herki and the Begzadi from the west poured in at the same time. The son of one prominent Sheikh from Shamsdinan came from Nochea and established himself in Dilgusha, just outside the city gates. On the arrival of the Turkish army, a few days later, order was for a time restored, and the Kurds and Moslems restrained from the bigger acts of violence. But as soon as the Turkish officers got hold of the reins of government the lives of the Christians became unbearable. For a time a Jihad—a Holy War—was spoken of on all sides and the Christians gave up all hopes of being allowed to live. The Turks made it quite clear that they had come to serve Turkey, and did not conceal their desire to get rid of all Christians. They also set to work to fill their own pockets; 6600 tumans were taken from the shop and store owners, and other well-to-do people. They prepared a list of 'suspected persons', who were to be put to death if not ransomed by the payment of a sum of money. In many cases the money was not forthcoming, and the prisoners were put to death.

It was in this way that Mar Dinkha, Bishop of Tergawar, met his death. Mar Elia, the Russian Bishop, was ransomed after a payment of 5500 tumans had been made to the Turks.

### **The Tragedy of Gulpashan**

The case of the treatment of the village of Gulpashan is without parallel in the history of the Urmi massacres. It is the most wealthy and prosperous of all the villages of the plain, and its inhabitants are quiet and law-abiding people. When the sister village of Geogtapeh was plundered and burnt, by an ominous fate Gulpashan was spared. Karani Agha, a Kurdish Chief, well spoken of as a man of high principle, had announced that the village was his property and that it was to be spared. For two months the people were left in peace. It was said to be due to a friendship which existed between the Christian village masters, one of whom was related to the German Consular Agent at Urmi, and the Moslems. A servant of the German Agent was there, and Turkish soldiers were placed to guard the village. On February 24th, a band of Persian Fedais, who had been unsuccessful in an attempt on Salamas, returned to Urmia and attacked the village. They feigned friendliness at first, until they had got the men of the place in their power. Then they tied them together with ropes and drove them to the cemetery, where they butchered them in a barbarous and cruel way. Then the men, still wild with blood, turned on the women, and after treating them in an unseemly manner, put some of them to death. The American missionaries went afterwards

and buried the dead which they did in many other places also. This was the last of the massacres in the Urmi plain. The awful deeds that were perpetrated here were telegraphed to America, whereupon such strong representations were made by the United States Government that an order was made for their cessation.

### **The Massacre in Salamas**

In the plain of Salamas, to the west of Lake Urmi, there are many large and beautiful villages inhabited by Assyrians and Armenians. For the most part these people had fled to Russia before the flight from Urmi took place; but their homes and fields shared the same fate as those in Urmi. The Turks found on their arrival there that a good number of Christians had hid themselves in the houses of friendly Moslems. The Moslem Hadjis were ordered to prepare a letter, which every Christian must sign, stating that they had received kind consideration at the hands of their protectors. This was only a trick on the part of the Turks, for in this way they got to know the names and dwelling-places of about 725 Armenians and Assyrians in Slams. A few days later all these men, roped together in gangs, were marched to the fields at night between Haftevan and Khusrawa, and some were shot, others were hacked to pieces, in one way and another, in the most horrible fashion. This happened in March, only three days before the return of the Russian troops. This timely arrival of help prevented the women of the place from sharing a like fate.

[147] pp. 577-586; *J. Bryce op.cit.*

[*Paul Shimmon, Massacres of Syrian Christians in N.W. Persia and Kurdistan, London, Nov. 1915, p. 24*]

### Document No. 17

Azerbaijan, behind the Russian front: Extracts from a series of letters by the Rev. Robert M. Labaree; communicated by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A.

(a) Letter dated Tabriz, 12th March, 1915 (to Mr. Labaree's mother)

Sad news. The Kurds driven back from Khoi massacred 800 Syrian and Armenian men with cruel torture. This in the plain of Salamas. In Urmia the largest and wealthiest Syrian village, Gulpashan, which had been spared by payments of large sums of money, was given over to plunder by the returning Kurds. The men of the village were all taken out to the cemetery and killed; the women and girls treated barbarously. Sixty men were taken out of the French Mission, where they had taken refuge, and shot. Others have been hanged. The Swiss teacher of the missionaries' children has died of typhoid. I have been asked to go to Urmia, but every way is blocked. Please let Mr. Speer know facts.

(b) Letter dated Tabriz, 13th March, 1915 (to Mr. Speer)

Dr. Shedd's latest communication speaks for itself and reveals a terrible condition of things at Urmia. This condition, I fear, has been rendered even more acute in the two weeks since the letter was written by the defeat of the Turks and Kurds near Salamas. At that time all the remaining Christian refugees in Diliman (the chief town of Salamas) suffered terribly. All the males above twelve years of age were taken to two neighboring villages, tortured and shot. Their number is estimated at 800. The women were to be made Moslems, but the entrance of the Russians into the town the next day prevented that. I doubt not but that the retreating Kurds will wish to do the same thing as they pass through Urmia. One is perfectly helpless at such a time. The Consuls are acting in concert, but what can they do? The only salvation seems to be that the Russian army may advance soon to Urmia, but for military reasons this may be impossible. My own visit to Urmia has been stopped for the present by events. There is no possible way of my reaching Urmia, unless the Consul should go and I should accompany him.

(c) Letter dated Diliman, 19th April, 1915 (to the Presbyterian Missions Board, New York)

There seems no more prospect now than when I last wrote of any measures being taken by the Russian authorities to relieve the Urmia situation. If any plans are afoot for the occupation of the city they are not at all in evidence, and I am persuaded that a good many things must happen elsewhere before the local conditions will be materially changed. Recently a Mr. McGowan, a reporter of the Associated Press, fresh from America, arrived here—all interested in the situation.

He was most anxious to reach Urmia, if any way could be found to get in and any assurance be given that he could return. We decided upon a perfectly open policy. With the consent of the Russian officers here, we secured a messenger and sent him directly to the Turkish Consul in Urmia, asking for guards and safe conduct, from a point just beyond the pass to the city, and return. In our letter to the Consul we enclosed an open letter to Will Shedd, asking his advice in the matter. Indirectly we hear that our messenger was put under arrest (lest, I suppose, he should undertake to return), and no answer has been sent to our request; while, on the other hand, horsemen were despatched to a midway point to escort into the city some Persians who had sent a request very much like our own by the same messenger. It is no use making any more efforts to get inside this chestnut burr, until through God's Providence it opens itself. I am here to render what help I can, and while as yet I have been able to do nothing, yet perhaps it will be given me later to give some little assistance to our poor, tired, beleaguered friends in Urmia. Mr. McGowan has gone back to the Caucasus. It was a pleasure to get sight of an American face and have a fresh whiff from the outside world.

The news that comes to us from across the Turkish border is far from pleasant. The many hundreds (and perhaps some thousands) of Armenians and Syrians in the region of Bashkala have been massacred. The Armenians and Kurds in and about Van have begun to fight. In the mountains Mar Shimun is said to have gathered the independent tribes about him, and they are battling for their lives against great odds. These are the near-by places. What is going on inside Turkey, God only knows.

Yesterday I assembled about fifty Armenians from the neighborhood of Bashkala in a near-by village for a service. They were all men in the employment of the Russian army when it withdrew from there several months ago. They had to come away with the troops, leaving behind their families and all that they possessed. They feel certain that their wives and children have been massacred or else taken away to a captivity worse than death. When one stands before such an audience, the words that are so easy to speak at other times fail one. Is there any balm in Gilead for such wounds? Is there any power to take away from the hearts of these men the sorrow and the rankling spirit of revenge? May God never put me in a position like that, or else may he give me more grace than I now possess.

When one knows that three-fourths of the Moslems of this district, if not nine-tenths of them, were implicated in the plunder of Christian villages, and that many of them were parties to worse crimes, it is hard to have the same zest for work among them. But now that the way to Urmia seems barred for the present, I am planning to plunge into that work. Just now the Moslems here are so alarmed lest they suffer for what they have done that they are ready to listen to almost anything a Christian may say. It is a pity that in so many cases this willingness has no higher motive.

(d) Letter dated Tabriz, 6th May, 1915 (to the Presbyterian Missions Board, New York)

Just a word to report that I am safe at home. My departure from Salamas was most sudden and exciting. An overwhelming force of Turks and Kurds attacked the place, and in the course of maneuver we were nearly caught between the two firing lines. It is not an experience that often comes to one, nor is it one that one wants repeated. With hundreds of other refugees, now twice plundered, we made our way to Djoulfa, and from there I came here.

[29] pp. 110-112, *J. Bryce op.cit.*

Document No. 18

Letter dated Tabriz, 17th March 1916, from the Rev. F. N. Jessup; communicated by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

On the 1st November (1914) Turkey declared a 'Jihad,' or Holy War, against the Allies, and it was soon evident that she would try to stir up other Moslem nations. In December a small force of Turkish troops crossed into Persia at Soujboulak, south of Urmia, but we thought nothing of it, knowing that the Russian forces here would be able to cope with them. But in the last day of December it became evident that the Russians were actually about to withdraw from here, and there was a panic among the Armenians and other native Christians. Day and night the poor Armenians fled out of the city towards the Russian border, and out of 750 or more families only about 250 were left, most of these being the poorest people.

From the first we were beset by people asking to be allowed to take refuge with us. We had permission to admit those who were connected with us, and in addition, had to make arrangements to receive all the Europeans who might need protection. It was decided that all the missionaries should come to this compound, where the Memorial School and men's dispensary are located. You can imagine the rush and work of the first days of January—all the school-rooms to be cleared of everything so as to be ready for the crowds of people so anxious to get in, people to be interviewed day and night, rules to be made as to who and what were to be admitted, our own houses to be made ready for the advent of the missionary families. For example, my house, in which I had been living alone on Friday, by Saturday night contained five families, consisting of ten adults and seven children; and whereas up to that time Dr. Vanneman and I had been having our meals alone, now in my dining-room all the Americans ate together, nineteen adults and a number of children!

By this time almost all the Europeans had left the city, including the Consuls of the Allied Powers; the banks were closed and the Indo-European telegraph office was shut. The Europeans who were left in the city came to us for refuge, all except one family of Italians and a few Germans, Austrians and Turkish subjects who thought they would be safe. But even these asked to have a place reserved in case of need, for no one knew what might happen when a horde of undisciplined Kurds entered the city. Not only this, but a number of prominent Mohammedans came to ask protection, and very many more left the city to flee to Teheran, knowing that they might be molested or blackmailed.

On Tuesday, the 5th January, the Russian troops left the city and encamped on its outskirts; the next day they started north towards Djoulfa, and on Friday, the 8th, the Turks and Kurds entered.

For the next three weeks they were in possession of Tabriz. We were cut off from the outside world, without news of what was occurring elsewhere, practically shut up in this compound with the four hundred who had taken refuge with us. We had as our guests Belgians from the Customs and Finance Departments, French Catholic Sisters with forty or fifty of their school-children, two German ladies who had been sick and unable to go with the rest of the German colony, a Russian lady, and two American Seventh Day Adventist missionaries from Maragha, but most of the people were Armenians and Nestorians. As you see, they were of all nationality and religions, but all lived together in the greatest goodwill, and things moved with a remarkable lack of trouble or friction.

We had planned to observe the regular Week of Prayer with nightly services in our church, but our church had to be abandoned, for almost every Christian from that quarter of the city had fled, and no one dared to stir out of doors after dark. But we were given a greater opportunity. Instead of a week's services attended by fifty or sixty people, we had Evangelistic services in the assembly room of the Memorial School every night for a full four weeks, with a hundred to a hundred and fifty in attendance, and all listening with the most earnest attention. And as we had with us refugee families from Soujboulak, Maragha and other places, we had a chance to preach the Gospel to those rarely, if ever, reached by the truth. Instead of having to seek a congregation, we had it ready within our gates, and one composed of those whose hearts were softened in the face of our common danger and life together.

As the time went on, the blackmail and plundering on the part of the Kurds grew worse and people became more anxious. It was indeed a welcome day when the sound of cannon and machine guns was heard to the north, and it appeared that the Russians were returning to deliver the city. This they did on the 30th January, and so well had the campaign been arranged that the fleeing Kurds were cut off from the city after the battle, and so could not loot or kill on their retreat, as many had feared they might. And thus in God's providence the city was relieved, and we and the many lives entrusted to us were kept safe from harm during that trying time.

When the roads were once again open and word reached us from other places, we began to hear of the terrible plight of the Christians of other places, especially Urmia and Salamas. When suddenly and unexpectedly the native Christians of those places heard that the Russian army was immediately to be withdrawn, they knew that their only safety from the

cruelties of the approaching Kurds lay in flight. Men, women and little children were obliged to start off at once, in mid-winter, most of them on foot, unable to make preparation or to carry sufficient food, clothing, or bedding, and to flee in terror of their lives through snow and deep mud, wading through streams and toiling over the mountains and across plains covered with an impassable mire, till at last they might reach Djoulfa on the Russian frontier, nearly 150 miles away. The story of the horror of that flight will probably never be fully told. From Urmia 17,000 or 18,000 must have fled. When they reached the Salamas plain, their numbers were swelled by thousands of Armenian Christians fleeing thence. Men who went through the experience tell us that the events of those days are indescribable. On the edge of the Salamas plain multitudes could find no lodging and had to sleep in the snow. Some children were carried off by wolves, and many more died before morning.

And then the march of those days! Up before daylight, struggling in the snow and slush and darkness to find and keep to the road through the mountain passes, hurrying on ever, knowing that at the end of the day only those who first arrived could be sure of finding shelter for the next night; parents becoming separated from each other and from their children in the darkness or in the mass of hurrying people, unable to find them again, but hoping that they might meet at the end of the day; people throwing away the quilts or other necessary bedding they had brought because physically unable to carry them; the road strewn with abandoned goods; the weak and sick falling by the wayside, many never to rise again; men become as beasts in the common struggle just to live. At night many would arrive long after dark at the appointed stopping-place only to find every caravanserai and lodging so full that they would be forced to spend the night out of doors. Those within fared little better, crowded in so tightly that often they could neither lie nor sit down, but had to remain standing all night in rooms with every door and window shut, and the air so foul that the winter's cold without seemed preferable.

And at such stopping-places exhausted mothers and fathers were anxiously going from house to house and group to group, seeking their lost children. The fugitives have many terrible tales to tell. By the time they had reached Khoi their plight was desperate, but beyond Khoi their sufferings were increased by the deep mire through which they had to struggle. One of our Christian workers from Urmia told me that with his own eyes he saw a man go up to his mother, who had sunk exhausted in the mud, and shoot her through the head, rather than leave her to die by degrees or to be killed by wolves. They tell of a family who started from Urmia--an aged father and his two married daughters, each carrying two children, one on her back and the other in her arms. There, in the mire beyond Khoi, the father could no longer go on and had to be left, and one of the women gave birth to a child. She wrapped the new-born babe in a piece of cloth torn from her dress, and taking it in her

arms struggled on, but the other two children had to be abandoned like their grandfather. On arriving at Djoulfa these women found their husbands, who had been in Tiflis and had hurried down to meet the fugitives. There for several anxious days they waited, hoping for news of the lost children. The fathers had been away long, and could not be sure of recognizing them, and the mothers were too exhausted to return. At last some soldiers came in with a wagon full of lost children whom they had rescued, and among them were the two little ones. But they had suffered so from exposure that in a few days they both died. The grandfather had perished in the mire.

Mr. Labaree, of our station, left for the Caucasus as soon as the way was open, to find out conditions and see what we could do to help the poor refugees. There are 70,000 or more reported in those regions, not only from Persia, but from Turkey and the border. The Armenians of the Caucasus had organized relief committees, and the Government was also helping. The average grant was about 2d. or 1 1/2d. per adult a day. The villagers among whom those thousands of absolutely destitute strangers were distributed were very kind, but the burden was very heavy for them. Mr. Labaree said that the poor fugitives were in a pitiable state. Sickness had followed the exposure and strain—scarlet fever and other diseases—and in almost every room he visited he heard of four or five children who had died.

But the condition of those who did not, or could not, flee from the Urmia and Salamas plains has been even worse. In Urmia about 12,000 took refuge in the three compounds belonging to our Mission, while 3,000 more were in the French Catholic Mission. Here most of them have remained since the 1st January, but some have withdrawn to yards adjoining ours, some have been taken out by force and killed by the Turks, and many have died. Urmia has been entirely cut off from us. A few letters and messages they have succeeded in sending through, and from these we have learned something of their condition. At the first arrival of the Kurds and Turks, most of the people remaining in the Christian villages fled to the Mission for protection. Of those who stayed in the villages, many girls and women were carried off by the Mohammedans and many men killed. In those first days of January, about ten thousand were crowded into our compound at Urmia city. In the church there were three thousand, so many that they could not lie down to sleep. At the beginning from ten to twenty-five were dying daily in our city compound, and a little later the mortality increased to from twenty-five to forty a day. At first it was not possible to take the bodies out of the grounds for burial. Later, when they were able to secure some adjoining yards, conditions became a little better. Dr. Packard, hearing that a large Christian village was being attacked by the Kurds, rode out there and, at the risk of his life, made his way to the Kurdish chiefs and then to the village, and persuaded the Kurds to spare the lives of the people on

condition of their surrendering their goods. Thus, by his influence with the Kurds, won by many medical services in the past, he was able to save nearly a thousand poor people from massacre and conduct them that night to the city.

All these thousands have had to be fed and cared for. It has meant a daily expenditure of from £50 to £55 sterling for the three tons of bread distributed each day. Some of the wealthy fugitives to Russia left money with the Missionaries on their departure, with permission to borrow it and use it if necessary, and in this way they were able to get on up to the last reports, for we have been unable in any way to reach them or send them money. But it is now nearly a month since we have received authentic news from the Missionaries at Urmia. At that time they reported the situation as very grave. We have heard that a Turkish officer and several men entered our Mission grounds by force, beat Mr. Allen twice because he could not tell them of the whereabouts of some men they sought, and carried off several men to kill them. From the Catholic Mission, in the same way, some forty men were taken and massacred.

In a village whose people had from the first been peaceful and had paid a large sum for protection, 51 (others report 85) men were seized, taken outside and butchered, and then the soldiers returned to outrage the women and girls, not even little children being spared.

For three weeks Mr. Labaree had been in Salamas, hoping that a Russian expeditionary force might be sent to rescue the Urmia Christians and that he might be able to go over to help the Missionaries, who must be greatly worn by the strain and by their work. But as yet he has neither been able to go nor to send or receive any word, nor are there any signs of a rescue.

This is the most awful calamity which has befallen the Nestorian people in the ninety years of our mission work among Nestorians here. Until now about 1,000 have been killed and 2,000 died from diseases in Urmia alone. The Nestorians estimate that perhaps as many more died on the flight to Russia or have died since. This would mean a fifth or a sixth of the 30,000 Nestorians who live on the Urmia plain. Their prosperous villages have all been pillaged and most of them burned, and their churches destroyed. Of the survivors, half are refugees in great want in the Caucasus, the rest remain in Urmia in conditions of peril and fear and need which wring one's heart. Already over £4,000 sterling must have been spent by the Missionaries in Urmia to preserve the lives of those taking refuge with them. As soon as it becomes in the least safe, they must be helped to return to their ruined homes and villages to make a fresh start.

Two months ago Mr. Labaree appealed to America for at least £10,000 sterling as the smallest sum required, and as time goes on it becomes evident that more will be needed. Thus far about £2,400 has been received from the American Red Cross and our Board, £30 from our missionaries in Hamadan, and £20 from the English missionaries at Isfahan. Of course we here are trying to help too. These poor distressed Nestorians are the especial charge of our American Presbyterian Church, which has labored so many years for their good, and there is little hope of help for them in this hour when so many nations are in trouble, except in so far as we help them. And it is not only the Christians of Urmia that are in great need. Those of the village of Miandoab (Armenians, these) have similarly lost everything. The Kurds still occupy their town, and they are refugees in Maragha and Tabriz. At Maragha the Armenians have suffered greatly, for most of them had to flee, and now they have the burden of all the refugees from Miandoab and other villages. And in Salamas it is worse. All the Christian villages on that plain have been smoked. Most of the Christians fled when the army withdrew in January, but some remained behind and these sought the protection of their Moslem neighbors. But a few days before the return of the Russia army to Salamas, when the Turks saw that they would be compelled to flee, they secured the names of all Christians by a ruse, pretending that all who registered would be protected. Then they gathered all the men into one place and carried them out in companies of about twenty-five, each to be shot down in cold blood. Others were tied with their heads sticking through the rungs of a ladder and decapitated, others hacked to pieces or mutilated before death. In this way practically every Christian man remaining in Salamas was massacred. You can imagine the fate of girls and women. The most detailed report received, signed by a number of men now on the compound, stated that from 712 to 720 men were thus killed in Salamas.

Document No.19

Urmia during the Turco-Kurdish occupation; diary of a missionary, edited by Miss Mary Schauffler Platt and published by the Board of the Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

**Urmia, Persia, Saturday, 9th January, 1915**

I want to start a letter telling you of the events of the last week, though I cannot tell when it will reach you. As you know, the Russians had taken possession of this part of Persia, and were maintaining order here, so that for the last year conditions were more orderly, peaceful and prosperous than for long years before. They had a consul here who was very capable, and tried to do justice to all.

When war was declared between Russia and Turkey, we knew that this meant war for Urmia, for we are right on the Turkish border, and only a few years ago Turkey tried to get this section for herself, but failed. We were told by the Russians in authority here that they would hold Urmia against all odds, so the city was fortified by trenches and defences on every side, and several thousand reinforcements came.

On New Year's Day, according to our custom, we received our friends. As many as a hundred and forty of our Moslem and Christian friends, men and women, called "to bless our New Year." On Saturday, the 2nd, like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, we were informed that the whole Russian army was withdrawing; some had gone in the night, the rest would leave immediately. There was a panic at once among the Christian (Syrian and Armenian) population. The Osmanlis, or Turks and Kurds, were but a few miles away, and the Christians were absolutely defenceless.

At once, as soon as the Russians had gone, with large numbers of Syrians and Armenians leaving at the same time, the evil-minded Moslems all over the plain began to plunder the Christian villages. When the people were trying to flee to the missionaries in the city, they were robbed on the roads of everything they had, even of their outer clothing. In some of the villages the Moslem masters placed guards to prevent the people from going themselves or bringing their possessions to the city, saying they would protect them. When they tried to get away, these same guards robbed and stripped them.

The crowds had begun to pour in at our gates on Sunday; the city people were taken in by night and many others from near by. On Sunday morning we put up the American flags over the entrances. On Monday morning Dr. Packard, with American and Turkish flags, accompanied by two Syrians, started out to meet the leading Kurdish chief. He arrived at Geogtapa in time to prevent a terrible massacre. The people of Geogtapa who had not fled to the city had gone to our church and the Russian church, both of which are situated on a high hill formed of ashes, a relic of Zoroastrian times. The churchyards are enclosed by high mud walls. All finally went to the Russian church, which was on the highest ground. They barricaded the strong doors, and, when the Kurds attacked, the men defended the fort with their guns and the women crowded like sheep into the church. When Dr. Packard arrived, a lively battle was going on, with little chance for the Christians. He had great difficulty in getting to the chiefs without being shot; but he finally reached them, and they knew him. Some of these Kurds had spent weeks in our hospital and had been operated upon by Dr. Packard, so they listened to him while he pleaded for the lives of the people inside. After several hours' entreaty, they agreed to let the people go with him if they would give up their guns and ammunition.

I was talking yesterday with Layah, our Bible Woman, who was inside the church. She said that when Dr. Packard first tried to signal to them, they did not know him and kept on firing, but when they recognized him a shout went up: "It's the Hakim Sahib! Thank God! We are saved!" I asked her what the Kurds did when they came out, and she said they stood by and helped them, saying: "Come on! Come on! Don't be afraid!" In the rush, Layah fell and broke her arm, and is now lying on Miss Lamme's sofa resting.

All Monday the refugees had been coming in, until it seemed that every room and storeroom was full, many of the rooms not lying-down full but sitting-up full. But that night, when Dr. Packard came, he brought over fifteen hundred more with him, and they had to be stowed away. This is Saturday, the sixth day these thousands have been here in our yards, not less than ten thousand—perhaps twelve or fourteen thousand. We have taken several small yards and houses adjoining ours, and the English Mission yard adjoining the seminary yard is also full. Of course, the two Englishmen of the English Mission had to leave with the Russian army, and with them a large number of prominent Syrians who had been sympathizers with Russia. Here in the city there has been plundering and some destruction of property, but no general disorder—unless it be in the Armenian quarter. The fine brick quarters which were built as barracks for the Russian army I understand have remained intact, because the invaders are afraid to go near them for fear they may be mined.

From the first the Sheikh promised protection to us and our people, and when the Osmanli officers came they immediately took possession of the city, and have tried to keep order and prevent plundering by Moslems. The other day a Moslem, terribly wounded by a Turkish guard while robbing, was brought here for treatment. This is an illustration of our position: Here is a Mussulman thief, plundering Christians, shot by the Osmanli guard, and then brought to us by his friends that we might care for him.

Although we were promised safety for all within our gates there is no certainty. On Wednesday morning I lay in bed a little longer than usual, and about half-past seven suddenly an awful cry of fear and despair went up from thousands of throats, and the crowds rushed toward the church, then swayed back, not knowing whither, to fly. From the church, where human beings are packed in like sardines, they began jumping from the windows. My first thought was that the Kurds had broken in through our back gate, which opens into the Moslem quarter, and that the massacre was about to begin; but the poor, terrified people soon quieted, and before I could get dressed I knew it must have been a false alarm. The poor, hunted creatures think that if they can only hold to the skirts of a missionary they will be safe.

On Thursday, Hannah, the wife of one of our pastors, reached us after great suffering and exposure. They lived in Nazi, and heard the report that the Russians were leaving. They couldn't believe it, but on Sunday afternoon Kurds from the west came and began plundering. The people all fled to a walled village, because they thought they might be safer there and because our preacher there, Kasha One (Preacher Abner), had many friends among the Kurds, being a mountaineer. On Monday, a Kurd visited them, pretending that he had been sent by the Turks from the city, telling them they need have no fear, as they would be protected; but it became evident that he was a spy. Afterwards a band of Kurds came, demanded the guns, and drank tea with the people; then others came and they began robbing and killing. The people gathered together like a flock of frightened sheep, and many were slaughtered. The greater part of them got through the great gateway while the Kurds were plundering, and that night they spent in the mountains without food or shelter and with very little covering. One of our girls, Katie, who had gone home on Friday for her Christmas vacation, was among them. She saw her mother murdered and had to leave her body lying by the gate as they ran. The next morning more than four hundred of them started towards the city, cold, hungry, exhausted; many, having lost their shoes in their flight, had frozen and bleeding feet. Hannah came here, her feet were dressed, and she is lying comfortably on a mattress on Miss Lamme's floor. Her husband and daughter were already here. The rest of the party were taken in at our College compound, two miles west of the city. The pitiful tales we hear of murder, of narrow escape through snow and mud, hungry, sick and cold, are numberless.

### **Monday, 11th January, 1915**

Several families from Digala are camped in our parlour, and the night before last Victoria, one of the women, came to me and said an old woman had just come in who didn't seem able to answer anything she asked her. I found her crouched in [a] corner of the hall. She said she was so cold. At first she couldn't eat, but after drinking some tea she improved. We had absolutely no place but a stone floor for her; but we took up a carpet from my bedroom, rolled her up in it in the upper hall-way, and she went to sleep. She was the janitress of our church in Barbaroud, fifteen miles to the south. The Kurds did their worst there several days ago, and she had escaped, barefooted, almost naked, and without food. She died a day or two later.

One poor woman, who had both husband and son killed, has gone crazy, and we haven't any place to put her but a dark closet under the stairway. At midnight I was awakened by her pounding on the door. She has a nursing baby. Thank God, to-day they took her to the hospital, where they can care for her a little better than here. (She died two days later.) At the College compound, where the hospital is, they have only about two thousand, and we

have perhaps twelve thousand, and every day more are coming. Those who have been hiding with Moslem friends are coming to us day by day, and we haven't any place to put them. We have not been able to take the dead from our yards, so we are burying them in the little yard by the side of the church—twenty-seven so far. Some die every day, and there is no shroud or coffin for them.

**Wednesday, 13th January**

Since Monday, the 4th, we have been giving out bread. In the morning we sell to those who have money, and in the afternoon give free bread to those who cannot buy, disposing of over four tons of bread a day. Practically all the refugees from the city have their own food, and some from the villages, too. We buy our bread from the bazaar (market), and a very efficient and willing young Syrian has been attending to the weighing and giving out, while groups of other young men have been selling and distributing. The only things we have had for carrying the bread are our clothes-baskets and old tin bath-tubs, and they are doing good service. We have received some gifts of food for the refugees from Moslems. One man gave over six hundred pounds of meat, which we cooked and gave out in one section, but it is very difficult to distribute anything except bread among so large a number. I am speaking only of what we are doing here in this compound, where by far the larger number of refugees are. They are doing similar work in Sardari (the Boys' School premises) and at the College compound. Mr. McDowell is looking after sanitary conditions and the streams of water flowing through the yards, which furnish the only drinking water for the crowds, and conditions are much improved.

There are hundreds of mountaineers who have no place to go to. Before this affair they were distributed among the villages, and we had established a number of schools especially for them. These people had been driven from their homes by the Kurds early in the autumn. Many of them seem little better than animals—dirty, lazy, satisfied with any hole to lie in and just enough bread to keep their stomachs comfortable. Of course, they are not all of this sort, but we have several hundred that are. They are chiefly crowded into the church and our large school-room. The people who are suffering most are those who have been accustomed to the comforts and decencies of life, who are crowded together like cattle, without sufficient clothing or food.

The day after the flight from Geogtapa we went with a basket of bread to one of the larger rooms of the Press, which was filled with self-respecting people who had the day before been in comfortable circumstances, but who had fled with nothing, or had been robbed of whatever they had tried to bring with them. When they saw the bread for distribution, they began to cry and cover their faces, and we had to drop the bread into their laps—they didn't

reach out for it. Of course, we assured them that under such circumstances, it was no shame to eat the bread of charity. When the people began to flee, they wanted to deposit their money with us, and our Treasurer accepted it on condition that we could use it without interest and repay it when normal conditions are restored. It is with this money that we have been enabled to buy bread and save these people from starvation. Children are being born every day. We have managed to give two small rooms to these women, many of whom haven't even a quilt.

Children were born even in the crowded church. One of the women who was reporting these cases complained in a very aggrieved tone that some were "even bringing two" as if one wasn't enough to satisfy anybody under these circumstances.

This is the first day that we have been able to get donkeys to haul away the refuse. I hope we shall soon be able to take the dead to the cemetery.

#### **Thursday, 14th January**

Mr. Allen returned last evening from his journey to the villages of the Nazlu river. Several thousand fled towards Russia; many have hidden with Moslems, who are now trying to force them to become Mohammedans and to give their girls in marriage to Moslems. In Ada perhaps as many as a hundred were killed, most of them young men. It is told that they were stood up in line, one behind another, by the Kurds to see how many one bullet would kill. I went down to see the woman in the room under mine who had received word of the killing of her brother in Karadjalu. Everywhere there is wailing and sadness, and her lamentation for her dead brother is the wail of thousands of hearts:

"Oh, Yerima (Jeremiah), my brother!

The pillar of our house; a father to us all, ah, Yerima, Yerima!

Thou didst comfort us all! A giant in body and giant in spirit.

Oh, Yerima, my brother, oh, my brother, Yerima, my heart is broken for thee!

My brother! Oh, my brother, thy house is left desolate; thy little ones orphans.

Oh, Yerima, Yerima! thou wert a righteous man, merciful to the poor!"

#### **Saturday, 16th January**

Yesterday some Abijalu people were in, asking for bread, although a week ago they were among the well-to-do. The same story of robbery, exposure and horror. When a Kurd tried to carry off Shamasha Sayad's daughter, she jumped into the well and stayed there for hours in water up to her chin. Some one said a few days ago, "Blessed are the dead," and I echoed the sentiment.

**Monday, 18th January**

In the midst of panic, distress and death, we have had two weddings. Both had been arranged to take place on the Syrian New Year, the 14th January. Dr. Shedd performed the ceremony in both cases. Both brides had their trousseaux ready, but felt these were not proper times for the display of finery, so wore ordinary dresses.

These last few days a number of the city families have returned in fear and trembling to their homes, taking just a very few things with them. This is relieving the overcrowded rooms somewhat, and Miss Schoebel this afternoon is trying to drive the people out into the sunshine long enough to have the rooms swept, or rather shoveled. It consumes all one's energies to try to get anyone to do anything. All the responsibility and much of the actual labor has devolved upon the missionaries. Of course, many of our best men fled to Russia, and among those who are left there are few leaders. There are some notable exceptions, though, both here and at the College—e.g., Jacob David, who without missionary assistance has charge of eight hundred and fifty refugees and is doing finely. Another, a young shopkeeper, has had charge of the weighing and distribution of bread, with much of the buying, from the beginning. He has done the work with surprising efficiency and self-devotion. Bands of young men have been ready, day after day, for distributing bread. The nights have been divided into three watches, and groups of men have taken their turns in acting as watchmen. Mr. Nisan, who has charge of the English Mission yard, one night found the watchmen asleep, so the next day they were tied to trees, and a placard placed over them with the inscription: "Unfaithful Watchmen," as a warning to others. Guarding the streams is a very necessary and a very difficult task. Mr. McDowell finds it extremely hard to get anyone among the hundreds of Syrians here who can be trusted to oversee such work, or who can be kept on a job longer than an hour or so at a time.

We are urging some now to return to their homes. Many are so afraid, and we cannot give them assurance of safety. Some Kurds have gone, but many are still about. The people come to the individual missionaries and beg for just one small room for their families, each one with his own special plea. When we tell them the greatest danger for them just now is to remain crowded in such narrow bounds, it makes little or no appeal to them. They are nine-tenths fatalists any way, and think that it all depends upon the will of Allah. They say: "Let us die by the hand of God and not of the Kurds."

We have been having unusually fine weather; only two bad days, and they were not cold. A Mohammedan was heard to say: "Do you see how God loves these Christians? Who ever saw such weather in the middle of winter?"

Dr. Shedd is the representative of our station before the Government; he and Dr. Packard have had that end of the work, daily pleading before Persian and Osmanli authorities for the Christian population. It was told us that a prominent Moslem had said: "Dr. Shedd is the best Christian in the city! Just see how he comes every day through the deep mud to plead for those people!"

### **Wednesday, 20th January**

A few people from the city went to their homes, and our hopes began to rise; but yesterday and to-day others came in from the Nazlu river and from Tchargousha. Thirty-six dead were carried to the trench in Mart Maryam [St. Mary] churchyard yesterday; the larger part of them were children.

Lucy, daughter of Kasha (preacher) David of Ardishai, came in yesterday with her baby from Gulpashan, where they had been refugees for some time, living in terror of Kurds by day and night. They also feared the Moslem neighbors and the Turkish guards sent in to protect the village. Her own village was Tchargoueha. In terror the people fled to the roofs as the village was surrounded by Kurds, and there was no avenue of escape. The Kurds came up on to the roofs and commanded the people to go down. Lucy, with one Kurd below her on the ladder and two above her, her baby on her back, got down. In the yard she saw her younger sister, Sherin, a pretty girl of about fifteen, being dragged away by a Kurd. She was imploring Lucy to save her, but Lucy was helpless. When she was telling me this with tears and sobs, she said: "Every night, when I try to sleep, I hear her entreaties, 'Oh, Lucy, I'll be your sacrifice. Save me, Lucy!' I called to her, 'Pull your head-kerchief over your face; don't look into their faces.' She tried to conceal her face, and daubed it with mud, but she has such beautiful dark eyes and rosy cheeks! The Kurds grabbed the young women and girls, peering into their faces, till each one found a pretty one for himself, then dragged her away. If they had only killed my sister we could say 'She is dead, like many another—it is finished' but that she should be in the hands of a Kurd—we cannot bear it!" Some of these captives have been recovered, but there was no word of Sherin.

### **Saturday, 23rd January**

Yesterday we counted three thousand three hundred in the church, and many have gone out, so there must have been four thousand people there these last two weeks. Is it any wonder that children are dying by the score? Morning and afternoon there are burials; at other times the bodies are collected and laid in a room near the gate. To-day Mr. McDowell succeeded after long efforts in getting a cart for scavenger work. It came but one day. We have not been able to get even donkeys, except five or six. The scavengers would not come into the yards of Christians for such work, even though Mr. McDowell offered to pay well.

We cannot open our back windows, the stench is too dreadful. I suppose the mere mention of such things is quite shocking even to read; but we have been living in such surroundings for nearly three weeks, and see only a little light ahead. We are hoping we can distribute some of the mountain refugees in empty houses here in Mart Maryam and the Christian quarter.

Many Moslems who pretended to accept food and goods of Christians for safe keeping, are now claiming them as their own. One of our preachers, after having been plundered of practically everything by his Moslem neighbors, was received as a refugee into one of their houses and was fed from his own dishes, of his own food, and put to sleep in his own bed. Dr. Packard has been gone for several days to the Nazlu villages, to gather together the remnants of the people scattered in Moslem villages, or in hiding, and to see if it be possible to put them into a few of their own places again. Most of the Kurds have left, but the Syrians are unarmed, and, just as from the beginning, their Moslem neighbors are their greatest enemies. If it isn't a Jihad (Holy War), it is very near it. It must have been planned beforehand, for there has been concerted action from one end of the plain to the other, though here and there some Moslems have been friendly throughout, have done many kindly deeds and saved many lives.

### **Later**

Just at this joint we had an interesting diversion. A band of Turkish soldiers came into our yard and said they wanted to search our premises for wounded Russian soldiers. They searched the houses of the Allens, the Mullers, and our house; then the schools and all outside buildings and storehouses, even to the smallest closets. You might have thought they were searching for a lost hair from Osman's beard! I have an idea they thought we were concealing arms or ammunition, though ten days ago we collected all we could find anywhere among the people, and gave them up to the Osmanli commander. As we had nothing hidden, of course we had nothing to fear, though some of the people were scared. A dozen times a day I pray "Oh, Lord, how long?" All the first days it seemed as if it must be a horrible dream from which I would awake; but it has become a three weeks' reality, with little hope of an end dawning. It looks as if our long night might stretch out till the dawn of peace in Europe. And for these things who shall answer, if not the Powers of Europe? We have read that America has done so much for the sufferers in Europe; surely they will not be too poor to help this little corner of misery, with its twenty-five or thirty thousand sufferers, and with absolutely no one on earth to look to but the American Mission! For months we have not been permitted to write of conditions here, and now we are entirely shut off from the world, even from Tabriz. Anything we write "must be in French, just to say we are well."

Our last word from Tabriz, the nearest mission station and residence of the American Consul, was written on the 31st December, and this is the 23rd January.

**Sunday, 24th January**

The fourth Sunday, but no Sabbath. To-day nearly all the people were taken out of the church and distributed among the empty houses near the Russian Mission and in the old church. I went with some of the young men who are helping with the distribution of the bread to count the people in each place. In one house there were two hundred and fifty; these are all mountaineers. We give to each one sheet or loaf of bread per day; about ten ounces. Not very extravagant feeding, you see!

**Tuesday, 26th January**

On Sunday a Jew brought us word from Usknuk that Kasha David's daughter, Sherin, is there in the house of a Kurd, and that every effort is being made by gifts, persuasion and threats, to make her turn Mohammedan, but that she always answers "You may kill me, but I will never deny my faith." We are making plans to try to get her back. Dr. Packard reported on his return from the Nazlu villages that in one place practically the whole population has become Moslem and have given up their church to be a mosque, while some even cursed their former faith.

**Wednesday, 27th January**

Miss Lamme and I went to-day to the Jewish quarters to look up Syrian refugees there. We found them in large numbers in the Jewish houses, where they had been kept and in some cases fed. Yesterday the French Mission sent away from their yards two hundred and fifty or more persons, who first went to the Governor. He telephoned to Dr. Shedd, and we had to receive them. They were put into Dr. Israel's house in Dilgusha, outside the city walls. All the houses there have been completely plundered; many have been robbed of doors and windows. No one thinks of returning to homes there, but a great many have returned to Mart Maryam.

**Later**

Everywhere about the yards people are basking in the wonderful sunshine, which is more like April than January. The common sight everywhere is the everlasting hunt for vermin, friends and neighbors graciously assisting one another. I suppose it is a vulgar subject to mention, but "we've got 'em" and must go on living in hourly contact with thousands of others who swarm with them.

**Friday, 5th February**

We can't complain of the monotony of life, for we never know what will happen next. On Tuesday morning I had a wedding in my room here. The boy and girl were simple villagers. He had gone to Russia and brought back a little money, with some foreign clothes. Then his folks began to look round for a wife for him. He was betrothed several months ago to Anna of Ardishai, and, according to custom, gave her the money to buy her trousseau. For several weeks she had been sewing, until at last the wonderful silk dress, white silk headkerchief, veil and all the necessaries, were ready. The wedding was fixed for the Syrian New Year; but the Kurds came and carried off wedding clothes and everything else in the house. They all fled here, and were married in the old, dirty garments they were wearing when they ran for their lives, for this was a month ago. In the flight the bride's mother was lost, probably killed, as nothing has been heard of her since. Their only present was a little tea and sugar that I tied up in a kerchief and gave to the bride, that they might invite a few friends to drink tea instead of eating the dinner they had intended giving.

There are a great many people who have been accustomed to good living heretofore, but for months have had no cooked food, so I invited a number of these to dinner on Wednesday. We had a meat stew, bread, cheese, pickles and tea, all they could eat. There were thirty-five for dinner, and twenty for supper. There was enough left over to feed fifty or more poor and sick ones outside. The whole thing cost about four dollars and fed a hundred people. We spread long cloths on the parlour floor and ate with wooden spoons from enamel plates borrowed for the occasion from the school. The matron and school-girls did the cooking and serving.

But for our next-door neighbors the scene quickly changed again from weddings and dinners to one of terror and flight by night. The house of Dr. Lokman adjoins ours, and the roofs are continuous. For several days there had been rumors that their house would be plundered by the Turkish authorities, and they had not dared to undress and go to bed in peace, but on Wednesday they felt more safe and went to bed early. I myself had gone to bed, but not to sleep. Just before eleven o'clock I heard loud knocking on their gate, and then a rapid trampling of feet on the roof over my room. Pretty soon there was quite a commotion in our front yard. I jumped up, and saw in the yard a dozen or more Turkish soldiers, who entered through our front door and went up to the roof through our halls. I dressed as quickly as I could and went to Miss Coan's room on the roof, to find that some of the women from Dr. Lokman's family were already there. In a few minutes the rest of the women and children from there climbed the wall or slid from the roof on to our balcony, and I let them in through the window into our parlour. They were crying and frightened nearly to death, but kept quiet. The Turks searched the house, but took nothing, saying they had come to take evil men, not things. They came back through our house again. The orders have been in our yard that

the gate should never be opened at night but by one of the gentlemen; so, when they first knocked, the guard came and called Mr. Allen. He let them in and went with them to Dr. Lokman's house. In the meantime, a Syrian had aroused Mr. Müller, and when he tried to get out of his front door he found a Turk guarding it. He tried to push out, saying that he was the master of the house, but the Turk struck him and refused to let him pass. When the gang returned from our neighbors', they insisted on searching Mr. Müller's house, even going into the bedroom where Mrs. Müller was in bed and Ruth was sick. Meanwhile a second band came and pounded on our gate, but our guards had run away, and finally one of the men climbed a telephone pole to the roof, got down inside and opened the gate. The officer tied up the Persian guards as a punishment for not opening the gate. Afterwards they went into the Allen house and even asked to have the piano played. It is maddening to have our premises and houses invaded in this way, and by such a lot, but we are helpless, and, for the sake of what we may be able to do for the safety of the people, our gentlemen have to smile and try to turn away their wrath with soft words, even though they are threatened and called liars by the representatives of the invading Government. I don't believe the Mission in the seventy-five years and more of its existence has ever been placed in so difficult and humiliating a position.

Still the ghastly procession of the dead marches on. Between seven and eight hundred have died so far. A great many are able to get plain wooden coffins for their dead now, but the great mass are just dropped into the great trench of rotting humanity. As I stand at my window in the morning I see one after another of the little bodies carried by, wrapped mostly in a ragged piece of patch-work; and the condition of the living is more pitiful than that of the dead—hungry, ragged, dirty, sick, cold, wet, swarming with vermin—thousands of them! Not for all the wealth of all the rulers of Europe would I bear for one hour their responsibility for the suffering and misery of this one little corner of the world alone. A helpless, unarmed Christian community turned over to the sword and the passion of Islam!

This morning my attention was called to a girl of twelve, who was too sick to be kept any longer in a room with other people. A young Syrian woman, who was helping with the sick, wanted to put her into that closet under the stairway from which none ever come out alive. I said: "She will die in there." She replied: "Of course she will die, but we shall have to find a place for her until she does." We put her there temporarily until we found a small room where there were only twenty. These we distributed among other crowded rooms, brought Marganeta there, laid her on some matting and covered her with an old carpet. Poor child, she has a sweet face, but life has treated her cruelly.

Dysentery has been bad for a long time, and when the sick get helpless and their condition offensive, it is almost impossible to get anyone to care for them unless they have near relatives. Dysentery and measles have both been epidemic for a long time, and nearly all deaths are directly due to one or both of these diseases.

We had a real respectable funeral in the front yard this afternoon. A good old woman from Digala died, and her pastor had a service for her. This is only the second real funeral service I have seen, though a preacher is always present at the two burials daily, and conducts a service at the cemetery.

### **Friday, 12th February**

To-day we have begun a new method of giving out bread. We have printed forms, which we fill in and ask the heads of families to sign, promising to pay us later for the bread. All day thousands have been crowding the big tent in the yard, where a number of young men have been filling in and giving out these tickets for bread. The problem is a big one. Undoubtedly some could find bread who are taking it free, but we cannot decide most of the cases. Then we are spending thousands of borrowed money, and as yet no response to our cablegram sent long ago to America! The numbers asking for bread are increasing daily, but if we should refuse it, hundreds would die of starvation.

Again the yards are wet and muddy from melting snow. The last two days have been very hard for the thousands without fuel and with very little clothing. One of the verses that helps to keep my faith steady these days is: "He that spared not His own Son."

The death-rate has been considerably reduced; for two weeks or more it averaged over thirty a day. Mr. Allen is off on a tour to the villages of the upper Nazlu river, to see what is left there, and to give help or encouragement to anyone who may be left. A while ago when Mr. Allen visited the villages on the Baranduz, one of our Bible Women told him of a certain spot she wished him to visit. She lived in Kurtapa, and as she was about to flee with a bag containing nine tomans of money, the robbers appeared at the door. She quickly threw the bag down beside a broken earthen tub and the thieves did not see it. Mr. Allen went to that village, found the room and the broken tub with the bag of money beside it, and brought the money to its owner.

Last week, the Shahbanda or Turkish Consul, who is now the chief authority, demanded six thousand tomans of the Syrians. With great trouble this was partly collected and partly borrowed by the help of the Sirdar (Persian Governor), who demanded six hundred more for his share. The Shahbanda promised that, if this were given, the shops and houses of the

Syrians in the city would not be disturbed. It remains to be seen how much his word is worth.

To-morrow completes six weeks of this siege and semi-siege condition. We keep on praying, but see no signs of deliverance. We are shut off from the world, and thousands are held in this bondage by a few hundred Osmanli troops and a few wandering Kurds. I realize now that Persia is dead—or worse; she has no manhood nor moral character left.

**Wednesday, 17th February**

A few days ago the Turkish Consul arrested all the men at the French Mission. After some examination, a hundred were sent away, leaving about sixty-three at the Consulate. A gallows with seven nooses was erected at the “Kurdish Gate” of the city, the one near us, and on Sunday the ropes were put in place. The people here on Sunday were very badly scared. The women of the men under arrest came and wept and besought Dr. Shedd to do something, but he could do nothing. That evening the people gathered in the church for prayer, and continued praying until midnight. Each night since similar meetings have been held. As yet no one has been hanged, but the Turkish Consul is demanding money for their release. The second day after the arrest of these people, a Turkish soldier was sent to us to ask us to send bread for the prisoners, and we have been feeding them ever since. When their women-folk went to see them they were charged two krans (nine pence) admission. It has been reported that the prisoners have been tortured in various ways known to the Turks, in order to extort money from their families. A toman is about four shillings. The Turkish Consul has demanded the ten thousand toman of English bank money committed to us when the bankers fled. The matter has been referred to our Consul in Tabriz. If it should have to be surrendered, we should be in straits, for that is all we have to buy bread with for these thousands of hungry people. Weeks ago we appealed to America, both to the Red Cross and to our Board, but there is no reply.

It was reported to me that there were refugees here who had stores of flour, meat, butter, etc., and yet were taking bread from us, so yesterday I made an investigation and found small quantities; but if the whole were sold, it would not amount to twenty dollars, and the owners would be reduced to nothing but dry bread, and, though this might do for a limited time, they cannot “live by bread alone” week after week. Undoubtedly this terrible epidemic of dysentery which has carried off hundreds is due largely to lack of proper food and want of variety of food. As I made the rounds of our own yards yesterday and visited the people herded together in one of the dark storerooms of our Persian Girls' School, it seemed to me that their condition of cold, hunger, filth and sickness was about as miserable as they could

get in this world. One great difference that was apparent in all the rooms was the absence of small children, hundreds having died during these last months.

The evangelistic work is now well organized, and everywhere there are at least daily meetings for everyone. The women workers under Miss Lamme visit outside places. Mr. McDowell, with native women, also visits outside places where there are large numbers of refugees herded together. Mr. McDowell tries to keep the preachers at work, too.

Last week a group of one hundred and fifty or more mountaineers who are staying at Sengar, two or three miles from the city came down with one of Kurdu's men, asking us to feed them. They said that heretofore they had been provided for by Kurdu, a Kurdish chief, for whom they had been working, caring away for him the plunder he had collected here, and that now he was leaving and we must feed them. We put them off several times, but finally accepted the additional burden. Every one who gets tired of his job of charity or responsibility throws it upon us. There seems no end, and this is the seventh week.

#### **Thursday, 18th February**

Yesterday afternoon I went out to the College compound for the first time since Christmas. We had to drive under the gallows at the city gate. It creates rather unpleasant feelings to think that perhaps some of our friends may be suspended there.

Our Mission is being treated with more consideration than at first, and we are hoping that perhaps the Turkish Consul has heard from Constantinople, and that our own Government has been exerting influence at Berlin and Constantinople. For weeks we have had no word from the outside world; but we "rest in Jehovah and wait patiently for Him."

#### **Friday, 19th February**

This has been a snowy day again. The people have been making it a day of fasting and prayer—as if every day were not a fast day!

#### **Saturday, 20th February**

All day negotiations have been going on in regard to the English bank money. When Dr. Shedd and Dr. Packard were called to the Turkish Consulate, they found there the former Urmia Consul, who had fled from here last autumn when war between Russia and Turkey was first declared. He had gone south to Soujboulak. It looks as if he were perhaps fleeing now in this direction, which would mean that the Russians were in Soujboulak; we have heard this report. It is being reported that the Kurds were making preparations to-day for leaving here. It may be that the Consul's haste to get this money is another evidence that he is expecting to leave soon. He told the gentlemen today that he thought that, as Americans,

they ought to make a contribution toward the cause of Turkey. They have felt that a compromise on the ten thousand is the best way out, and suggested that he take two thousand; but he refused to take less than five thousand, and promised that he would not take it before to-morrow, so if something does not develop before to-morrow we shall probably be the poorer by that amount. We are hoping that it may be taken without any show of force or violence. Of course, we cannot make any resistance.

To-day we finished going over all the bread tickets, arranging the names according to villages. Then we called in responsible men from each village and went over the lists, to find out those who would be able to help themselves soon, and those who had reported more members of families than they have. I am sorry to say that we found scores who were cheating in various ways, and now we have to get hold of all of them—a big business for some days to come. We are distributing 14,000-15,000 loaves of about ten and a half ounces each day; but there are so many getting more than a loaf each that there are probably not more than eleven thousand persons receiving. An epidemic of typhoid has broken out at the College among the refugees—twenty-seven cases. To-day, even in the midst of our troubles, the Evangelistic Board met to consider a reorganization of the work. When the people are able to return to the villages, they will probably have to settle temporarily in a few of the larger ones.

### **Sunday, 21st February**

To-day there are three or four services in the church. This morning it was packed for a communion service and many were turned away. Another communion service is arranged for this afternoon, and then again next Sunday, to give an opportunity for all communicants.

### **Tuesday, 23rd February**

Last night one of the most terrible things that has yet happened occurred. In the evening ten or a dozen of the prisoners from the French Mission, taken ten days or more ago by the Turkish Consul, were discharged, and we all felt that probably the rest would soon be set free, as there was no special charge against them. But this morning five men, two of them Moslems, were found hanging from the gallows at the Kurdish Gate, and forty-eight others were shot beyond the Tcharbash Gate. No one has dared to go out yet and get the bodies, though Dr. Shedd has asked permission of the Turkish Consul. For two days we had felt so much more hopeful, but to-day a terrible fear has fallen on the people. There is much silent weeping, but little violent demonstration, though the mothers, wives and families of the murdered men are here. The question in everybody's mind is: "What will the Turks do next?" Forty or fifty shots were distinctly heard in the night between one and two o'clock, but no one guessed what they meant. We had begun yesterday to take their bread-tickets away from a

few of the people to try to force them to go to their villages or find money in some way to provide for themselves; but now they are too frightened to leave and everything is set back again. Two or three days ago the Turks took some things from the French Mission property here, carpets, etc., and we hear that they are plundering more to-day. On Sunday we received a card from Tabriz saying that everything was quiet there, that £1,000 relief had been received, and that Mr. Labaree was going to the Caucasus to relieve the refugees who had fled from Urmia to Russia.

### **Wednesday, 24th February**

The French missionaries and the nine nuns were very much alarmed for their personal safety. They asked that one of our men should go there and put up an American flag; but, of course, we could not do that. Yesterday the Turkish Consul sent word that if we wanted the bodies of the three Christians hanging at the gate, we had permission to take them. Mr. McDowell and Mr. Allen went with some Syrians, took down the bodies, and buried them. There has been a little more disorder than usual, and the people are terrified again. I have had to give back many of the bread tickets that we had collected. There are hundreds of people who have fields and vineyards, but who cannot borrow a dollar. These tickets are really promissory notes which they have signed, promising to pay later, but we need cash now and our bread queue does not decrease—rather, increases. I wonder what a trained Red Cross worker would do with a mob that will not stand in line or stay where you put them; who, when you go over the case and give the answer, refuse to take it, but stand about and weep briny tears by the hour. They have no sense of honor, don't know how to tell the truth, can't tell the same story twice, and do not know much about anything except that their stomachs are empty. They try to get bread under the names of the dead, and when accused of evading the truth, will declare in the most injured tones: "We wouldn't lie." There is much that would be funny in these investigations if it did not get monotonous.

### **Saturday, 27th February**

When Mr. McDowell returned from the burial of those shot on Jewish Hill, he reported that they had found forty bodies and identified all but five or six. On Wednesday night, a still more horrible deed was committed at Gulpashan. This village and Iriawa had been shielded, partly through the efforts of a German; but on Wednesday night a band of Persian volunteers, arriving from Salamas or beyond, went there, took fifty men, and, according to reports, shot them in the graveyard near by. They then plundered the village, took girls and young women, outraged them, and acted in general as one might expect Satan to do when turned loose. The horror and sadness of everything has been brought nearer to us by the death of Mlle. Madelaine Perrochet, a young Swiss girl who came with the Coans four months ago to teach the missionary children. She was only twenty-one, so bright, so pretty,

that we had all learned to love her dearly. She spoke English well, and, of course, French and German. She died on Thursday, after dinner, and yesterday (Friday) we had the funeral service in Dr. Coan's living room, led by Mr. McDowell. We could not take her out to our little cemetery at Seir, so she was buried in Dr. Coan's garden, just at the right of the entrance to the long grape-arbor. In his prayer Mr. McDowell used the words: "We are not only walking in the valley of the shadow of death, but we are dwelling there in these weeks." Just now two of the young Syrians who are the chief men in helping with the bread came in and told me that they had received warning secretly that they had better leave here and hide with some friendly Moslems, as the Turkish Consul is going to take out all the young men from our yards and other places in the city and kill them—wipe them out." I cannot believe that it can be true, but we cannot know. If they enter our yards by force and murder men, then there is no further safety for any of us. As one of these young men said just now: "Let us commit everything into the hands of God, and then wait and be ready for whatever comes." Typhus is raging at the College. Yesterday there were seventy cases at the College compound, and over a hundred others on diet, with the probability of a large part of them developing typhoid. It is impossible to take care of so many cases or feed them properly under such conditions. At the hospital they are buying all the milk and mesta (matzoun) they can get. Mrs. Cochran has had charge of the feeding there, as well as doing much else, and yesterday she went to bed; to-day there are symptoms of typhoid. Mrs. Coan and Miss Coan took care of Mlle. Perrochet, and the last week or two had the help of a Syrian woman who has had a nurse's course in America, Miss George. She has proved very efficient and a great help and comfort.

### **Saturday Night**

There was a great deal of anxiety lest something should happen here; but we woke on Sunday morning in safety and saw a rainbow in the northern sky, though there was no rain. The reports of Mr. Allen from Gulpashan were too black to be written. The soldiers sent out by the Consul to protect the villages against Kurds and Moslem looters left unviolated hardly a woman or girl of those remaining in the village, and a number of girls were carried off. It seemed quite apparent that they understood that the whole business of protecting was to be a farce. When on Sunday morning Mr. Allen returned and wanted to bring people with him, he was not permitted. Those who had been murdered in the cemetery a few nights previously had been buried under a few inches of earth, and when he wanted to have them uncovered to identify them and bury them deeper, he was refused. The soldiers had made them all sit down on the ground and then shot at them. They then looked them over, and any who were found to be breathing were shot the second time. The only reason for all this was that they bore the name of "Christian." What has the Christian world to say? Mr.

McDowell went to Iriawa and found similar conditions there. We were very glad to see him and Mr. Allen safely back, for they undoubtedly were in jeopardy themselves and were treated insolently by the soldiers. Mrs. Cochran is better, and we feel now that she will not have typhoid. It is a tremendous relief. Only seven died here in this quarter yesterday. The death list here has passed the thousand mark, and, including the Boys' School yard and the College, fifteen hundred. All the past week three young men and myself have been kept busy all the morning and into the middle of the afternoon examining bread tickets, hearing pleas, and giving out new tickets as the new refugees have come in. The last several days we have purchased, without counting the College, nearly ten thousand pounds of bread daily.

#### **Friday, 5th March**

Mrs. Cochran has typhoid, but so far in a light form. Mrs. Coan and Miss Coan are taking on her work as best they can, and caring for her too, with the help of the Syrian nurse, Miss George. Dr. Packard has been in bed two or three days, but we do not know if it is typhoid or not. Mr. Allen went to Gulpashan with permission from the Turkish Consul, to bury those who had been murdered. He found fifty bodies. When he came back, a crowd of sixty-four, mostly women and girls, came with him. Our yards and rooms, including the church, are crowded again, but with cleaner people. Most of the mountaineers are out. Two families of mountaineers who are friendly with the Kurds started out yesterday for their homes. It is spring now, and time for ploughing and sowing, and unless the people can soon get to their villages there will be a dearth of wheat and other grain next year. There are repeated reports of the approach of the Russian army, and some Germans here have said that they were soon expecting to go on a journey. If the Turks should have to flee, there is no telling what they might do before going; but we do not dare to let our hopes of deliverance rise, for it makes the long wait harder. A few days ago the ex-Turkish Consul sent word that if there were any girls held captive that we wanted to get, he would find them for us. That looks as if there had been a quarrel—or perhaps it is a trick to trip us into being unwise. It takes the wisdom of the serpent as well as the simplicity of the dove!

#### **Saturday, 6th March**

Dr. Packard has developed typhoid. There is only Mrs. Packard to take care of him, and she is far from strong, and there are four lively boys to care for and keep out of mischief and danger. Since Mlle.'s death, it leaves the children's education on the mothers' shoulders, and Mrs. Packard has been trying to take the bulk of it. This morning I made out the second month's report of the bread funds which have passed through my hands. So far we have spent approximately £1,500. Over £120 has been collected in sales, which leaves nearly £1,400 debt for us. This does not include College or Boys'-School yard. All of this has been

spent on dry bread alone, two hundred and twenty-three and a half tons, all brought in on the backs of carriers. About one hundred and fifty pounds is a man's load. This month we have distributed four and a quarter tons a day.

### **Evening**

There is considerable fear to-night among the Christians that the Turks may strike a blow before they go. We have twenty-five extra guards of Persian soldiers. All day Moslem villagers have been fleeing to the city in fear of what the Russians may do when they come. We do not know how near they are, for we have no means of communication. It would seem strange to lie down in quiet and peace, knowing that all fear and terror to these poor people were passed.

### **Sunday, 7th March**

Dr. Packard is very sick with typhoid; yesterday his temperature was 105. He seems quieter to-day. Dr. Pera, former hospital assistant, has promised to take care of him every day from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Mrs. Packard will be night-nurse. Mrs. Cochran seems to be getting along quietly. Thirty cases of typhoid are reported in one of the houses in the suburbs, which a few days ago we filled up with refugees brought from the College compound. They probably brought the germ with them. The only reason it is not raging here is the eternal vigilance of Mr. McDowell in looking after sanitary conditions and the watercourses. He has frequently to appeal to the Governor to get donkeys for carrying off refuse, though he pays well. As the church is full of refugees, two meetings are held daily in the Seminary yard. Kasha Moshi of Geogtapa makes a fine out-door preacher. Just now, as I came from dinner, a woman met me, leading a little girl by the hand, and in her most wheedling tones tried to present her to me as a gift, saying she was her great-grandchild. I laughed and said I already had one hundred such gifts. She felt that I was not properly appreciative. There are scores of people who would like to dump their responsibilities under these conditions. We have had a number of cases of relatives deserting old and helpless women and leaving them for us to care for until they died.

### **Monday, 8th March**

Yesterday there was general fasting and prayer until noon for Dr. Packard's and Mrs. Cochran's recovery. There is a beginning of what we hope may be a deep and permanent spiritual awakening. In such times one lives in the presence of eternal realities, and Heaven seems quite near. It is marvelous how the Word of God speaks to us in every condition and experience through which we pass.

### **Tuesday, 9th March**

On Sunday a Mohammedan orator made a speech in a garden in Dilgusha to a crowd of several thousand people, practically all Moslems. He said that Italy and Persia had joined in the alliance with Germany, Austria and Turkey, and, of course, are in the way of victory. America had taken no part in this war, but is doing good all over the world without regard to race or religion, caring for the sick and wounded, feeding the hungry and befriending the needy. The American missionaries here, he said, have done and are doing this, and everyone should honor them and stand up for them. At this there was great applause. Last night a body of askars entered the house of Dr. Lokman, whose yard adjoins ours, and demanded Mar Elia, a Russian Bishop, who has been in hiding these last weeks. They didn't find him, but took about forty pounds' worth of money and jewelry and frightened the people nearly to death. Our watch-man called Mr. McDowell and Mr. Allen and they tried to go over to the help of the women. Mr. McDowell climbed the ladder from the side to go over into their yard, but at the top met a gun in the hands of an askar, who demanded his retreat. Mr. McDowell, out of respect for the gun, didn't insist on having his way. That yard is not in our hands and we have no flag there, so, of course, we couldn't do anything. This has scared the people again. This morning one woman brought me some jewelry and papers to keep for her. She had been in America and only returned last spring, and was bewailing her stupidity in returning. She says she is only waiting for a way to open for her to go back, never to return. Hundreds are saying the same thing, and I think there will be a large emigration to America when the way opens. I wouldn't mind emigrating myself for a while!

### **Friday, 12th March**

We cannot complain of the monotony of life for these last two or three days. It was on Monday night that the Turks tried to get the Bishop, but he escaped over the church roof. The next afternoon they suddenly appeared again, and this time found him hiding on the church roof behind a parapet. He tried to get down an old ladder standing by the wall, but the askar who was at the other end of the roof raised his gun and told him he would shoot if he attempted to run, so he was captured. It is said that he had two thousand tomans in gold and Russian paper money on his person. This, of course, was taken.

The most unfortunate incident of that capture was the arrest at the same time of Dr. Lokman. At Mr. McDowell's request, Dr. Lokman (Syrian) had gone over the wall into his house to find out if there were any typhoid cases there, and was caught by the askars. Our mission at once began to make efforts to secure their release. The Turkish Consul demanded £200 for Dr. Lokman and £2,000 for the Bishop. In the evening he sent word that unless they were immediately redeemed they would be shot at midnight. He ordered the Persian Governor to send eight men to assist at the shooting. In the meantime they had gotten hold of another man or two. When word came about Dr. Lokman there was some

hustling to find the money. "Brides" (young married women) were asked to give up the gold pieces from their dowry, and in a short time the £200 was sent. When Dr. Lokman was notified of his release he was sleeping soundly without any realization of the doom hanging over him. When he reached our yards and his family and friends congratulated him, he felt like one raised from the dead. Just as soon as he heard that the others were still in danger, he said: "Well, we must try to do something to release them." He is one of the most prominent Syrians here and influential with the Persian Government. From the first day of these troubles he has been on hand to help in governmental affairs in every way possible. All day yesterday efforts were being made to get money to redeem the others. These last two nights our yards have been overflowing with people from the Christian quarter here, and already the Moslems from the villages are crowding into the city for fear of the Russians. As one of our bakers said yesterday: "The city gates cannot let them in fast enough." The city is in a panic for fear of what the Russians will do to the Moslems when they arrive. Heaven grant that they will act in the spirit of Christ and not of Mohammed! Everywhere the Moslems are now anxious to show themselves friends of Christians. David gives expression to my sentiments concerning the wicked in Ps. 59. The Germans, I understand, have already left, except one of the leaders, and he is ready to go in haste. Yesterday I had to stay in bed with a headache, and it seemed to me that the very air was vibrating with expectation and excitement. Ten thousand times a day the petition arises, "O Lord, deliver us." Ten weeks to-morrow. It seems impossible to hold out much longer. "O Lord, deliver us from the hand of the wicked." Dr. Packard is still quite sick. Mrs. Cochran seems to be getting along slowly. They have so many cases of typhoid at the College that they have put up the big tent in the School yard there for a hospital.

### **Tuesday, 16th March**

To-day our hearts are heavy and sorrowful. Dr. Packard is very sick indeed, and it seems now as if Miss Coan has typhoid or typhus, whichever this sickness is. Mrs. Cochran appears to be getting along all right. We want Dr. Vanneman from Tabriz, but there seems to be no way to get a message through to him. Dr. Shedd asked the Turkish Consul to help us get a messenger through, but he said he couldn't. The Russians are between Urmia and Tabriz. We have twenty-five or thirty cases of typhoid here in this compound. Mr. McDowell is trying to empty a few rooms to put the sick in, but it is very difficult. Last night there was great fear again in Mart Maryam lest the new arrivals might devise some new evil for them, and many wanted to crowd into our yard, but every place is full. We are feeding 15,000 persons daily, one loaf each. A note by secret messenger came from Dr. Vanneman a few days ago, saying that they had received £1,200 for relief. This means a great deal, but it will pay only a third of the debt we already have. The Turks still hold Shamasha Lazar and Mar Elia (Bishop) for a big ransom. Our funds are getting low, and Mr. Müller has borrowed

some money at 24 per cent interest. Last week our hopes of deliverance were high, but hope so long deferred makes the heart grow faint. Mr. McDowell was trying to get some sick people out of the big school-room when he saw a tired and weary woman, with a baby in her arms, sitting in one of the seats, and said to her: "Where do you stay?" She said: "Just here." "How long have you been here?" "Since the beginning (two months)," she replied. "How do you sleep at night?" "I lay the baby on the desk in front of me, and I have the back to lean against. This is a very good place. Thank you very much."

#### **Thursday, 18th March**

It is such a relief to have Dr. Packard come to himself again, though he is very weak. Miss Coan's fever still continues, and Miss Lamme has gone to the College to help there. This morning Mr. McDowell is down with fever, but we hope it is only malaria. Shamasha Lazar, who has been a prisoner for a week at the Turkish Consulate, was released on payment of one thousand tomans cash on the condition that he finds the other £400 within two days.

If there were a mail or some other way open to Tabriz, we could sell orders on Dr. Vanneman, our Mission Treasurer in Tabriz, but the bankers will not buy such orders now because they can't dispose of them until a way to Tabriz is opened. The day before yesterday we tried to make a bargain with our twenty or more Mohammedan bakers, who are supplying us with about six tons of bread daily, to let us have it on twenty days' credit. They agreed to do it on condition that at the end of ten days we would pay half; but after they left here they agreed among themselves that they would not deliver bread yesterday, though they didn't tell us. In the morning, when we found that no bread was coming, we sent out and got other bakers to deliver for cash. When our regular bakers found we were buying elsewhere, they came back, and after a long discussion they promised to deliver for twenty days, if we would pay half every five days. So it stands; we shall see if they stick to their bargain. Fortunately, yesterday we had half a day's supply on hand, and managed to buy enough to finish out. There is a cash famine, and anyone who has any money wants to hold on to it in such uncertain times. This morning, a little after five, we were aroused by shouts and a commotion near by. The askars with their officers had entered the English mission yard by climbing a ladder from the street over the wall into the yard of a Mr. Neesan, who is a Syrian, but an English citizen. The watchman gave the alarm, and Mr. Müller and Mr. Allen were soon on the spot. Of course they couldn't do anything but reassure the women. Eight or ten men were arrested and taken away, probably to be held for ransom. That property has been connected with ours from the beginning of these troubles, and the American flag has been over the entrance. Mr. Allen said to the officer: "You don't intend to respect the American flag?" He replied: "The Turkish flag is also there." (It is under the American flag.) This makes one feel doubtful for the safety of our own yards. It is wonderful how quiet these

thousands of people can keep while such things are going on. A number of women and girls sleep in the parlour adjoining my room, and I opened the door and told them not to leave the room. They said: "No, we are only dressing" but it was evident that they were trembling with fear; and this is the state we have lived in for eleven weeks.

One of the most pitiful objects of humanity that I have ever yet seen came into the room to ask for a ticket—a boy of about twelve or fourteen, wasted to a mummy-like skeleton by hunger and sickness, so weak that he could hardly stand or speak, unbathed for these many months. I asked where he had been staying. He said: "In the school-room."

The Turks have demanded ten thousand suits of shirts and pyjamas for the army. Eight thousand were demanded from the Moslem women, and two thousand from the Christian or Syrian women. As the latter are practically all here with us and in the Christian quarter, it fell upon the missionaries to take the responsibility, so Miss Schoebel took charge. So far fifty-five bolts of calico have been sent; Miss Schoebel gave out the material to responsible women, and they in turn found others to help with the sewing (mostly by hand) and about eight hundred of the shirts are ready. How would you like to sit down and make clothes for Turks and Kurds who had robbed you, burned your homes, murdered your husbands, brothers, and fathers, dishonored your women, and carried your girls into captivity?

### **Saturday, 20th March**

The prisoners taken from the English Mission yards by the Turks were kept about twenty-four hours, examined, and to the great and unexpected joy of everyone were set free without ransom. The Turks said they had heard that a Russian spy was being kept in that yard, and when they found no evidence of this, they set the men free. Another thing may have had something to do with it. The night before last several Turkish soldiers who were sick with typhoid went to the College compound. When informed that there was absolutely no place for them they returned to the Consulate, which is in the former Russian Mission. The Shahbanda then sent for Dr. Shedd. It was after nightfall and we didn't know why he was sent for, but were fearful lest another blow might be about to fall upon us. But he asked him if we would be willing to care for their sick, a dozen or more, who have typhoid. He was told that there was no room in the hospital or College building adjoining, which are already crowded full of sick, but that we would do what we could. This probably had something to do with the dismissal of the prisoners. For two days no other arrests have been made, and only the Bishop is now a prisoner. The last ransom they asked for him was fifteen thousand tomans. The Shahbanda has said that he is going to take down all the American flags except the one over our main entrance. We have several other properties adjoining ours which are full of refugees, and several of the naturalized citizens have American flags up.

We are happy this morning that all our sick are better. Mr. McDowell was up yesterday and Miss Schoebel has no fever this morning, so it looks as if she had only malaria. Mrs. Cochran is getting along finely; Dr. Packard we hope has passed the crisis; Miss Coan seems to be having a light case. Our rooms, hallways, and every place are crowded to the limit again. The men are afraid to stay anywhere else for fear of arrest. The Turks have given out word that several thousand troops are coming, and are demanding houses in Mart Maryam, and those turned out have nowhere else to go. We are having trouble in getting bread, as the bakers refuse to deliver without cash on the spot. They say the "blue eyes" (Russians) will return, "and then you will not pay us." Mr. Müller will try to-day to get wheat on several months' credit, and we shall use that instead of cash if possible. I am realizing what a wonderful thing money is, and what a dreadful thing it is to be without it, especially under such circumstances. As long as we could pay cash we couldn't stop some of the bakers from bringing more than we wanted. We feel, with so many of our number sick, so many others busy caring for them, the end of our money in sight, and our physical strength almost exhausted, that surely deliverance must be near. Through eleven weeks we have looked for it in vain.

I have just paid a visit to the school dining-room, which is one of our hospital rooms. If there is another spot on this earth of more concentrated human misery, I hope I may never know it. One boy had just died. The mother looked up at me so pitifully, and said: "Lady, he is dead." Another baby was lying on the floor dying, under the influence of khaah-khash (opium). The mother has no milk for lack of food, and the baby is dying of starvation. The mother said: "Khanum, I am so sick, what shall I do?" I could only reply: "I do not know." Twenty others were lying on the floor, without bedding, in various stages of misery, groaning, weeping and appealing for help. One child was lying on his father's coat with a hard bundle under his head, with the marks of slow starvation upon him. To-morrow he too will probably be gone, and we shall thank God that it is so. They are so many, our strength and our means are so limited, the rooms are so crowded, we can do little for them and death is their best friend. One of our Bible Women is lying here, with her two daughters on one side of her and her sister on the other. Her boy died a few weeks ago. When I spoke to her she tried to raise herself up and tell me about some of the other sick in the room. We have been furnishing matting for the sick to lie on, and using Mr. Sterrett's supply of wood for fires in the sick room; the rest have had to do without fires except the few who have been able to get wood for their rooms. In one of the typhoid rooms yesterday I noticed a pile of charred wood in the corner and asked about it. They said they had sent to the village and brought in the half-burned beams of their homes for fuel. That was all that was left of their house, except a pile of mud. Others have done the same thing.

Yesterday Rabi Nanou, one of our Bible Women, went out as usual to hold meetings in the places where large numbers of refugees, mostly mountain people, are huddled together. She was stopped in the street by an askar who demanded her long coat. She told him she had been stripped of everything when she first fled from her village, and that the coat had since been given her by one of the missionary ladies. He said, nevertheless, it was not necessary for her, and demanded that she should take it off. Just then another askar came up who had been a guard at our gate. He interfered, saying that he knew her as a deaconess who went out every day to preach to the people, and she was allowed to go on with her coat.

A while ago I took some soft-boiled eggs and several pieces of bread to the sick ones in the dining-room, and to Rabi Surra and her family. They are very grateful for everything. I've no doubt that, if they were properly fed, most of them would be up in a week.

#### **Sunday, 21st March**

Yesterday Mr. McDowell called a meeting of all the native doctors to try to get them to help in the responsibility of caring for the increasing number of typhoid cases. There are a number of doctors who do practically nothing and find excuses when anything is asked of them. It is hard to understand how they can spend hours every day sitting in their rooms or walking up and down the pavement here while they might be doing something to help in the care of the scores of sick people and in the effort Mr. McDowell is making for the preservation of the health of the community. Our assistant physician, Dr. Daniel Werda, is sick with typhoid, and Dr. David, of Soujboulak, who went out to the hospital to help, has been brought home sick. Dr. Pera, our former assistant, is at the College compound now, helping with the sick missionaries and a few special cases, and Dr. Joseph Khoshaba has consented to go out there to help. Dr. Theo Mar Yosep has been our stand-by from the very beginning, and is the only native doctor here in the city yards who has really worked. He has been on hand every day.

#### **Tuesday, 23rd March**

Sunday evening was the beginning of the Persian New Year, Noruz, and as soon as the cannon went off to announce that the New Year had begun there was a great firing of guns and torpedoes more than usual. It was kept up for half-an-hour or more, and many of the people were badly frightened, thinking that perhaps battle was on. We heard the next day that the Shahbanda was scared, not knowing what it was. The Shahbanda sent forty-eight bolts of muslin for pyjamas, and the women under Miss Schoebel's directions are now sewing on them, having finished eight hundred and fifty shirts.

The smells in our backyards are almost unbearable. I can't open my back window at all. The sun is quite hot and dries things up; it also brings out the awful smells. Last night the Shahbanda gave us permission to send a messenger to Tabriz for Dr. Vanneman. Our sick are all getting along fairly well. Dr. Packard has passed the crisis and each day seems a little bit better. There are about twenty-five Turks in the hospital now.

#### **Thursday, 25th March**

We are trying to send away some of the people by taking back their bread tickets to-day; but we cannot give them any assurance of safety. They are so crowded here, and there is so much sickness, and money is so scarce, that it seems the lesser of two evils to send some of the people away, even though a few be killed. Yesterday we gave each of the sixty sick persons in the school dining-room a soft-boiled egg, and in the afternoon tea, which was served by two or three school-girls. Sugar and tea are so expensive, about three times the regular price, that it costs about six shillings just to treat that one room to tea. The big school-room is in just as bad a condition as the dining-room, only with so many more tenants that it seems impracticable to do anything there. I've no doubt that if hundreds of these people were properly fed for a week they would be on their feet, but it is beyond our means and our strength. Just now the voice of Kasha Moushi Douman of Geogtapa comes to me through the open window of the paved school court where he is preaching. Twice a day preaching exercises are held in the school yard, and besides there are a number of preachers and women who go round daily to rooms and other yards for services.

#### **Monday, 29th March**

We have had two or three rainy days, which are very hard for the people. Some of the sick are lying on the balcony with almost no covering or bedding. I saw one of the most awful sights I have yet seen on the school balcony yesterday—a woman stretched out on the bare bricks, half-naked, in the throes of death, the damp cold air blowing over her, friendless, helpless. The whole school-room, aisles, desks, corners, and platform is filled with the most miserable of the starving sick. We made the man who has charge of our tea-stand take the samovars there yesterday, Palm Sunday, and give each of the one hundred and fifty people two large glasses of tea. It costs about twelve shillings, but eight shillings were given me by Syrians. With the thousands of dollars of debt just for dry bread, we don't feel we can borrow money for special food for the sick ones, except in limited quantities for typhoid patients. We need space more than anything else, rooms where we could put the sick on straw mats with at least a quilt over them, a fire and a little food besides dry bread, which many are too sick to eat. It seems dreadful to think of two thousand people dying here in this way, but after twelve weeks of it we cannot but feel glad every time one more of these helpless suffering

ones finds rest. Sometimes for days I seem to be hardened past feeling; and then again the horror of it all sweeps over me. We pray and pray and cry out to God for deliverance, but no help comes. We seem shut off from the rest of the world and left to our fate. Nothing from the outside world for three months! We hear many reports, but few materialize. We are told that word has come that the Crown Prince has arrived in Tabriz and that Urmia should celebrate, so there has been a great deal of firing of cannon, display of banners, and decoration. We have had our entrance decorated with banners and rugs. There is a great deal of rejoicing among the Persians, who desire to see the Persian Government strong enough to turn out both Turk and Russian.

A few days ago, Mr. Müller managed to borrow a thousand tomans from a merchant in the bazaar. It was counted out in two-kran silver pieces. This he was bringing home on the back of a porter, he walking close behind with a Persian soldier. Suddenly he found himself surrounded by six Kurds, armed to the teeth with guns, cartridge belts, and daggers. Two walked ahead and punched the money-bag to assure themselves that it was really money; the others pressed close behind Mr. Müller as they followed him through the streets. They asked him where he was taking the money, but he walked on in dignified silence, not deigning to answer, though trembling for the safety of the money. They reached our gate in safety, and as he turned in, Mr. Müller thanked the Kurds for their safe escort. They laughed and passed on. Some of the young Syrians who guard the gate report that a few days ago a bunch of Kurds in passing stopped to talk and said: "We came down here to the plain with the intention of killing you all, not one of you would have escaped, but (pointing to the Stars and Stripes over the gate) we don't dare pass under that flag!" Everybody feels that had we not been able to give refuge to the Christians, there would have been few left to tell the tale; and so even yet we do not dare force the people out, and they all say: "We would rather die here of hunger and disease than take our chances with the Kurds and Turks." Our sick missionaries all seem to be getting along well, and we are very thankful. The typhoid here in the city is usually light, and there are few deaths from it, though many from dysentery. Measles almost disappeared some time ago.

#### **Thursday, 1st April**

Rabi Nannou of Geogtapa, our best Bible Woman, has died of pneumonia, after a few days' illness. For the three months that she has been a refugee here she has been a fearless and faithful worker, going out daily for religious meetings to the houses where the mountaineers have been huddled, looking after the sick, not hesitating to go to any place where she could help. For several years she has supported from her small salary her brother's four orphan children, and has been to them both father and mother. Herself unmarried, she has given

her means and love unselfishly to these as if they were her own children. There is no one to fill her place.

We have started to buy wheat on credit, as our cash is very low and we are not able to get more money. We have just bought four hundred bushels from Rabi David of Digala for part of his debt to us. When he was in prison and fined one thousand tomans to save his head, we furnished part of the cash and took his note. He can't pay cash now, so he is paying in wheat, which we will have ground to give to the hungry. What credit we can get for bread is for a few days only. Most of the bakers need the money to carry on their business.

#### **Friday, 2nd April**

Bertha Shedd, ten years old, has been sick with typhoid for several days, and now Miss Lamme is beginning; the latter went out to the hospital about two weeks ago to help there when Miss Coan went down with it. Dr. Packard, Mrs. Cochran, and Miss Coan are getting well. Oraham Badel, our financial agent and general assistant in the City Compound, is very low this morning, just as I was writing he died, leaving a wife and four little ones. Several hundred Turkish troops have come into the city, evidently in retreat, as there are wounded among them. It is not evident from which direction they came. Last evening one of the Turkish officers came rushing in here in great distress. He had taken poison by mistake and came in here to be saved. He was given an emetic, and his life was saved. They have heard of germs and are very much afraid of typhoid, and had some corrosive sublimate in a glass for washing hands. This man saw it and, thinking it was wine or whiskey, poured it down his throat. He was terribly scared, and after being relieved of the poison, it was suggested that, as his life had been saved, he should try to save other lives.

#### **Sunday, 4th April**

This journal is fast becoming an obituary. At first the hundreds who died were the poorest and the weakest, but now many from among our best are going. Yesterday Dr. Daniel Werda, Dr. Packard's assistant, died of typhoid. For three days Mrs. McDowell has been in bed with high fever. It is not evident yet that it is typhoid. Last night our cook went to bed with typhoid. Miss Schoebel is now trying to make her comfortable and makes her old mother look after her. All day we have been trying to get something to eat for the hundreds of sick who have nothing for Easter. Easter is the Syrian Great Feast, and is to them what Christmas is to us. They say: "The Little Feast (Christmas) was black, and now the Great Feast black too." They had hoped so much that deliverance might come before the feast. We have given eggs and soup to about five hundred sick, and before evening I hope a glass of tea will be given to as many more. To-morrow we plan to give soup to several hundred

more that we didn't reach to-day. We don't use relief money for anything but bread, and so have only personal funds for the sick—a very little.

### **Tuesday, 6th April**

We have dwelt so long in the valley of death with the sick, the starving, the dying, with the unending procession of little bodies sewn up in a piece of cloth, friendless corpses carried out on ladders, with gaping mouths and staring eyes, crude unpainted coffins, coffins covered with black chintz, the never-ceasing wail, and eyes of the mourners that are never dried, hands outstretched for what we cannot give, and now so many of our own number are down. I felt on Sunday as if I ought to get my own burial clothes ready so as to make as little trouble as possible when my turn came, for in these days we all go about our work knowing that any one of us may be the next to go down. And yet I think our friends would be surprised to see how cheerful we have kept, and how many occasions we find for laughing; for ludicrous things do happen. Then, too, after dwelling so intimately with death for three months, he doesn't seem to have so unfriendly an aspect, and the "Other Side" seems very near and our Pilot close beside us. It is at such times that one finds out just how much faith in the unseen he has, and just how much his religion is worth.

This morning Mrs. McDowell's rose-spots appeared, and now we know that she has typhoid or typhus (it was typhoid). Rabi Ester Alamshah has consented to help in the care of Mrs. McDowell. Miss Schoebel and I were perfectly willing to nurse her, but it would mean throwing our work on some other missionary already loaded up. Mr. McDowell will give up some of his work and help in nursing Mrs. McDowell. There are now six of our number sick, and it is impossible not to feel that someone else will go down in a few days unless it becomes possible to send the crowds away.

To-day Miss Lamme's rose-spots appeared, so her case is pronounced typhoid.

### **Thursday, 3rd June**

Almost two months since I last wrote in my journal. On Sunday, the 11th April, I went to bed with typhoid or typhus, and three days later Miss Schoebel went down with it also. Rabi Elishua, a teacher of the Persian Girls' School, came to nurse me at once. She kept up for three weeks and saw me through the worst of my sickness; then she took the disease. Three of the other Seminary teachers in succession came to care for Miss Schoebel, and each one went down with the disease in turn. Miss Bridges, of the American Orphanage, came to help us during the day, and in twelve days went to bed with typhus. She is just getting about again. All the teachers who helped to care for us have recovered, though one of the other teachers died. We were all surprised to find how competent these untrained inexperienced girls were as nurses when there were no available missionaries left to nurse us. We were dependent upon them and got along finely without any complications. When

the last one went down we knew that she was the last intelligent nurse we should find, and after that we were dependent upon ignorant village women.

A great many things happened during the two months of our illness and convalescence. A very large number of our Syrians died. Of our own circle Mrs. McDowell died on the 16th April, and Mrs. Shedd on the 17th May. We can't take in yet what their loss will mean to us when we get to living under normal conditions. Mrs. Müller attended Miss Schoebel and me for two and a half weeks; then she took the fever. Her little boy was born in a few days, but only lived overnight. This is the fourth grave we have out in Dr. Coan's orchard by the grape-arbor. It hasn't been possible to take them to our cemetery at Seir. This week Mr. Müller went to bed with typhus. His fever has been high. He is the thirteenth out of eighteen missionaries to get the fever, besides two of the children, Bertha Shedd and Ruth Müller. On Monday, Mr. Labaree, with two nurses, Miss Easton of the Tabriz hospital and Miss Burgess, who had reached Tabriz on her way to Urmia, arrived. Mr. Labaree had been trying for weeks to get through, but was unable until the Russian army opened the way. Yesterday, the 6th June, Dr. Lamme arrived and began work last evening. One of the hard things during these five long months was our isolation from the outside world. Of course we knew that our friends were thinking of and praying for us, but it is a great help to have the tangible evidence in the shape of these friends and of letters from many others.

On Sunday, the 24th May, the advanced guard of the Russian army entered Urmia, and in the afternoon the commander came to call on our gentlemen. When we learned that the army would not remain, but were ordered to follow the enemy, there was consternation and great fear. And when the army moved on, the Moslems immediately began to annoy and rob the Syrians who had returned to their villages. There was great fear of a Moslem uprising against the Christians, and hundreds fled in the direction of Salamas. Finally the Russians left a small guard of about two hundred men. Three days ago about six thousand Russian troops, with artillery, came in from the south and marched through the city. We watched them from our roof, and it was a goodly sight to us besieged people. We shall try now to empty our yards of refugees. A few days ago there were still about one thousand left in our own yards and in one yard adjoining, which we have been renting for refugees, besides many others in surrounding yards. The stench in our back yard is almost unbearable. I don't know how we can get rid of the smells or disinfect the ground, which must be soaked for two or three feet, as that yard has been used as a latrine for hundreds of people for more than five months.

Yesterday two Red Cross nurses, who have come with the Russian army from Mongolia, asked to be our guests for a few days until the army moved on in the direction of Erzerum. They say that from there they will go to Jerusalem. When traveling they dress like the

Cossacks, but wear their nurses' costumes in the house. A few days ago a number of prominent Syrians, who had fled when the Russians evacuated Urmia, returned, many of them to broken and badly damaged homes. We had a service of thanksgiving in the church yesterday, the first time for many months, as it had been occupied by refugees. Thousands have lived in such terror and want, it is a wonder that many have not lost their minds. It has seemed sometimes as if our tears were all dried up and our emotions were dead, we have seen and felt so much. I suppose it is nature's way of saving brain and nerve. When I look at these poor wretched creatures and little children like skeletons, I find I still have some feelings left. It is estimated that four thousand people have died from disease, hunger, and exposure, and about a thousand by violence. The suffering can never be told, nor is it ended. Hundreds, yes thousands, are destitute, and even if we empty our yard there is no one left but the missionaries to save them from starvation, and we look to America. In the name of all Christians we have tried to witness for Christianity before this Moslem people. Will the Christians of America pay the bill?

*[31], pp. 119-150, J. Bryce op.cit.*

Document No. 20

Urmia: Extracts from the Annual Report (for the year 1915)

*Presented by the Medical Department at Urmia to the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.*

A sad case was that of the mother of a girl of twelve who was being taken away to a life of slavery. The mother protested and tried to save her child, who was ruthlessly torn from her. As the daughter was being dragged away the mother made so much trouble for her oppressors, and clung to them so tenaciously, that they stabbed her twelve times before she fell, helpless to save her little girl from her fate. This woman recovered from her wounds. Some people were shot as they ran, and children that they were carrying were killed or wounded with them. In some cases men were lined up so that several could be shot with one bullet, in order not to waste ammunition on them.

At the height of the epidemic not less than two thousand were sick. The mortality reached forty-eight daily, and the fact that four thousand died, besides the one thousand who were killed, will help to make vivid the terrible conditions that prevailed in our crowded premises. All ranks have suffered—preachers, teachers, physicians, etc., as well as the poor for all had to live in the same unhygienic surroundings.

One of the most terrible things that came to the notice of the Medical Department was the treatment of Syrian women and girls by the Turks, Kurds and local Mohammedans. After the massacre in the village of N., almost all the women and girls were outraged, and two little girls, aged eight and ten, died in the hands of Moslem villains. A mother said that not a woman or girl above twelve (and some younger) in the village escaped violation. This is the usual report from the villages. One man, who exercised a great deal of authority in the northern part of the Urmia plain, openly boasted of having ruined eleven Christian girls, two of them under seven years of age, and he is now permitted to return to his home in peace and no questions are asked. Several women from eighty to eighty-five years old have suffered with the younger women. One woman who was prominent in the work of the Protestant Church in another village was captured by eighteen men and taken to a solitary place, where they had provided for themselves food and drink. She was released the next day and permitted to drag herself away. Later she came to the city to accuse her outragers, and practically did not get a hearing from the Government.

There is little to relieve the blackness of this picture. The Government gave some assistance in the finding and returning of Christian girls. A few have been brought back by Kurds. In one case eleven girls and young women, who had been taken away from Geogtapa, were sent to me by the chief of the Zarza tribe of Kurds. Several companies have been sent also by the Begzadi Kurds to Tergawar. Since the return of the Russians to Urmia some of the Kurds have tried to curry favor by returning prisoners that they have held for months, but quite a number are still held by them, some of them women who have been married to some of the principal servants of the chiefs.

It would not be right to close this report of medical work in Urmia without a word about the native physicians. One of them received a martyr's crown early in January in the village of Khanishan. Four died in the epidemics. One had been a worker for many years in the plain of Gawar, two days' journey to the west of Urmia. One of them was a companion in the attempt to find Karini Agha at the very beginning of the troubles here that resulted in the rescue of the people of Geogtapa. One was the assistant in the hospital. He had been in the hospital since his graduation in 1908, and was a most faithful and efficient man. During the awful first days of fear, murder and raping it was his hands that dressed and re-dressed most of the wounded, with the help of medical students. He thought little of himself and wore himself out until he could not eat, keeping on at his work for three days after he began to be ill. His life was given in the noblest self-sacrifice, and many people will remember him with deep affection. The fourth was one of the refugees in our yard who, though he was not very active, frequently prescribed for a number of patients. His wife, who is a graduate in medicine in America, in spite of the death of her husband and two children kept bravely on

with her work, trying to relieve some of the suffering. She had charge of the maternity cases and examined many of the outraged women and girls after they finally reached us.

The most diabolically cold-blooded of all the massacres was the one committed above the village of Ismael Agha's Kala, when some sixty Syrians of Gawar were butchered by the Kurds at the instigation of the Turks. These Christians had been used by the Turks to pack telegraph wire from over the border, and while they were in the city of Urmia they were kept in close confinement, without food or drink. On their return, as they reached the valleys between the Urmia and Baradost plains they were all stabbed to death, as it was supposed, but here again, as in two former massacres, a few wounded, bloody victims succeeded in making their way to our hospital.

*The testimony of the survivors of the massacre at Ismael Agha's Kala is confirmed by the following extract from a letter, dated 8th November, 1915, from the Rev. E. T. Allen, of Urmia:*

Politically, things are in apparently good order. People are easily frightened and are nervous, but we have good hopes. Yesterday I went to the Kala of Ismael Agha and from there to Kasha, and some men went with me up the road to the place where the Gawar men were murdered by the Turks. It was a gruesome sight, perhaps the worst I have seen at all. There were seventy-one or two bodies; we could not tell exactly, because of the conditions. It is about six months since the murder. Some were in fairly good condition—dried, like a mummy. Others were torn to pieces by the wild animals. Some had been daggered in several places, as was evident from the cuts in the skin. The majority of them had been shot. The ground about was littered with empty cartridge-cases. It was a long way off from the Kala, and half-an-hour's walk from the main road into the most rugged gorge I have seen for some time. I suppose the Turks thought no word could get out from there—a secret, solitary, rocky gorge. How those three wounded men succeeded in getting out and reaching the city is more of a marvel than I thought it was at the time. The record of massacre burials now stands as follows:

At Tcharbash, forty in one grave, among them a bishop. At Gulpashan, fifty-one in one grave, among them the most innocent persons in the country; and now, above the Kala of Ismael Agha, seventy in one grave, among them leading merchants of Gawar.

These one hundred and sixty-one persons, buried by me, came to their death in the most cruel manner possible, at the hands of regular Turkish troops in company with Kurds under their command.

[35], pp. 161-163, J. Bryce *op.cit.*

Document No. 21

Urmia

*Narrative of Dr. Jacob Sargis, recorded in a despatch, dated Petrograd, 12th February, 1916; from the correspondent at Petrograd of the American "Associated Press"*

Dr. Jacob Sargis, an American Methodist medical missionary, who has arrived in Petrograd after narrowly escaping death at the hands of the Turks and Kurds in Urmia. He fled through Persia and Armenia. He asserts that among the outrages committed against the Christian refugees was the burning to death of an American doctor named Simon, or Shimmun, as he was known there. His identity was not further established, but the story of the outrage, as told by Dr. Sargis, was as follows:

"Dr. Shimmun was in the village of Supurghan when the Turks attacked that place. He was among those who took refuge on a mountain near the lake. He was captured and told that since he had been a good doctor and had helped the wounded, they would not kill him, but that he must accept the Mohammedan faith. He refused, as almost all Christians did. They poured oil on him, and, before applying the torch, they gave him another chance to forsake his religion. Again he refused, and they set his clothes afire. While he was running in agony from the flames, the Turks shot him several times. After he fell to the ground unconscious, they hacked his head off. Mr. Allen, an American missionary, who went from village to village burying the victims of this butchery, found the body of Shimmun half eaten by dogs.

"The Catholic Mission there took 150 Christians of all sects, and kept them in a small room and tried to save them; but at least 49 of them, among them one Bishop Dinkha, of the Episcopal Mission, were bound together one night, taken to Gagin mountain and there shot down."

Mr. Sargis was born in Persia, but went to America in 1893, and was educated there by the assistance of Dr. W. F. Oldham, former Bishop of India. He is a graduate of Ohio Wesleyan and Ohio Medical University, and was for a time resident physician of the Protestant hospital at Columbus, Ohio.

Dr. Sargis was doing relief work in Urmia on the 1st January last year when the Russian army retired from that city, followed by 14,000 refugees from Urmia and a hundred surrounding villages. The hardships and sufferings endured by those refugees were described in

Associated Press despatches. There were still left in Urmia and the villages 45,000 persons, chiefly Armenian refugees, when the Turks and Kurds entered. The latter at once began the work of exterminating the Christian population. In one town alone, Gulpashan, in one night, according to Dr. Sargis, 79 men and boys were tied hand to hand, taken to a hill outside the village and shot. Their wives and daughters were distributed among the Turks, Kurds and Persian Mohammedans.

Dr. Sargis' story continues:

“On the second day after the Turkish officers came, they had a good many wounded and sick. As soon as they heard that I was an able physician, they took me, gave me a bodyguard, and put me in charge of Urmia Hospital. That was how I came to learn most of their secrets; I helped their wounded and sick. One day there were sixty men brought from Bashkala, all well-to-do citizens, some of them noted men of that place. They were used as beasts of burden and forced to carry rolls of barbed wire into Urmia. The next day they were all taken to the Castle of Ismail and every one was shot or hacked to death.

“About that time Nuri, the governor of Gawar, told me that he had received word from the Turkish commander to kill all the Armenian soldiers in the Turkish army. He said that, for my sake, he would not do it, but that somebody else would. Twenty-nine were killed about fifteen miles from Urmia, at Karmad. We had eight of them in the city, fine fellows, some of them educated in Beirut. They had been disarmed, and one night they took them to the suburbs and shot them. But one of them, named Aslam, escaped. He dropped with the others, but was not hit. After the butchers left, he made his way to the Presbyterian mission college. I was notified and asked to take care of him. I kept him until the Russian army came. He joined, and is now fighting with them.

“In the First Turkish corps, commanded by Halil Bey, there were about 400 Armenians. One of them, Gulbenkian, a graduate of Beirut, told me that they were all doomed to be butchered. When they appointed me head physician of the hospital, they gave me plenty of helpers, including seven Christian nurses, six Arabs and one Greek. Gulbenkian told me that if I did not help them they would be killed. An Arab doctor, Bahadin Effendi, was appointed to work under my direction. My Greek nurse warned me that Bahadin had already killed more than fifty Armenian Christians, and cautioned me to watch him. One night about ten o'clock, Bahadin sent for me, saying that he was sick. Fortunately for me, the Greek and two Armenian nurses went with me. When I reached the hospital, I found that Bahadin was not sick at all. He said to me: ‘What business have you to disturb me at this time of the night? Your coming shows that you have some designs upon my life.’ I told him that it was a mistake, that I had been told he was sick, and went away. At the bottom of the stairs I was

overtaken by an officer, who said that the doctor had not done with me. I protested, but was ordered to go back. So I put my trust in the Lord and went.

The doctor greeted me with the question: 'Who gave you permission to leave the room?' and continued: 'You are a prisoner, and you will never see the light of to-morrow's sun.' I told him that I was an American citizen, and that I was helping the wounded for the sake of humanity. He cut me off by saying: 'This is wartime. The top of your cap is green. That means that you are a descendant of the prophet, and it will give me pleasure to destroy your life to-night. I must think how I shall kill you. I could throw you out of the window, but that would be too quick. I could shoot you, but that also is too good for you. I shall have to use my sword. You sit down there in that corner, and these Turkish nurses will sing your funeral before I begin to cut you up.'

The Turks began to sing a droning chant and I had no choice but to sit and listen. My bodyguard, the Greek nurse Theodore and two Armenian soldiers, the latter my servants, stood outside the door, and when they heard the chanting they thought it was all over with me. The Greek, who was a shrewd fellow, told my bodyguard to enter, and, if he saw me, to say that the patients wanted to see the doctor. All of a sudden I saw him enter with a lantern. He saluted the effendi and said: The patients want the doctor. I didn't give Bahadin a chance to say a word. I was up and out and down in the street in about two seconds. When I got to the outpost they yelled from the window to stop me, but they were too late. My bodyguard and the Armenians and the Greek followed close behind me, and I got away. I reached home at midnight. My wife and children thought I was already dead."

Dr. Sargis turned the tables on the Arab doctor by alleging that he was insane, and having him put under guard and on a milk diet, notwithstanding that he was a doctor in Halil Bay's army.

Soon after the Russians left Urmia a German machinist Neumann, who came in with the Turks, announced himself as German Consul. By his orders a Christian of the name of Moushi was hanged. Neumann had promised me to release Moushi, but overnight he sold him to the Turks for £50. An Englishman named Jonathan George, well known in Tabriz, a relative of my wife, was whipped on Neumann's orders. In the village of Karadjalu a young Christian with a wife and two children was killed by a Mohammedan. The murderer took the wife and children, promising to protect them; but while crossing a bridge he threw the children into the river. At Ardishai 75 women and girls ran into the sea (i.e. Lake Urmia) to escape the Turks. They refused to trust promises of safety if they came out, and were all

shot as they stood in the water. Eight thousand five hundred died in the vicinity of Urmia in five months; 1,600 were killed, and the rest died of cold and hunger.

During the days of the Turkish occupation it was no unusual sight to see an old woman carrying the body of her daughter or son to a place of burial, digging the grave herself or with the aid of other women."

[34], pp. 158-160, J. Bryce *op.cit.*

#### Document No. 22

Urmia after its evacuation by the Turks and Kurds

*Letter dated Urmia, 20th May, 1915, from Mrs. J. P. Cochran to friends in the United States; communicated by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.*

It seems almost too good to be true to think that we are going to get in touch once more with the outside world, and may be it is. But, anyway, the Governor says he will send a messenger over to Tabriz to-morrow to carry letters and perhaps he will get through safely.

I have no idea what has leaked through to civilization since we fell out of the world, but I will give you as much of an account of the last four months and a half as the brief time allowed before the messenger goes will permit.

On New Year's Day we had our usual day of receiving callers in the city; all our Syrian and some Moslem friends called and things seemed fairly safe, though we knew we might be on the edge of war, as there was an army of Turks and Kurds within a day's march of us. They were said to be coming on to fight the Russians, who with a little force, of two thousand, perhaps, were strongly entrenched here.

The next morning the Russians rose and left in haste, and many of our Syrian men and others who were known to be their supporters here left with them. Our teaching force here at the College, our newspaper and printing press work, and even our city church work was terribly crippled by the exodus, as it took away some of our best workers.

The Russians' departure was the herald for the Kurds to pounce upon the prey they had so long been held at bay from, and, even before they arrived, the Moslem neighbors in all the surrounding villages flew upon the spoil, killing Syrians, running off with their cattle and household goods and even stripping those who were trying to run away from them of their money, bundles and any clothes they took a fancy to. They also carried off women and tried to force Christians to become Moslems, keeping them safely if they would deny their faith or

repeat the sentence which constituted the acceptance of Islam. In some cases they were successful in this, though, of course, many would not and some of them were killed for it.

Then came the rush of the Kurds. They came in hundreds from every Kurdish quarter, sore against the Christians for having joined forces with the Russians, who had armed them and drafted them for military service whether they would or not. They, being armed, put up a fight and killed a good many Kurds in the battles at some of the villages, though there were a couple of thousand Syrians killed too in the villages, before they escaped to the slender protection offered by six unarmed American men in our mission compound. Our flag was put up, not only on our own property here in the city but on all the adjoining blocks of Christian property in the city. Doors were made or holes in the walls between all that adjoining property, to bring it under our control, and only our principal big street-gate was allowed to be opened, all others being barricaded. There in the city between ten and fifteen thousand, many thousands of them destitute, congregated and sat huddled in rooms, a hundred in a room or more, sometimes unable to lie down at night on account of the crowding.

We had a good deal of money entrusted to us by the people who had to flee, and as most of it is in silver ten-penny pieces, there being no paper money in circulation here, they could carry away but little, and we took charge of large sums without interest, to be used by us if necessary and repaid when banking was resumed. With this we began to feed the people. It was the system in the city to sell bread until noon, and after that to distribute one of the thin sheets of bread to every one who had nothing to eat and no money to buy anything. This distribution took a force of about twenty or thirty men seven hours to get through. The city church is in the enclosure under the American flag, and it held three thousand ill-smelling people with their few earthly possessions remaining to them.

Here at the College we had about two thousand people. Because of the few buildings the housing was a problem. We had five hundred in the hospital. Our largest ward has only ten beds in it, and by putting people on the floor between the beds we could get in about twenty, but in two other large wards that we took the bedsteads out of, over a hundred apiece sat huddled together on the floor, without fire or lights, as we could not afford them for them. We had those who were destitute here; those who had escaped with their cattle and a sack of flour or some bedding or a carpet we put over on the other side of the avenue in the College buildings.

I fed those on the hospital side besides attending to the regular hospital routine, which was heavier on account of the wounded Christians who were being brought in every day.

My own rooms consist of my dining room and sitting room, in one of which I have a couch to sleep on, a kitchen and a little room downstairs for my man.

I reserved one room for myself for living, dining and bedroom combined, and took in seven of the College boys, students from the mountains, who are here all the year round and whom I knew pretty well, to bring their native beds to live in my dining room. Seakhan had the kitchen full of her people and friends, seven or eight of them, and Choban took two families into his room downstairs.

The boys helped me by distributing the bread in the hospital and holding evening prayers in the different rooms in the hospital. Then we all began to get the typhoid fever. We had some Turkish soldiers in the hospital with it, and the people were ignorant and careless, so we had an epidemic of it. We have seven hundred new-made graves in our compound here at the College, as the result of it. I have had it and recovered, and am as strong and well as ever, though somewhat thinner, fortunately. I had a Syrian trained nurse, the only one in Urmia, as I was the first missionary to go down with it, being in the most direct contact with it in the hospital (though Dr. Packard went down the day after I did). He also recovered. The little Swiss governess the Coans brought out with them was the first to die of the foreigners, and then followed the death of Mrs. McDowell and, this week, my dear Louise Shedd, my best friend here—a friend of fifteen years' standing from the time we were together in charge of the seminary. All my boys went down too, and my favorite one died—such a simple, sweet Christian boy. Others of the missionaries who have had it or are having it are Dr. Coan and Elizabeth, Bertha Shedd and Mrs. Müller. Mrs. Müller gave birth to a seven months baby boy who lived a day and then she went on to have typhoid. Besides these there were Miss Lewis, Miss Schoebel, Miss Lamme and Mr. Allen.

In the hospital there was a time when the head physician-assistant, Dr. Daniel (who died of it), the matron, the druggist, all the nurses, the cook and the bake-woman, the steward and the washer-women were all down together, and two hundred and fifty patients to be taken care of. You can imagine, or rather you can't begin to imagine, the disorganization of the place. Elizabeth Coan took my place at first, and in two weeks was having it. Then Miss Lamme came to take her place and two weeks she, too, was on her back. The Syrian woman who came next to fill the vacancy is still at it, though I am back at some work, being now safe from infection. My man had it, but my woman has weathered the gale so far, and after three months we have to record to-day that for ten days past not one new case has come down here. One of the boys, Seakhan's mother and two of the men in Choban's room have died of it in my family.

In the city it was even worse. It is raging in our big compound, though from the first they had from ten to forty deaths a day from cold, privation, illness of one kind and another, and perhaps shock from fright. In another part of the city, whereas we have a big school building for our Moslem boys'-school, three thousand people were rescued and brought in by Dr. Packard's valiant intervention, when he rode up to the Kurdish chief in the thick of a fight between Kurds and the villagers entrenched in Russian trenches and fighting for their lives, begged the lives of the inhabitants, and after parleying awhile succeeded in buying the souls of the people in exchange for their guns. He rode back to the city with them after the sun had set on a January night, reaching the city about nine o'clock, their homes being robbed and burned behind them by the Kurds.

Turkish rule and Kurdish plundering have reduced the inhabitants to the verge of starvation, and as yet the end is not in sight.

Yesterday the Turks and Kurds arose and departed, and it is supposed that the Russians are about to return. They are only a day's journey distant, having just been successful in a long fight with a Turkish army that came from Constantinople via Mosul, and after a three months' march was cut to pieces by the Russians near Gavilan, a day's journey from here. There were twenty thousand or more of them, well equipped, but the Russians had the advantage of a fortified position, a knowledge of the lie of the land and perhaps superior numbers. We don't know anything definite about that.

We haven't had a word of war news during 1915 so far, and feel as if we were in the bottom of a well as far as seeing what is going on about us is concerned.

No mail has penetrated the veil that hides the world from us, but we have had a telegram from the American Ambassador in Constantinople inquiring for our safety, and have sent telegrams saying we had not been disturbed personally, which is one of the miracles of missions, by the way. Just now things are very tense here; the Moslem Governor is doing well in trying to control things, but the Moslems hate the Christians, so that they are killing some of those who have gone back to their ruined villages to live.

There is no power of description that can overdraw the picture, that is and has been before our eyes constantly, of misery and distress. Instead we have to veil it, for details are too horrible, too revolting to try to convey to people who are not called upon by God to go through it. But whatever the end may be for me, I am sure I can only be thankful God has given me such an unlimited opportunity for service as these past months have been.

If the Russians come back or the Turks stay away, we shall have a mail system established again, if there is such a thing going on across the world nowadays. Since last July we have had little mail on account of the war, but some did leak through till the 1st January (1915), since when we have been like Moses when the light went out.

We are still feeding thousands of people—just enough bread every day to keep life in their bodies—and have saved the Syrian nation but have accumulated thirty or forty thousand dollars (six to eight thousand pounds sterling) of debt, which we don't know where to find money to repay. We only know of six thousand dollars (£1,200 sterling) that were telegraphed as relief two or three months ago. But we hope the Red Cross Society and charitable people in America will send us money.

We haven't even been able to get our money from the Board sent to Tabriz, but even what could be paid on our regular salaries has been paid out of these borrowed funds. However, when things settle down a little we can get at that if there are any of us left by that time.

Just now I have regularly one school-boy and often a few others at my table, as they are all hungry with the hunger that comes after typhoid and the College fare is reduced to bread and cheese.

The one who eats with me all the time is a boy from the village Dr. Packard delivered, Geogtapa, and his father was killed and his house burned and goods carried off or destroyed. Their food supplies were left, mostly, as the robbers got their fill and could only destroy the rest. For instance, a cellar had jars of molasses smashed and into that was thrown their flour, and on that pickles by jars—full—the big earthen pointed-bottomed jars that household supplies are all stored in here. Into this pudding were thrown their books, few in number, perhaps, but all the more valued for that. Then this boy, because he belongs to a village where soldier guards have been placed and some degree of safety assured, was told that he must go home. That was a general rule, and when I learned the state of things I told him he could eat with me till things cleared up. Then they have fields and vineyards that can be worked, and he has older brothers in America and Tiflis who will look after him. He is about eighteen, the youngest of the family and the only one left at home. He is only one case out of thousands equally at a loss just now. He has his room at the College and sleeps over there with other students.

I hope you have all been kept in safety during these months and will write to me all about yourselves and the world at large.

*[32], pp. 151-155, J. Bryce, op.cit.*

"Das 'Liebeswerk' for the Nestorians in Kurdistan and Persia

At the beginning of 1904, Protestant pastors in Berlin founded a charitable organization for the Nestorian Church, chaired by Pastor Dr. Georg Diettrich, who was also a well-known Orientalist and scholar of Syriac studies and theology of the Nestorian Church of the East. The creation of this group was prompted by personal contact in Berlin with an Assyrian from Kurdistan named Toma (min Beth = 'of the family') Kelaita, from the village of Mar Bishu, in the district of Tergavar. A short time later, his brother Simon and cousin Jonathan, also joined this Berlin mission association. Like the German mission from Hermannsburg, this mission movement had no far-reaching consequences for the Syrian Christian who belonged to it. The association intended to build a school and a church, not among the Assyrians living in Persia, but among those living in the Turkish-Persian border district of Tergavar. They had previously been neglected by missions. The main location was the village of Mar Bishu, home of the very influential Kelaita family, well-known throughout the entire mountain region.

From May 1905 on, the mission association in Berlin published the journal "Der Nestorianer-Bote" (The Nestorian Messenger). Seven issues were published through November 1908. It contains reports on life among the Syrians in the mountainous country, clearly depicting the Christian population's suffering even before the war.

For the most part it consists of Syriac letters from Turkey to Toma Kelaita, who was living at this time in Berlin. They were translated into German, with the assistance of Pastor Diettrich, and provided to the mission journal.

The reports, in particular, on the Turkish-Persian border conflict of 1907, which forced thousands of Christians from Tergavar and other border districts to take flight, are written with a very personal intensity which will affect the reader even today. Even in peacetime, the harassment of the impoverished Christian farmer population by Kurdish tribes and the Turkish Ottoman rabble of soldiers was hardly tolerable.

A special, perhaps unique situation arose with the marriage of Simon Kelaita to the German pastor's daughter Elisabeth Wendt in 1906. Shortly thereafter, the couple travelled to Persia, together with the two other Kelaita family members. When the border conflict settled down, the entire family moved once again to the village of Mar Bishu in Tergavar.

Elisabeth Wendt wrote letters on a regular basis to her parents in Germany. Excerpts appeared in the "Nestorian Messenger" as long as Pastor Otto Wendt from Lerbeck near Porta Westfalica remained part of the Berlin mission association. He left this association in

1908 because of internal differences, founding his own "Charity Committee for the Nestorians in Kurdistan." Between 1908 and 1915, Pastor Wendt published an informational brochure on an annual basis. It included messages from his daughter on the general state of the Assyrians in Persia and the mountain regions, including particularities on local events.

Of particular interest is the last report on the terrible events of January 1915, when the Turkish troops marched in following Russian withdrawal. Because the Kelaita family did not join in the general flight of the Christians together with the Russians, they experienced these events personally. This description differs from other reports because of its sympathy with the Turks; its depiction of specific incidents provides a somewhat different picture than most other eyewitness reports.

Before Elisabeth Wendt and her Assyrian family made their adventurous escape via Persia and Russia to Sweden and from there on to Germany, she learned that the entire population in the high mountain valleys, 160,000 Assyrians, had been surrounded by the Kurds. In October 1915, this valuable report was published by Otto Wendt in the form of a brochure titled "*The terrible consequences of the world war for the Nestorian Christians in Kurdistan*". Otto Wendt personally accompanied his son-in-law Simon Kelaita to Berlin for a discussion in the German Foreign Office, believing that the Germans could motivate their Turkish allies to grant protection and assistance to the Assyrian Christians on their territory. At about the same time, the missionary Johannes Lepsius from the Deutsche Orient-Mission (German Orient Mission) informed the Foreign Office about the annihilation of the Armenians in the Turkish empire. With the authority of the German imperial government, the two of them travelled to Constantinople, Simon Kelaita for the Assyrians and Johannes Lepsius for the Armenians. The annihilation and expulsion of the Christians in Turkey had by this time long been decided and was fully under way.

### Document No. 23

From a report by the German pastor Otto Wendt (Lerbeck) from June 1915  
and his daughter's letters from Urmia

When I left Persia in November 1914, the Russians were still the absolute rulers of the Urmia area. They used their power in such a way that both Muslim and Christian residents submitted to them sheerly out of fear. Some of our Syrians expected Russia to rescue them and assist them against the Kurds, whose savagery and impertinence as soon as war broke out frightened every one. Along with a few others, our Simon Kelaita dared to quite openly take the position of the Turks, trusting that in the end Germany and her allies would be

victorious. This view brought him into extreme peril with the Russians. When we left, his brother Toma was dragged away to Russian captivity, and until the present his family knows nothing of his whereabouts.

The advances by the Kurds from the mountains into the extended Urmia plateau became even more terrifying. The Christians (Armenians and Assyrians) were treated simply as confederates of the Russians. They have had to suffer indescribably from the atrocities by the Kurds. One village after another was raided and set on fire. Thousands of residents fled with only some of their belongings to Urmia and from there north towards the Russian border.

Following the Kurds, the regular Turkish army advanced from the mountains into the Urmia plateau. On January 3, 1915, Urmia fell into their hands and, on January 10, Tabriz.

Elisabeth reported in her letter from April 19, 1915, on the Assyrians' flight to Sauchbulak, including Simon's brother. This reveals that after conquering Urmia on January 3, the Turks surrendered it once again, leaving it to the advancing Russians. Those must have been frightful moments such as we here can hardly imagine.

“ . . . Many Assyrians died. Contagious diseases have broken out, and many are buried each day. On Friday April 16th they suddenly were alarmed that the Turkish army was close by. Simon, together with other men, rode out towards the Turks. In the afternoon the Turkish army, with drums beating, rode back into the town—to our indescribable delight.”

*(Source: Special printing by Pastor Otto Wendt, June 24, 1915, Lerbeck)*

#### Document No. 24

From the reports by the German pastor's daughter Elisabeth Wendt to her father  
on the events in Urmia, October 1915

On January 1, 1915, the Russian rulers in Urmia feared the approaching Turks for the first time—until this time they had ruled this Persian town with a heavy hand. The Russian consul, the Russian army, the Russian population, the English and French missions all suddenly left the town. Many thousand Christians with their children and scant belongings joined the retreating Russians out of fear of the Kurds, who could no doubt be expected even before the Turks. It was icy cold; the poorly dressed, destitute Assyrians who had fled without any provisions soon lagged behind the Russians. No one took care of them. Many froze to death during this flight.

In Urmia Simon and Elisabeth Kelaita witnessed further terrible events. On the same day (January 3), before the feared Kurds or Turks arrived, the Persian Muslims of the Urmia district made terrible raids not only on Charbash, but also on about 110 Christian villages in the area around Urmia. Until now they have kept back the Russian regiment. In almost all the villages a terrible butchering of the people began—50 to 200 people and even more were soon murdered and left behind in most villages. A large number of women and girls of most tender age were violated. The Persians plundered house after house wherever the Christians had died or fled. They constantly dragged huge loads of food, furniture, windows, doors and cattle into the town as their spoils. Old people who could not get away quickly enough were terribly mistreated or simply killed.

The Kurds advanced on Tuesday and Wednesday. There were a few Turks with them. When more and more of them rode into Urmia on horseback, armed to the teeth, everyone who had been rescued from the Persians only shortly before was deathly afraid. They immediately began to shoot at the Christians. Simon helped by reacting energetically. He succeeded in persuading the two highest-ranking Turks, Nadji Bey and Rashid Bey, to put a halt to the bloodshed. He suggested to them that those Christians who had not fled with the Russians were to be treated as friends of the Turks. As a result, Rashid Bey actually had a number of Kurds summarily killed who had been caught robbing or killing Christians. For the moment this was a help.

Simon Melaita also attained another very important privilege from the Turkish authorities mentioned above. As a generally known representative of German interests, he requested military protection for his house in Charbash in order to make it a general place of refuge. And in fact 14 armed Kurds were placed at his disposal for this purpose. It quickly became apparent how valuable this measure was:

"Pastor Oone, who is also very respected by the Kurds, lives in the village of Kalla (one of the 110 Christian villages in the Urmia district). One of the richest Kurds is his personal friend, and has, on his occasional visits, given him a number of valuable objects for safekeeping. When the Russians left Urmia, this Kurd came to Kalla with many armed servants and spent his time with Pastor Oone in the usual friendly and familiar manner. He spoke of the Persians' atrocities against the Christian villages and assured him of his protection. Kasha Oone treated him and his people in the best manner possible, as such protection was now very welcome. His guest then requested some of his things back, and they were given to him. Finally he said: Give me your gun too! This is when Oone noticed what was awaiting him: he handed over his rifle to the guest through a third person, but he himself took flight. He had hardly set off, when shots rang out in his house, and in the whole

village. A few residents reached the gates of the walled village and escaped. Others hid under haystacks and in holes and were saved. Such a treacherous breach of hospitality is otherwise unheard of with the Kurds. But this is the "Holy War," with all its dire consequences!

The refugees from the village of Kalla (700 persons) were on their way to Charbash that evening. They hoped that Simon would still be there, as he had stayed on alone after the flight several months ago. They were met by a band of Persians who took away the money that a few were still carrying, ripped their clothing from their bodies and gave them some ragged, spoiled things in exchange so they could cover their nakedness. The frightened people then hid in the churchyard near Charbash, and crept by night to Simon's house, where they had seen light and where the German and Turkish flags were waving. To their horror they found the Kurds on guard there, ready to shoot. But when they said: "We are Simon's friends," they were let in, and this group of more than 700 people was given lodging there and in the two adjacent houses—the only ones which still had doors and windows. And there Simon's Kurds protected them from the Persians who were everywhere, roaming about, plundering and murdering. On the following morning—it was the holy Christmas day, which is celebrated on January 7th there—Simon received the news in Urmia that the refugees from Kalla were in his house in Charbash. He hurried there, scratched together what was left in provisions for the hungry ones in the village, and provided first aid to the wounded. Then, under the protection of the 14 Kurds, he brought the entire crowd of Christians to Urmia in a walled courtyard of the American mission.

A few days later the relatively small Kurdish-Turkish army retreated from Urmia, towards Khoi. But the incalculable Kurds and the Persian officials (together with a few Turkish ones) remained—and an indescribable reign of terror now began in the town too. By turns robbing, whoring and murdering, and for four long months. A Christian could not even dare to walk the streets. It was a terrible time. The Persians enjoyed denouncing the frightened Christians to the various rulers. Some were then arrested and tortured to death in a most frightful manner. The gallows on which various innocents found their demise were prominently placed on the main road in such a way as to make your blood curdle. And everyone had to fear that he too could be placed under suspicion by someone any moment.

The Christians were contained within the large walled-in courtyards of influential people (in the American mission courtyard too) as if in a prison. There was a complete shortage of food, and in the bitter cold most people had only a tent roof over them. Several hundred Christians were crowded together into a church. As there was no charity or care, more and more devastating illnesses developed: typhus fever, scarlet fever and dysentery. The corpses were buried—ten, twenty, eighty, one time even eight hundred in a mass grave—

usually only sewn into cloth, because they can't buy coffins. This happened in such a makeshift way that dogs dug the corpses up once again. The smell of decay became intolerable. Hardly anyone accompanied his dead relatives to the grave out of fear of contagion.

Death and fear made for severe conditions in Urmia. When a strong Turkish army under Lieutenant Chalil Bey from Mosul reached Urmia on April 18, 1915, there was for a short time an end to the indescribable suffering. The commander-in-chief had been very friendly to us, being a friend and admirer of the German character. Model discipline was administered—the troops paid for whatever they needed. Unfortunately, the Turkish army stayed for only three days, and then moved on toward the Salamas district. And then came an unfortunate turn of events for the Turks. After hardly five weeks, the Russians occupied Urmia once again at the end of May.

Numerous Assyrians who had fled with them at the time returned to Urmia with the Russians. They hurriedly began to harvest and thresh in their villages. Many Assyrians who had remained in Urmia in January had been interned by the Russians, as also happened to our Simon. They were threatened with the death penalty if they left the town of Urmia. Simon was later banned to Salamas. Here he met with the patriarch of the Nestorian church, Mar Shimun Benjamin.

As the patriarch is the highest and practically the only authority in the land, Simon learned the following from him:

The mountain Nestorians in the provinces of Tiari, Tkhuma, Jilu, Baz and Diz have also had to go through a time of fear and misery due to the declaration of Holy War. They had, in a faithful and loyal manner, positioned themselves against the Turks. They in no way sympathized with the Russians—it's worth noting that the mountain Nestorians are now speaking again of a generally known prophecy which we mentioned many years ago in our "Liebesarbeit" to the Nestorians in Kurdistan," No. 1. One of their writers, the revered priest Rabban Yonan (d. 1886), predicted this time in a clear and detailed description in a book, and that all of 40 years ago: "Everyone will be against Germany!" he said. "But Germany will win in the end. Help will arrive for the Nestorians not from Russia, not from England, not from France or America, but from Germany!"

The mountain Nestorians have paid their war tribute to the government according to their means, or even beyond their means. They have given up quantities of mules, sheep and

provisions. And now? 160,000 of them are crowded into the Tiari district and surrounded by the Kurds. They are heading for the most terrible of famines.

Whoever is there and still alive was rounded up from all the districts. They have hardly any weapons, and provisions for three to four months at most. 200 and more people are together in one house, in one small apartment, where previously 10 persons lodged. They have no salt at all to prepare their meals, which is a terrible deficit. They are facing a harsh mountain winter. They, particularly the women and children, do not have even the minimum of necessary clothing. The Kurds keep them surrounded like hungry wolves and let no one escape from this mass prison. The venerable patriarch's courtyard has burned down. Many members of his family were shot dead. The ancient churches in the mountain villages are destroyed. Wherever a cross could be seen, it was smashed to pieces by the Kurds. A great number of the teachers that we employed and paid to teach in our winter schools have been killed. That's what remains of the much-tried old Nestorian Christianity.

The patriarch Mar Shimun beseeched Simon to attempt to escape to Germany in order to seek assistance there for the 160,000 Assyrians in the mountains. The moment was favorable. The rumor of the fall of Warsaw spread among the Russians (it was the 6th of August) and caused vast confusion. In order to bind the Nestorians to them, the Russians gave freedom to all the Assyrians under arrest. At the same time, panic broke out in Urmia. One could hear among the Muslim population: "When the Russians are gone, we will butcher all the Christians and throw them to the dogs." Every one pushed to flee hurriedly.

These dreadful days cannot be described. A pathetic image! Old men with a child on their backs. Heavily-laden women holding hands with crying, tired children, women who can hardly drag along their bundles. All are afflicted by hunger and burning thirst, as the water in the region is salty and almost undrinkable. And so they waded through the deep dust with their raw feet often wrapped only in rags; and then over stones and rocky pebbles under the glowing heat of the Oriental sun—for days. There were no animals to ride on or carriage vehicles. The Russian officers were forbidden, under threat of punishment, to take someone into their wagons who could not keep going. They only egged the people on to keep moving. And whoever could not come along lay dying along the side of the road. They slept outside under the night sky, by the light of the burning stubble fields; crowds gathered in the thousands. Parents and children often got separated, never to find each other again. Those who fled reached the Salamas area.

Simon asked his way to his loved ones through the stream of fleeing, desperate people. He managed to get a cart for them. But they were soon at the border, where the Russian

military cordon let no one pass. It seemed absolutely impossible to make it through to Russian territory. Simon assailed the Russian commander-in-chief four times, saying "You must let us through." He was rudely turned back four times. A young German-speaking Russian officer noticed them and interceded for them with the commander-in-chief. Of all the thousands, Kelaita's carriage vehicle could the border barrier, and many bid farewell to them with tears in their eyes.

Travelling via Russia and Sweden, Simon Kelaita's family finally made it to Germany. Together with his German father-in-law, Pastor Otto Wendt, Simon Kelaita called on the Foreign Office in Berlin and described in detail the situation of his fellow Nestorian Christians. On October 9, 1915, Simon von Kelaita travelled on behalf of the Foreign Office, and on their authority on to Constantinople.

*(Source: Otto Wendt, Die furchtbaren Folgen des Weltkrieges für die nestorianischen Christen in Kurdistan - Nach authentischen Berichten [The terrible consequences of the world war for the Nestorian Christians in Kurdistan, according to authentic reports]; Lerbeck, Westphalia, October 1915)*

#### German Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Persia

The mission institution of Hermannsburg (in northern Germany) was dedicated to "missionary work among the pagans." Several Assyrians from Persia who in fact belonged to the Nestorian church studied Lutheran theology there between 1875 and 1910. They returned to their parishes in Persia after their training, but Hermannsburg considered them missionaries sent from the evangelical Lutheran church. With correspondence and occasional visits, these pastors maintained contact with the German mission of Hermannsburg for decades. It is doubtful that their parishes and schools in the villages of Gögtapa and Vazirabad were ever really Protestant; however, a "Committee for Lutheran Evangelization in Persia" was founded in Hermannsburg in 1909. It existed under the direction of Pastor Karl Röbbelen until his death in 1932. The priests and mission employees Pera Johannes, Jaure Abraham, Johannes Pasha, Luther Pera and Lazarus Jaure maintained an active correspondence with him. Their reports, which were written in the German language and perhaps modified a bit here and there, were published in the "Circulars" between 1909 and 1917. They contain a large stock of informational material on the history of the Assyrians in the first years of the century, up through the First World War and the terrible period of breakup, annihilation and expulsion. As eyewitness reports, the

published letters are primary sources for a part of Assyrian history of the twentieth century. They were unfortunately lost from sight and gathering dust in the Hermannsburg Mission Archives for over half a century. The originals of these and other Hermannsburg publications on the so-called Lutheran Nestorian parishes in Persia also contain many interesting photographs from this period.

Even almost two decades after their flight from Persia to America via Russia, letters were exchanged between some of these Assyrians and Pastor Röbbelen in the small town of Hermannsburg. In a letter to him shortly before his death in 1932, one learns that a manuscript from Lazarus Jaure with the title "Meine Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse in Persien während des Weltkrieges" [My Experiences in Persia during the World War] was sent to print. Unfortunately, this perhaps very interesting text could not be found in the archives.

#### Document No. 25

A report from Persia about the first year of the war  
*from Pastor Luther Pera, Urmia, Persia, 3 July 1915*

In order to describe the events of the past ten months, I would have to write entire books. But I must keep it very short. In mid-December of last year (1914), the Russians suddenly pulled out of Urmia. Many Christians from the town and from the villages along the road left with them. On Saturday, December 20th (according to the Oriental calendar, which means January 2nd by our calculation), all the Russians were gone. On Sunday, the Christians were all unprotected prey for the fanatical anger of the Muslim population. All the Christian villages and houses in Dilgusha and around Urmia were plundered, and all men, women and children robbed of their clothing and their ready money. All the men and young people from villages farther away from the town were shot dead by Muslims.

As soon as the town's Muslim population informed the Kurds that the Russians were away, they overran the surrounding countryside. Gögtapa, where people from twenty Christian villages had sought protection, was saved from a complete massacre by the heroic courage of the American missionary Dr. Packard and two Syrian youths, Joseph Khan and Dr. David Khan. On Monday, January 5, 1915, the doctor rode with his companions to the Kurdish chiefs who were besieging Gögtapa with thousands of warriors. In a discussion lasting several hours, the only concession that Dr. Packard could wring from the Kurds was that the residents of Gögtapa would surrender to Dr. Packard, thus saving their lives alone. All their belongings would become property of the Kurds. Thus, many thousands were rescued and brought to the American mission house.

Our rescue was like a miracle. Our landlady summoned a young Muslim friend of her family. We put her guest up because her husband had fled with the Russians. In the evening the guest assured us that if anything happened, he would take us along to his house. On Sunday morning (January 3), we were besieged by the Muslim rabble. We thought we were lost. But, as if sent by God, this young Muslim arrived with his five brothers, and they helped us pack our rugs and furniture and transport them to their house. In the evening they took us along to their house, where we spent one and a half months. I was very worried about my father and his family. But after three days they arrived at the American mission house, stripped of all their belongings, including their clothes. I took them along with us to the Muslim house.

The atrocities which have been committed by Muslims and Kurds are an outrage. Forty-six persons from the French mission were arrested, bound together arm to arm and shot by order of the Turks. More than 80 people were killed in Gulpashan. Women and girls were exposed to the impure desires of the wild mob. And the Turkish consul and the Kurdish sheik had promised the village of Gulpashan complete safety. In many villages, as in Ada and Sepurgan, indescribable atrocities were perpetrated. Many died as martyrs for their Christian faith. Many, many women and girls were abducted by Kurds and Muslims.

Among these, the steadfast figure of fourteen-year old Shirin, daughter of Pastor David from Ardishai, stands out. She could neither be tempted nor threatened into converting to Islam. Quite the opposite: with the Bible in her hand, she preached the gospel to the Kurds.

8,000 members of our small people have died—killed and wiped out. All the churches were burned down, including ours in Wazirabad and Gögtapa. As long as the Turks were in charge here, no bell could be rung in the town. Many Christians from the town were arrested and money was barbarously extorted from them. Many were hanged, including a Kurd who had converted to Christianity. During the holy days of Easter, instead of bells ringing we heard the cries for help from the women and children—Muslims had broken into their houses. Almost every night a house was forcibly entered and plundered. Some nights we slept in our clothes in order to be prepared to take flight at any time.

The American missionaries sacrificed themselves during the five months of affliction: they served every one, friend or foe. They have earned the respect of Muslims, Turks, Christians and Jews. Just consider the burden of 15,000 persons, or at least 12,000, shut into the narrow rooms of a mission and fed by the mission. The children first died of measles, then of dysentery from the cold and lack of clothing. The last to develop was typhus fever, and it

carried off the best boys and girls who had hitherto escaped the sword by being under the American flag. Every day 30-40 people died in the mission. Our dear Friedrich was also a victim of typhus, while my brother Ignatius and my sister Luise recovered. For more than five months I've had to feed my father's whole family; it is a wonder that we haven't yet died of famine.

The Russians have been back in Urmia for about a month and have liberated the Christians from their captivity. The Turks and all those together with them have fled. But we are still in danger, because Islam has been incited against the Christians. God forbid that these brutes return once again; if they do, no Christian will be safe—they will butcher them all with terrible torments. For this reason, all the more well-off families are going to Salamas, where it is safer than in Urmia. If the Russians were to withdraw from here, we would all have to run with them, as sure as we live and breathe, or else we would be lost.

The Muslims completely demolished the beautiful German church in Dilgusha (it belonged to the German Orient Mission, and the Nestorian pastor preached to the Lutheran Russian soldiers there).

*(Source: Nachrichten aus der Lutherischen Mission in Persien [News from the Lutheran Mission in Persia]; published by Pastor K. Röbbelen on commission of the Verein für lutherische Mission in Persien [Association for the Lutheran Mission in Persia]; Volume 2, September 1, 1915, No. 4; pp. 14-16.)*

### **The Afflictions of the Christian Assyrians on the Urmia plateau in the year 1915**

In the late fall of 1914, war broke out between Russia and Turkey. On December 2nd, Turkish troops advanced into Persia and occupied Sauchbulak. The Russians were also in danger of being attacked by the Kurds. The Russians forced the Assyrians to accept weapons from them so they could fight together against the Kurds. At the same time, the Russian rulers committed an atrocity with which they extremely embittered the Muslims. They arrested ten rich, respected men, accusing them of having delivered ammunition to the Kurds, set up a large gallows outside of Urmia and had these ten Muslims hung in disgrace. At first, the Persian governor of Urmia confiscated their belongings; only after a thousand tuman (4,000 marks) were paid for each dead body did he allow the hanged men to be taken down from the gallows. When the Kurds burst out of their mountain region, full of anger, the Russians attempted to scare them by raiding and destroying several Kurdish villages. Several Assyrians also helped them to do so.

After the Muslims had been roused to fervid hate, the Russian occupiers suddenly withdrew from Urmia on January 2, 1915. The Christians, however, who were considered supporters and allies of the Russians after what had happened, were exposed to the Muslims' fierce rage without protection. About 12,000 tried to save themselves by quickly fleeing. Deep snow and severe cold could not hold the unhappy people back. Even if the frost were to kill them—they would suffer a worse death if they fell into the hands of their merciless enemies. Thus they continued towards the Russian border day and night through snow and frost.

Many froze to death on the way. Children, old people, women with newborn babies in their arms could be seen dead along the road. The refugees hurried past them until they reached the Russian border, after walking for days. The Persian Muslims fell upon those who remained behind in Urmia and in the villages, killed many Christians, robbed them of all their possessions, committed unspeakable atrocities and destroyed their houses. Vazirabad was also assaulted by a mob. Many Christians there were killed, and their houses plundered and destroyed.

Our pastor Pera Johannes was robbed of everything he had, even the coat he was wearing. His house was utterly destroyed, his church burned down. Pastor Luther Pera in Urmia was saved by a Muslim friend. This man arrived with his brothers when the plunderers were approaching our brother's house, and brought Luther Pera, along with his family and part of his possessions, to his house. There he accommodated him and his family, that is, Pera Johannes' family and other relatives, a total of twelve people, for one and a half months and helped them as generously as he could. Other Muslims did similar things, saving the lives of endangered Christians in so doing.

After the Persian Muslims had begun murdering and plundering, the Kurds also approached. Their hordes on horseback assaulted all the approximately one hundred villages of the Urmia plateau, and wrought havoc with murder, robbery, arson and atrocities against the Christians. The poor women and girls suffered a terrible fate; hundreds of them were dragged away, others jumped into the Lake of Urmia or the rivers in order to escape the disgrace. A small eight-year old boy did the same thing; he had been taken along by the Kurds to be raised as a Muslim after his parents and siblings were murdered. When they were crossing the bridge, he jumped from the horse he had been placed on and disappeared into the icy waters before they could catch him.

The Kurds besieged the large town of Gögtapa, to which several thousand Christians had fled. The American missionary doctor Dr. Packard managed to impel them to preserve the

captives' lives. However, they had to leave everything they owned behind, and this was robbed by the Kurds. Thus, our brother Jaure Abraham lost everything in his house.

However, Gögtapa was not destroyed. Only our church was burned down. The school, on the other hand, which was built in 1910 and to which many German schoolchildren had contributed, has remained whole. The refugees from Gögtapa and other Christians sought refuge in the American Presbyterians' mission courtyards. They took in 15,000 Assyrian and Armenian Christians and fed them for months. Outside of the American mission station's protective walls, no Christian could be sure of his life. It is true that the robbing and murdering ceased when the Turkish army arrived in Urmia. The Turkish army leader Rashid Bey had those who were caught plundering shot, and it is said he even personally shot down Kurds who were robbing. But the Turkish troops moved on, and the murdering and plundering began anew. The Easter celebration was marked by screams and yells from the assaulted women, rather than Easter bells.

The Russians finally returned, bringing the Christians support and protection. Some of the refugees also returned. A good harvest was ripening in the fields. But the Christians had no sickles to cut down the stalks of grain, and neither carts nor draft animals to bring in the sheaves. They were stripped of everything. The Presbyterians helped by purchasing as many farming implements as they could. A new day of terror suddenly arrived. On August 6, the Russians unexpectedly pulled out of Urmia once again. This was immediately announced everywhere, and on the spur of the moment the Christians gathered together what they most needed, leaving the rest behind, and took flight. An immense crowd surged through the dust and heat towards the Russian border. They often had no water, and there was not enough food; many died en route. This time, our three pastors with their families were also among the refugees. They too sought refuge in Tbilisi.

Most of those who fled turned towards the Russian border. However, they were prevented from crossing this border. Diseases broke out among the crowds of people who gathered there. Typhus had already done away with thousands in the winter. The terrible cholera claimed a particularly large number of victims.

When they heard that the Russians were in Urmia once again, many Christians returned home. Pastor Johannes, however, had escaped to Russia, where he is staying with his family in a relative's house in Bjely Kljuch, one day's journey from Tbilisi, near the German colony of Elisabeththal.

*Source: Hermannsburg, 20 January 1916, Pastor K. Röbbelen, the "Oriental Church" in ancient and modern times. For the cause of the Christians on the Urmia plateau plagued by war-time afflictions, Hermannsburg 1916*

Document No. 26

German Orient Mission (D.O.M.) in Persia: eyewitness reports

*Pastor Pfander, D.O.M. in Urmia, July 22, 1915*

*Letter from Miss Anna Friedemann, director of the German Orphanage in Urmia*

The Russians were hardly gone when the Muslims began to rob and plunder. Windows, doors, stairways, woodwork, everything was dragged away. Some Syrians had abandoned all their household equipment and winter provisions and fled. Everything fell into the hands of the enemies. The best thing was to flee, since those who stayed behind suffered a sad fate. 15,000 Syrians found protection inside the American mission house, where the missionaries furnished them with bread: one lavash (thin matzoh bread) per person a day. Diseases broke out, and the death rate rose to 50 people a day. In the villages the Kurds killed almost every man they could get their hands on. For six weeks we had an Ottoman soldier as a guard. It helped quite a lot that I was born in Germany, and no one harmed a hair on our heads.

Should I report how the Turks set up a gallows on the main road in front of the town gate, and hung many innocent Syrians and shot others whom they had imprisoned for a long time beforehand? I intend to remain silent about the horrors. Besides many other Armenian soldiers, they slayed one here in front of the gate, and buried him right behind Miss Friedemann's wall, but in such a negligent way that the dogs partly dug him out again. One hand was completely exposed. I took a few shovels, and we formed a grave mound over him.

Miss Friedemann's garden, property of the German Orient Mission, was destroyed by the Muslims, and some of the houses were set on fire. We greeted with pleasure the first Cossacks who reappeared after five months. We feel safe once again, and we don't need to keep the gates locked during the day.

**Anna Friedemann, director of the German Orphanage in Urmia (1900-1914)**

The newest news is that 4,000 Assyrians and 100 Armenians died of disease at the American missionaries alone.

Sauchbulak was levelled by the Turks. A gallows was erected for the missionaries, but help arrived to prevent the worst. One missionary woman and a doctor have died.

In Haftevan and Salamas, 850 corpses have been pulled out of the pump wells, and without their heads. Why? The Turkish troops' commander in chief offered a sum of money for every Christian head. The wells are soaked through with Christian blood. From Haftevan alone more than 500 women and girls were handed over to the Kurds in Sauchbulak. In Diliman bands of Christians were locked in and brutally forced to convert to Islam. The males were circumcised.

Gulpashan, the richest village in the Urmia region, has been completely levelled, its men killed and its pretty girls and women led away, as in Babarud. Hundreds of women fled into the deep river when they saw how many of their sisters were raped, as they did in Miandob in the Solduz district. The troops which went through on their way from Sauchbulak through Maragha carried the Russian consul's head on a spear.

40 Assyrians were hung on the gallows erected in the Catholic mission courtyard in Fath-Ali Chan-Göl. The women of the nunnery had run out onto the street and begged for mercy, but in vain. Their whole station was destroyed in Salamas in Chosrava; the women of the nunnery have fled. Maragha is destroyed. It is not as bad in Tabriz.

In Salamas 1,175 Christians were killed, and 2,000 in the Urmia district. At the missionaries' place, 4,100 died of typhoid fever. All of the refugees together, including those from Tergawar, Van, and Azerbaijan, are estimated to total 300,000. A committee has been formed in Echmiadzin to care for the poor.

*(Source: Johannes Lepsius, Bericht über die Lage des armenischen Volkes in der Türkei [Report on the Situation of the Armenian People in Turkey], Potsdam 1916, pp. 104-107)*

## **2. Hakkari (Turkey)**

The Hakkari mountain range is in the southeast corner of Turkey. Its foothills border on Persia in the east and on the Mesopotamian plain in the southeast. In the west, Bohtan is in the upper Tigris region. The Great Zab flows through 175 km of the alpine massif. The mountain peaks are as high as 4,170 meters. The entire region covers 25,000 square kilometers.

When in 1856 the administrative districts of the Ottoman empire were organized anew as a consequence of reforms, Hakkari was given the status of its own province (Vilayet). From 1888 on, the mountainous country was a district (Sandjak) of the Van province. The provincial governor had his residence in the town of Van. There were eleven counties, ten of which were inhabited by Syrian Christians: Julamerg, Albaq, Gavar, Shamsdinan, Mahmudi, Norduz, Chal, Beit ul-Shabab, Oramar, Amadyia. These eleven counties (Kaza) were divided into 49 sub-districts (Nahiye). A total of 1,555 individual villages were listed.

At the end of the 19th century, one statistical count indicates about 300,000 residents: Kurds (160,000), Syrians (100,000), Turks (20,000), Armenians (15,000), Yezidi (4,000), and Jews (4,000). There is no way to prove how accurate these statistics are. For the Syrian Christians and the Kurds, they seem to be somewhat below other indications. When it came to the annual tribute to the sultan, the patriarch indicated 160,000 Syrians.

The Syrian Christians made up about half of the population of Hakkari. For that reason, the Christian tribes maintained their autonomy for centuries against the neighboring Kurds. In addition, they had protective relationships with both Christian and Kurdish villages with leases and feudal tenure.

The first European traveller who made it to Hakkari and from there to Julamerg was the German researcher F. E. Schulz, who was to research and describe the area geographically and archaeologically on commission of the French government. He was murdered by order of the emir of the Kurds in 1829.

Beginning in 1602, the patriarch Mar Shimun had his residence in Kochanes in the sub-district of Julamerg. The second highest Nestorian metropolitan Mar Khnanisho resided in Shamsdinan (or Nochea; earlier Rustaka). Another bishop's seat in Ashita (Chal district) was vacant.

General Statistics**Population in Hakkari**

County:	Residents	Assyrians	Kurds	Turks	Armenians	Jews
1. Julamerg (Julamerg)	33,900	15,000	14,100	2,800	2,000	---
2. Albaq (Albaq)	42,870	10,000	22,500	5,690	3,000	1,600
3. Gawar (Diz) / Mar Bishu	26,200	9,300	12,800	1,900	1,900	300
4. Shamsdinan (Nehri)	18,470	3,000	13,270	2,000	--	200
5. Norduz (Marane)	17,600	3,000	11,000	1,000	2,600	--
6. Chal (Chal) / Ashita	43,890	32,000	11,000	840	--	200
7. Beit ul-Shabab (Elki)	18,700	6,700	11,000	900	--	--
8. Oramar	25,910	11,040	14,000	870	--	--
9. Amadia	23,940	6,000	13,680	860	--	1,900
10. Mahmudi	31,680	1,000	23,200	2,480	--	500

Sanjak Van: 16 Syrian villages, bishopric

Expulsion of the Assyrians June - September 1915

While in April and May 1915 the massacres and deportations of the Christians had reached their climax, the Turkish government systematically prepared for the complete expulsion of the Nestorian Assyrian mountain tribes in the southeastern part of the empire. Turkish units from Mosul advanced from the south into the mountain valleys of Hakkari. For several months there was a local theater of war here—the Assyrians were putting up resistance. This is not mentioned by European authors anywhere in their memoirs and war reminiscences.

From the war diary of an Assyrian tribal leader, Shlemon d-Malek Ismael, and the records made by the patriarch Mar Shimun's sister, Surma d-Bet Mar Shimun, it can be inferred how the expulsion of perhaps the oldest population on Turkish territory took place. The details describing the expulsion from centuries-old areas of settlement in the alpine valleys of the Hakkari mountainous country show that here too the cause was not betrayal by the

Christians, as the Turks had claimed. The constant escalation, culminating in a campaign of destruction against the defenseless Christian farmer population in the Turkish-Persian border areas as early as late 1914, led them to contact the Russians as a last resort. However, this was also unsuccessful.

The Kurdish tribes fighting together with the Turkish troops were for the most part puppets of the Young Turk policy of extermination. They received weapons and ammunition from the Turkish army, which in turn was generously provided with war materiel by imperial Germany. In addition they made their mercenary services pay off by plundering and seizing land belonging to their Christian neighbors. Only a decade later they themselves were the victims of a Turkicization policy which has lasted to this day.

The organization of the Assyrian tribes was complicated. Their tribal leaders were in part elected, in part hereditary office-holders. The patriarch Mar Shimun was the religious and temporal leader, and he also took over the strategic military leadership for the exodus of his people. Rivalry among the tribal leaders and varying opinions about the strategic military plans meant that at first only a portion of the tribes joined in the move, which finally took place with losses. Half of those who remained behind were wiped out by the Turkish and Kurdish troops; the rest managed to flee to Persia in roundabout ways.

Statistics**1915/1916****Assyrian Tribes from the Hakkari mountainous country and bordering districts****Independent Tribes**

Tiari	50,000	51 villages, 29 churches
Tkhuma	25,000	5 villages, 5 churches
Baz	8,000	5 villages, 5 churches
Tal	7,000	13 villages, 11 churches
Diz	6,000	13 villages, 13 churches
Jilu	25,000	16 villages, 12 churches

**Assyrian districts**

upper Bervar (incl. Kochanes)	9,000	29 villages, 29 churches
Levan (west of Julamerg)	3,000	11 villages, 6 churches
Serai (45 miles east of Van)	3,000	
11 villages near Serai	4,000	11 villages
Norduz	2,000	4 villages, 3 churches
Albaq (near Bashqala)	3,000	11 villages, 5 churches
Gavar	4,000	23 villages, 15 churches
6 villages in Nervan and Rekan	2,000	6 villages, 4 churches
Shamsdinan and Mar Bishu	2,000	2 towns, 2 churches
	153,000	approx. 200 villages, 139 churches
	(approx. 160,000)	

**Death rate:** 1915/1916      20,000 to 30,000

**Causes of Death:**

1. Battles June - July 1915
2. Various waves of flight  
massacre of those left behind (Tkhuma)
3. Diseases, epidemics, hunger, cold  
among refugees in Persia

## List of the Assyrian Villages of the Tribes in Hakkari (Turkey) through 1915

### 1. Tiari (diocese of patriarch Mar Shimun):

#### a) Lower Tiari:

Ashita, Zavita, Minyanish, Merge, Kurche, Lizan, Umra takhtaya, Zerni, Karukhta, Chambe d-Bet Sosena, Mata d-Kasra, Bi-Ziso, Lagippa, Bi-Alata, Ravole, Shurd, Ravola d-Salabkhan.

#### b) Upper Tiari:

Sarispido, Siyador, Chambe d-Bi Elia, Chambe d-Nine, Chambe d-Kurdaye, Mezra, Mratita, Bi-Nahra, Bi-Zrako, Rumta, Jemyata, Rishe d-Nahra, Aina d-Alile, Dura alaya, Kalayata, Mezra d-Kalayata, Chambe d-Malek, Bi-Dalyata, Dadush, Mabua, Ko, Chambe d-Kurche, Bi-Mariggo, Roma Smoka, Chambe d-Hasso, Darava, Malota, Chambe hadta, Zorava, Garamun, Halamun, Challuk, Arosh, Hore Resen.

#### c) Walto:

Sirta, Shvavuta, Mata d-Mart Mariam, Khadiana, Rishe d-Nahra.

### 2. Diz:

Golozor, Suva, Kursen, Chiritshara, Mades, Mar Kuriakos, Akose, Chulkhan, Bi-Shamasha, Saramos, Rabban Dadisho, Markita, Alogippa.

### 3. Bervar:

a) Bervar d-Kochanes: Kochanes, Bi-Nano, Nerva, Terkones, Kiger, Sorines, Tarmel, Bi-Khadjidj, Pichen, Haros.

#### b) Bervar Sivine:

Khardalaes, Kotranes, Akhvanes, Shmunines, Sivine, Espin, Sallen, Guranen, Kerme, Oret.

c) Bervar d-Shvavuta: Shvavuta, Sakerran, Derikki.

d) Bilidjnaye: Derres, Avert, Daden, Bi-Respi, Alas, Nauberi.

### 4. Tkhuma

(Mar Sargis of Jilu diocese): Gissa, Bi-Aridjai, Tkhuma gavaya, Mazra, Gundikta.

### 5. Jilu:

Alsan, Medhi, Nahra, Zirine, Mata d-Mar Zaya, Ummod, Talana, Bi-Bokra, Nerik, Ori, Zer, Zerpel, Bu Bava, Shamshikki, Mata d-Oriyaye, Musperan.

**6. Baz:**

Argeb, Kodjijdjaya, Mata tahteta, Shvavuta, Orvantuz.

**7. Rekan:**

Hish, Merkanish, Gebba, Erbesh.

**8. Chal:**

Ba Dare, Ba Ikta, Bi Kuraye, Bi Aziza, Rabbat, Talana, Arevun, Ko, Irk, Bi-Shuka, Shavriza, Biyya, Bi Leta.

**9. Gavar**

(Mar Sliva diocese): Bi Rberri, Zirkanes, Uresha, Darave, Kiyet, Manunan, Kadiyyan, Mamikan, Sin Ava, Chulchus, Gerbel, Gagoran, Ba Jirga, Vazir Ava, Maken Ava, Pir Zalan, Cher Divar, Zizan, Pa Elan, Dara, Paghi, Serdesht, Dizza.

**10. Derrenaye:**

Mar Bishu, Iyyel, Bi Zekte, Basan.

**11. Khananes:**

Khananes alleta, Khananes tahteta, Silmuan, Khalila.

**12. Albaq:**

Hoze, Erdshi, Ates, Menjil Ava, Kharsalun, Sharines, Azan, Pusan, Burduk, Alamiyyan, Kalanes.

**13. Hartoshi district (Kurdish area):**

Gezna, Parrashin, Charaban.

**14. Levan:**

Erki, Chergel, Mata d-Umra, Nevgvizan, Zaranes, Kanunta, Bellikken, Khandekki, Billi, Dera Zengel, Gohikki.

**15. Norduz:**

Marvanan, Ulama, Chilgiri, Parkhilan.

Document No. 27

The Expulsion of the Assyrians of Hakkari (Kurdistan) 1914 - 1915  
*Surma d-Bet Mar Shimun, sister of Patriarch Mar Shimun Benyamin*

**3rd August, 1914**

It was on the 3rd August, 1914, that the Patriarch Benyamin Mar Shimun was summoned to Van to meet the Vali, Tahsim Pasha. [The date is important, as it shows that the Turkish government had already determined its attitude, and instructed its local governors. *Editor's Note*] Long conversations took place between them referring to the assistance that would be granted to the Assyrians, if only they would remain neutral and not join themselves with the Russians, for Turkey was entering the war. The answer was clear, namely that our attitude would be conditioned by that of the Turks toward the Christians at large, and that in the case of the Assyrians, Mar Shimun must of necessity consult with the Maliks and notables of his nation, as without that he could not be answerable for them. The Patriarch then returned from Van, and sent letters of counsel to all the "Rayat" districts of Christians, warning them all to remain quiet, and to fulfil strictly all their duties to the Turks.

**October, 1914**

In October, some fifty men of the Christians of Gawar were brought to Bashkala—the local government centre—and there killed. In the district of North Berwar, the Turks plundered the houses of the peasants, taking even the children's socks. One deacon was most brutally treated. He had not come to greet the "soldiers," excusing himself on the ground that he was at service in the church. His mouth was filled with live coals. Women were carried off, among them two women of the village of Iyil who were beautiful enough to take the Kurds' fancy. This was done by the direct order of the officer in command. One of them begged that her husband might accompany her, and that she might carry her infant child on her shoulder. Her husband and child were killed before her eyes, and she herself carried off. The poor creature, crazed with grief, flung herself into the first river that the party had to cross on the road.

At the same time, certain friendly Kurds wrote privately to the Patriarch, to the effect that his arrest had been already decided on, and that he must take measures for his own safety. It must be clearly understood that the atrocities of which we have given instances did not take place without the knowledge of high officials. On every occasion, the fullest details were sent in writing by Mar Shimun, to the Vali of Van, and to the Kaimakam concerned.

One woman was brought in, from the village of Kirmi, distant some three hours only from our house; she was bare-footed and bare-headed, and had a child of three months old at her breast. This was the tale she had to tell:

**13th November, 1914**

“We were just about going to bed, when there came a detachment of Turkish soldiers to the village, on the road to Julamerk. They entered the village, they demanded food immediately and also the surrender of the women's socks and head wraps because they had not enough! We gave them what we could, and started the preparation of food. Then when I was busy, I heard a scream from one of the women of the house, and a man's voice saying, ‘I am your servant, only do not take my wife.’ Then my husband rushed in, saying to me, ‘Run and hide yourself.’ Then I ran to the cradle and took my son, and started to come here, and for the others, I know not what has befallen them.”

The child died, and the woman was in danger for some days, but she still survives.

**14th November, 1914**

Then in the morning we heard that Yukhanan the deacon and his two sons had been killed in Albaq, by Khurshad Beg the Kurd, at the order of the government. This Yukhanan had been a trusted servant of the government, a member of the council of the local governor (Mutaserif), and a man whose house, as he was a man of some means, was always open to guests. After three days, the Patriarch sent a trusty Kurdish messenger to Albaq, to bring word of what had passed. In five days he returned, and with him a Christian, who had this tale to tell:

As for the Christians of Albaq, most of the young men have been killed, all the villages and houses plundered, and the women and young children carried captive and now kept in the house of a Kurd, Shahin Agha. He has used them kindly, and has prevented any attempts to make them embrace Islam by force.

At that time the word was being diligently spread in all the land that “The war is a Jihad, and therefore every Moslem who does not undertake the conversion of Kafirs, declares himself thereby an apostate and renegade to the faith of the Prophet Mohammed.”

Every district of Assyrians who lived under Ottoman rule were in the same state. In Shamsdin, Norduz, Albaq, Mar Bishu, Iyil, Gawar, all was alike. Villages were raided, men and women were either killed or carried captive, and those that remained scattered in other lands. There was but one step for us to take, and at the last, that we proceeded to do.

**15th February, 1915**

On that day some 300 armed men of Tiari came up to Kochanes, and I, with the Patriarchal family and my younger brother, went down to Tiari with them. The Patriarch remained in the place, with my brother David, and about 500 men, representing all the tribes, for we were still in the hope that there might be some change, and that we might not be forced to begin open and official war with the Turkish government.

**12th March, 1915**

The Patriarch and his following went down to the district of Dizan, and the village of Mar Diz, where there was held a month later a great assembly of all the notables of all our tribes.

**12th April, 1915**

This momentous assembly was held in the very house in which, seventy-five years before this time, there was held the assembly of the notables of the nation under the presidency of the Patriarch Mar Abraham, which decided that the nation as a whole must make war on the Emir of Hakkari.

The debate lasted for five days, and at the end of that time it was decided, with the approval of the Patriarch, that we must declare war on the Turkish government, and enter into an understanding with the Entente.

**1st May, 1915**

Thus an official letter was sent through the Kaimakam, to the Vali of Van, to the effect that, because of the massacres and oppression to which their "Rayat" brethren had been subjected, the six free districts Tiari, Tkhuma, Jilu, Baz, Ishtazin, Dizan felt obliged to sever their political relations with the Ottoman government.

The first fighting took place at the bridge of Diz, between some of our out-posts, and a detachment of zaptiehs (Gendarmerie), and as a result of it, Julamerk fell into our hands. There in the telegraph office we captured an official message from the Vali of Van to the Kaimakam of the place, telling him how extremely necessary it was that Mar Shimun should be arrested, "to make it impossible for the tribes to enter into war against us."

**May, 1915**

It was in this same month that the Patriarch received a message from the commander of the Russian force in Azerbaijan, General Chornazuboff (Cernozubov), forwarded to us by the commanding officer of the force in Gawar, Andreiovsky. Agha Petros had sent the letter,

asking the Patriarch to bring his force and cut off the retreat of the army of Khalil Pasha (which was then in retreat from Urmi) and to unite his force with that of the Russians.

The Patriarch took a party of mountaineers, and went down to Persia, where he met the Russian general in Salamas, and was received with all the honours of a prince. He represented to him the very great need we had of rifles, and, in fact, of supplies of all sorts, and asked for assistance. It was agreed that a force should be sent to our help "as soon as it should be possible."

### **23rd June, 1915**

On this day the regular Turkish army, with the Kurdish irregulars in support of it, advanced from Mosul against Lower Tiari, bringing machine and mountain guns with them, as well as bombs. They were commanded by Haidar Beg, Vali of Mosul. At the same time the Kaimakam of Julamerk, with the Artosh Kurds, attacked the district of Upper Tiari, and a combined assault followed.

It was a desperate fight, for the Kurds had, of course, rifles and bombs, and many on our side had old flint-locks only. Thus the enemy were able to advance as far as Mar Sawa, and the women and children had to be removed to the higher mountains. The losses on both sides were very heavy.

### **6th August, 1915**

Mar Shimun, who had been in Salamas at the time of the attack, returned from that place, with some 200 rifles of the Russian pattern, and a supply of cartridges. This enabled us to attack once more, and three days later we drove the enemy out of Mar Sawa, and defeated the Kaimakam's force near the village of Derawa. The Patriarchal family was at this time in the village of Mar Odisho, in the district of Tal.

### **10th August, 1915**

Mar Shimun and the notables of the nation had another important council at that place, to consider the position. We could then say that we had fairly repulsed the first attack made upon us, both by regular and irregular troops. It was at this time that my brother the Patriarch received a letter from Haidar Beg, the Vali of Mosul to the effect, "Hormizd, your brother, is in my hands; if you do not order your people to lay down their arms, your brother will be put to death." The answer of the Patriarch was as follows, "My people are my sons, and they are many. Hormizd my brother is but one. Let him therefore give his life for the nation."

It was decided in the council that the Patriarch should return once more to Salamas, to ask for the help that had been promised, so he set out accordingly, accompanied by a small party of riflemen, and by a deputation of the "Notables." They had great difficulty on the road, for they had to travel by night on account of the dangers, and had to fight for their lives more than once, and were in difficulty through lack of food. However, they reached Bashkala, and there Mar Shimun gave his escort permission to return, and went himself with the chiefs who were with him to Salamas, where he met the Russian general Cernozubov, who was expecting him.

As a result of the council they then held, the Patriarch sent on one of the mountain chiefs (Khoshaba of Lizan) to Tabriz, that he might tell his tale to the Consul there as representative of the people, and explain their condition. This, it was promised, should be duly passed on to "exalted quarters."

There was, however, no possibility of the Russian giving help at the moment. He was in the act of withdrawing his force from Salamas, and his advice to the Patriarch was that he should accompany them, "and so save a life that will otherwise be thrown away."

This advice Mar Shimun rejected immediately and finally, with the words "I go back to my people to live or die with them."

At last Mar Shimun returned with one servant only, to us in Diz, to say that there was no chance of any relief from them. Thus for these three months the five little tribes of our people had held out in their mountains against all the attacks that had been brought against them, till at the last, in our army, men were selling cartridges one to another at a Turkish gold piece for ten.

There was a final fight in the district of Tkhuma, near to the village of Rabat, and in this action many of our men were fighting hand to hand with their daggers only, having no other weapon, and this was the reason why in this fight alone some few of our men were taken prisoners by the Turks. Food was failing us also; we were terribly in need of salt, the lack of which began to cause illness and many of our folk were suffering much from hunger and nakedness. Many died from sheer lack of any decent food.

### **October, 1915**

It was in the month of October, 1915, that what was left of the nation of the mountaineers issued from the mountains and came down to the plains of Salamas. We had lost men in thousands, both from battle, and from illness, and from famine, and latterly, from overcrowding.

The Consul of the Russians now took steps, and the men of the nation were soon dispersed in various villages in the districts of Khoi, Urmi, and Salamas.

*(Source: Surma d-Bet Mar Shimun, Assyrian Church Customs and the Murder of Mar Shimun, Chapter: The Great War, pp. 76-89)*

### **Shlemon d-Malek Ismael's War Diary (Tiari/Hakkari)**

The war diary of Schlemon d-Malek Ismael from upper Tiari is an invaluable source about the local war events which took place between 1915 and 1918 on the outskirts of the theater of war at the Caucasus front. In the annals and memoirs by European authors, there is practically no description of the military conflicts between the Turkish army, reinforced by armed Kurd troops, and the Assyrian militia, who fought against them in 1916 under the command of Russian Cossack officers in Persian Azerbaijan and in the Turkish-Kurdish Hakkari region south of Van.

The documentary character of this war diary can be seen in its exact description of individual battles, with indications of losses of soldiers on both sides, the local geography, and the names of the Turkish, Kurdish, Russian and Assyrian commanders. The description of the expulsion from the high alpine valley areas of settlement in the Hakkari mountainous country in southeast Turkey clearly shows that this was not a tribal feud between the Assyrians and the Kurds, but rather that the Kurdish tribes acted as puppets of Turkish policy-making by command of the Turkish government. There were varied opinions about military strategy, as well as rivalry among the various tribal leaders under the leadership of the patriarch Mar Shimun Benjamin and his influential family. To the outside world at least, he represented the nation. The concept 'nation' is not used to describe those Assyrians living at the time in the Urmia and Salamas region in Persia, as they were either under the bishops of the Nestorian dioceses or dispersed among other Christian denominations through the missions' influence (Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists).

The straightforward and at the same time detailed chronology in the diary also describes the inevitable necessity of an alliance with the Russians. From 1911 on they were already present as a military force in Urmia on the Persian side. The mass conversions to the Russian Orthodox church by the Syrian Christians living here in 1898 did not make the patriarch interested in an alliance with the Russians. He first looked towards the English mission for a mediator to approach British diplomats and influential politicians. England was involved in diplomatic battles with the Russians about hegemony until at least 1907, and sought to gain influence over the non-Catholic Christians through their missions. The odds

were already on the Russians' side due to their geographic situation: only they could offer effective protection to the downtrodden indigenous Christians.

From the Turkish government point of view, the Christians were an unsafe population due to their religion and their geographic circumstances; they had to be eliminated. The Young Turks' orders to deport and eliminate the Christians, particularly in all border regions, are based on these arguments. For the Turks it was not enough to purge their own territories; they sent their armies over the border into Persia, into a neutral country which was not a participant in the war. Thus, a theater of war also developed in the Azerbaijan province in the northwest of Persia.

Document No. 28

The Assyrians and the two world wars (1914-1915)

*War diary: Shlemon d-Malek Ismael*

Some Armenians from Van were accused of betraying the Turkish government at the very beginning of the world war in October 1914. As a result, the order was given to eliminate the Christians in the Turkish empire. Among the first affected by this order were the defenseless Assyrians from the border regions in the mountainous country, Gavar, Albaq and Norduz, who were caught in groups and driven in winter through the snow-covered mountains, barefoot and barely clothed, into larger towns. There the soldiers murdered them. Only a few managed to flee to the Assyrian tribes of Tiari, Tkhuma, Jilu, Baz and Diz or to Kochanes to patriarch Mar Shimun.

The tribal leader Malek Ismael of upper Tiari sent 500 warriors to Kochanes on January 15, 1915, to protect the patriarch, and an additional protective troop of one hundred men on January 29. After their arrival, the patriarch convened a meeting where it was decided that all women and children should be evacuated to upper Tiari to the safe tribal area. Even Surma-Khanim [Lady Surma; Khanim is a honorary title], the influential sister of the patriarch, was to travel there. It was only those men determined to defend themselves who remained behind. A protective troop of one hundred armed men accompanied the women and children's trek, guiding them on dangerous paths through the high mountains to the main village of Chambe in upper Tiari, where Malek Ismael also resided.

In the spring of 1915, the Russian troops reached the towns of Albaq and Bashqala and drove out the Turkish troops and their Kurdish voluntary mercenaries, under the command of Khalil Bey. Because the Kurdish population under the protection of the Assyrian tribes in

their region also suffered from this expulsion, Malek Ismael travelled to Bagira with 1,500 warriors to prevent these innocent Kurds in their piteous state from being mistreated by the Assyrian Tiari population as revenge for the marauding Kurd tribes. He also intended to make contact with the Russians. He fell into an ambush and was brought to the Russian commander.

At first, communication was difficult, as the Assyrian interpreter's Russian knowledge was not adequate. Khoshaba, one of Malek Ismael's military leaders, tried to communicate in English; this worked out with the help of one of the Russians' interpreters. They explained to the Russian that they would fight as allies against the Turks and Kurds, and informed him that the Turks had sent reinforcements to Khalil Bey's army. The Russians then returned to Albaq to hold back the Turks.

Khoshaba suggested to Malek Ismael that the Tiaris for their part could attack the Turks and put an end to them, but he refused. "As long as they don't attack us, we don't need to fight with them," he said. They should wait until the patriarch Mar Shimun reaches an agreement with the Russian General Chernozubov about weapons and equipment for the Assyrians, he continued. Khoshaba could not get his way with Malek Ismael. When, however, he returned with his men to lower Tiari, he engaged in an attack on three Kurdish villages, together with Malek Bardu. On the other side, the Kurds from Oramar attacked Malek Chammo in Zer. The Assyrian tribes from Jilu and Baz under the leadership of the priest Naviya and the Malek Khammo of Baz came to their assistance just in time. After a 36-hour battle, they drove out the enemy. Seventy Assyrians were killed, including women and children. Fifteen Kurds were killed.

The Turkish governor of Mosul, Heidar Bey, organized a campaign against the Assyrian mountain tribes settled in the Hakkari mountains, with the assistance of the Kurdish tribes of his area. They had been living in an area which is difficult of access for more than a thousand years, free of direct government intervention in their internal matters. They were ruled by their independent tribal leaders, the Maleks ("Kings"), and chiefs, under the sovereignty of patriarch Mar Shimun.

The Kurdish army consisted of five tribal groups, each undertaking certain actions:

- Rashid Bey, the Mir of lower Bervar, with his tribes and reinforced by Turkish soldiers, completely equipped with cannons, attacked Ashita and Lizan, the main towns of lower Tiari.
- Said Agha from the Chal region led his troops against Salabkhan in lower Tiari, which was ruled by Malek Barcho.

- Ismael Agha from Bi-Garbiyan led his troops against Chambe of Malek Ismael in upper Tiari.
- Said Agha from the district capital Julamerg marched against Mazrago in upper Tiari.
- Soto Agha from Oramar was deployed with his troops against the districts Jilu, Diz and Baz.

According to Heidar Bey's order, these five Kurdish commanders were to attack all the Assyrian tribes simultaneously so that they could not help one another.

The Assyrian troop leaders were informed of this plan by spies. On June 11, 1915, two wings of Rashid Bey's troops attacked in lower Tiari: the first wing directed its fire against the main village Ashita and the second against the valley of Lizan. The leaders of the Assyrian defense, Zenkho of Bet Hiob and Lazar of Ashita, were both good strategists and brave warriors. Nonetheless, the two towns of Ashita and Saraspido were conquered in one day. At the beginning of the attack, the women and children were brought over the Chambe bridge to the other side of the River Zab, where they escaped to the village of Bet Delyata and on into the mountains.

The leader of the defense against the second wing was Khoshaba Yosip of Lizan. A terrible battle raged at the bridge of Germani from daybreak into the night. All the Kurds' attacks were fended off, and they did not succeed in conquering the bridge. When it became dark, Khoshaba gave the order to set the bridge on fire so it would not fall into the enemies' hands. Two brothers, Lazar and Giso Oshana of Bet-Koka, volunteered for this task. While they were setting fire to the bridge, they were discovered by the enemy and shot at with cannons. The younger one, Giso, died the next day from his injuries, but Lazar survived his wound and continued taking part in numerous battles through 1918.

On the same day, June 11, Said Agha of Chal and his troops also attacked the valley of Malek Barkho in lower Tiari. The attacks did not subside all through the day and night. Fourteen houses were destroyed in the process. On the next day, however, Malek Giwargis of Tkhuma joined in with strong troops. Together with Malek Barkho's men, he succeeded in expelling Said Agha's army. In the process, 25 Kurds and eight Assyrians died. All the Assyrian villages which the Kurds had temporarily seized were plundered and burned down, so that the returning Assyrians found neither their homes nor their provisions. In the days to follow, the Assyrians had to take part in similarly difficult defensive fights. In part they were victorious, and in part the combats ended with defeat and death.

On June 27, 1915, our patriarch Mar Shimun received the following extortionate letter from Heidar Bey in Mosul: "All of Tiari is destroyed; three villages, Sarzer, Deshtan and Tarvanesh, have been burned to the ground, and the fighting continues. May I tell you that your brother Hormizd is in captivity here in Mosul. If you do not capitulate with all your tribes, your brother will be killed."

The patriarch answered in the following manner: *"Under no circumstances will I submit the tribes to your power, after having experienced what the Turkish government has done to the Assyrian Christians with oppression and torture. For this reason I prefer to let my brother be killed than to surrender the entire people."*

He then called a tribal assembly. All the maleks and chiefs of the districts and towns were to come together to discuss how the people could still be rescued.

Shlemon, Malek Ismael's son, representing his father from upper Tiari, Priest Kena of Baz and Khoshaba Yosip of Lizan suggested fighting their way through to the Russian allies in Persia and bringing the families to safety. Afterwards the tribal troops could return to defeat and drive out the Turks and Kurds in battle. For this, however, they needed supplies of weapons and food, and so the leader Malek Barcho of lower Tiari, Malek Giwargis and Micho of Tkhuma suggested they not leave their places of residence. Instead, the patriarch, protected by a small troop, should fight his way through to the Russians and first ask for assistance with weapons and equipment. That is what happened.

One day after this June 28, 1915, consultation, the patriarch set off towards Dizan. On the way, he was held up in the village of Madès. Fights were going on there, and he had to withdraw with his escort into the inaccessible mountain regions as quickly as possible. Here they spent the night in the rain and cold, and with great difficulty arrived next morning in Dizan, where the Assyrians had successfully held back the attacks of the Kurds from Oramar, although with a great number of losses. In the village of Saramos, on the other hand, sixty Christians were surprised in their sleep by an attack and killed.

On July 1, the patriarch was able to leave Dizan, accompanied by sixty warriors. He travelled to Albaq, where there was a Russian military base, and negotiated with the commander.

Meanwhile there was a terrible famine in the war areas. The people lived on plants alone. Malek Ismael of upper Tiari thus ordered that the Leon region be conquered before the harvest, which was successful. The Assyrians occupied the entire region up to Julamerg, and in this way were able to save many thousand people from famine.

When the Kurd leader Ismael Agha learned that the Leon region and its entire harvest had been taken by the Assyrians, he invaded the village of Qavale behind the mountain on the western side of Leon, intending to occupy the entire mountain chain and to push the Assyrians back to the other side of the Zab River. A troop of forty Assyrians were harvesting when they were attacked from two sides. They were, however, armed, and they defended themselves bravely. Five Assyrians and three Kurds fell in this conflict, including Ismael Agha's brother; his son Hamid was wounded. This was the Kurdish sheikh Ismael Agha's last move against the Assyrians.

Shortly thereafter, Kurdish-Turkish troops under Djevdjed Bey attacked the patriarch's village, Kochanes. Many Assyrians from the neighboring hamlets and villages had taken refuge here, and some Armenians were among them who came from Bashqala, Julamerg and Paghe. After two days of fighting, the village was conquered by the troops. The refugees sought protection in a fortified camp near the fortified church of Mar Shallita. It was not until the third day that the Assyrian defense was victorious and able to drive the enemy out. There were fifty deaths on their side, including women and children, and ten wounded.

On July 29, 1915, the patriarch returned from his negotiations with the Russian general Chernozubov. The result was unfortunately unsatisfactory. They had said that they were not able to offer the Assyrians assistance in the high mountain valleys, and that they should attempt to break through to Persia.

Meanwhile, Heidar Bey from Mosul had written to Malek Slivo and other tribal leaders of Tkhuma: "Other tribes have already been wiped out by the government. You too will be exterminated if you do not capitulate." The Tkhuma residents answered: "We are ready to accept your conditions if you break up the army you have gathered. We have no enmity with the Turkish government, but we are compelled to defend ourselves against the attacks by the enemy Kurdish tribes."

Heidar Bey then prepared to attack Tkhuma; the Assyrians learned about this from their spies, but their own defense was weak against the army, equipped as they were with cannons and machine guns. The first hostile attacks immediately upset the defense so much that the Patriarch had to quickly give the order to evacuate the entire population. The meeting place for the first evacuees was to be in upper Bervar in the village of Kotranis, from where they would then proceed on their way to Albaq. Just at this time, the young patriarch Mar Benjamin Shimun, 29 years old, was a victim of adverse strokes of fate. He found that his sick brother Ishaya had just passed away when he travelled to the camp in Mar Odisho to

visit him. And this is where the news reached him that his other brother Hormizd, who had been a hostage in Heidar Bey's captivity, had been murdered at the Bey's command.

Almost all Assyrian tribes followed the appeal to leave the country, since they realized the situation could not be militarily sustained without assistance. The only people who did not want to take part in this exodus were part of the people of Tkhuma, the followers of Malek Barkho of lower Tiari, and all the people of Halmon. The exact number cannot be determined. Perhaps 50,000 people were prepared to move out of their high mountain valleys in order to temporarily reach safety.

This mass exodus could not be kept secret. The Kurdish sheikh Said Agha wrote to Heidar Bey and other Kurdish tribal leaders: "Malek Ismael and the Assyrian tribes left their residences to go to the Russian army. They are about to seize the entire region from Bashqala to Albaq. You must hold them up immediately and kill all their warriors before they reach their goal. If you miss this opportunity, they will return with the Russian army and destroy all of Kurdistan."

This secret paper caused the Kurdish tribal leaders to gather and attack the fleeing Assyrian masses. On August 9, 1915 the following Kurdish tribal leaders united to attack the Assyrians: Jangir Agha from Darjanaje, Taher Agha from upper Dustiknaje, Mahmud Agha from Apinshaje, Soto Agha from Oramar, Karim Agha from upper Apinshaje, Musa Bey from Gulanke, Rashid Bey from Baje, Rustam Bey from Dare.

These eight Kurdish aghas and beys were under the command of Sheikh Said Taha. All the troops together made up about 4,500 men. They had gathered at the Zinjia mountain, where the Assyrian trek had to cross. When the vanguard sought to pass this place on the following day, there was a hail of bullets. A protective troop of about one hundred men under the leadership of Dincha, one of Malek Ismael of upper Tiari's sons, attacked the right flank of the Kurdish enemy. A fierce battle broke out, and in the end the Kurds were compelled to flee.

In this battle, Karim Agha was killed with fifteen men. Many were wounded. The Assyrians lost ten people, including Qahsa Nabiya of Baz, and 32 were wounded. Khoshaba Yosip pursued the enemy with his people in order to make the way easier for the refugee trek. The patriarch determined that observers would be sent ahead to guarantee the safety of the masses of people against further assaults. Malek Yosip of Shamsdinan and Malek Ismael watched over the mountainside with their people. In this manner the trek reached the village of Haji Name in the Sarpnaje valley. After a rest, they left the village on August 11. On the

way they encountered several Russian Cossacks. Hoping to be rescued soon, they celebrated this encounter with volleys of cannon fire.

On the next day the patriarch was met by a Russian honor guard of twelve riders, led by an officer. They had been sent by the Russian headquarters in Albaq to greet the patriarch. The officer greeted His Holiness Mar Shimun with the following words: "The general of the Tsarist army greets His Holiness and thanks you for your great bravery, which could hardly be expected by a small people such as you are. You have shattered the Turkish army and the Kurdish tribes, who are equipped with the best and most modern of weapons, using a few hundred weapons, and you have opened the difficult path through the alpine country to your allies. I can truly say this happened with divine leadership."

On August 13, they all reached Bashqala, where the exhausted and starved people rested for six days from their extreme exertions. On August 15, the festival of Mary, General Chernozubov arrived to meet with Patriarch Mar Shimun and his tribal leaders. He advised them to camp here first and not proceed on to Persia until new orders from Russia had arrived. After the discussion, he returned by automobile to his troops.

Somewhat later, David, the patriarch's brother, went to Albaq to scout out the situation. He learned that the Russian troops were about to leave Albaq, and that the Assyrians should depart without delay in order to reach Salamas in Persia. On August 18, the trek arrived in Albaq, and three days later, on August 21, reached the Salamas plateau in Persia.

*(Source: [The Assyrians and the Two World Wars 1914-1945, Diary of Shlemon d-Malek Ismael]; edited by his brother Yaqob Ismael, Tehran 1964 (orig. in Syriac))*

### **Assyrian War Song**

1915

by Shamasha Ephraim of Serai d'Mamidai, Van

Brothers, up; arouse ye; shake off sloth and slumber!  
 Take each man his rifle for the battle with the Turk.  
 Now the day is dawning when we face our foemen.  
 Forth we go to battle in thy name, O Mar Shimun.

Rouse ye chiefs and princes, Maliks God-appointed;  
 Forward goes our army through the land we owned of yore.  
 Hear the rifle rattle echo from our mountains.  
 Forth we go to battle in thy name, O Mar Shimun.

Up, I say, ye captains; up, I say, ye Maliks!  
 Kings we had in olden time right mighty men of war.  
 Take we gun and powder; days of stress are on us.  
 Forth we go to battle in thy name, O Mar Shimun.

Lady of the Holy House, Surma stands amongst us;  
 Giver of high counsel to her brothers from a child.  
 "Now the very babe must bear the bow and arrows."  
 Forth we go to battle in thy name, O Mar Shimun.

Young men of the Nation, Clans renowned in story,  
 Stand by one another now in brotherhood and zeal.  
 Shall beloved Kochanes be a prey to foemen?  
 Forth we go to battle in thy name, O Mar Shimun.

Young men of the Nation, bide a band of brothers,  
 Tiari fast by Jilu and Tkhuma fast by Baz.  
 Listen to the roll of battle drums ye warriors.  
 Forth we go to battle in thy name, O Mar Shimun.

David is our leader, valiant in the combat;  
 He shall be our captain and set us in array!  
 He shall go before like sun and moon to guide us.  
 Forth we go to battle in thy name, O Mar Shimun.

Forth we go to battle, raging o'er the mountains;  
 Hearts all yearning forward to Mosul's fertile plains.  
 Nineveh's fair city summons back her children.  
 Forth we go to battle in thy name, O Mar Shimun.

On the Tigris' banks lies Nineveh the holy;  
 Her old walls shall be to us a diadem and crown.  
 There alone, Assyrians, can our race be established.  
 Forth we go to battle in thy name, O Mar Shimun.

Hark, our Nation calls—our great Assyrian Mother;  
 Hark, young men, she calls you—calls each one of you by name.  
 Blest that youth for ever who will hear her calling.  
 Forth we go to battle in thy name, O Mar Shimun.

*(The original is by Deacon Aprem d-Serai from Mamidai, Van, around 1915. The English translation is in Rev. W.A. Wigram - Our smallest Ally. A brief account of the Assyrian nation in the Great War. London 1920, p. 15-16)*

Document No. 29

Mar Shimun's highlanders and their fight for life, as depicted in the thrilling narrative of Mr. Shlemon, of Berwar

*(translated from Syriac to English and compiled by P. Shimmon)*

In the latter part of March, 1915, when the storm was about to break against all the tribes of Christians, Mar Shimun made an effort to avert the calamity by appealing to the German consul at Mosul. He asked one of his chieftains farther in the interior to forward a letter to that official, Mr. Holstein, begging him not to listen to the stories circulated by the Kurds, who were intent on the wholesale murder of the Christians, and to do whatever was in his power to defend them. When this letter was carried to the German Consul, he is said to his credit that he was able for a time to stay the attacks, and he secured the issue of firmans in Turkish language that if any Christian were murdered they would hang every Kurd implicated. The immediate result was that for a time the Kurds were kept quiet and the danger was temporarily averted.

Meanwhile, however, Halil Bey, a relative of Enver Pasha, who was at the head of the Turkish army operating against Russia in north-western Persia, met a crushing defeat in the plain of Salamas on the 2nd of May, 1915. When retiring in despondency, his army massacred all the villagers of Gawar on their way west, so that the Nestorian villages of Gagoran, Pirzalan, Maskhudawa, Mamikan, Diza and Zezan were destroyed. They killed nearly one thousand people, carried a great number captive, and took all their cattle. Some families lost as many as seventy head of cattle apiece. But as the Russians advanced later

on, the Kurdish tribes and Turks of those regions, including those of Bashkala, Van, Moush and Bitlis left and fled, killing everything that came along in their route and devastating the whole region. Very soon after this, widespread rumours were circulated that the Christians would be massacred.

In the early part of June the Vali of Mosul began to get ready and collect a big army against the Nestorians. He had some 7,000 Turkish troops with regular artillery and some 15,000 Kurds from all those regions. In twelve days they reached Berwar and Amadia, on the banks of the great Zab, a tributary of Tigris. A few days before this some fourteen villages out of twenty-one in Berwar had made their escape towards Tiari, on the other side of the River Zab. It was then hoped that the Russian army would penetrate these wild mountainous regions and hold them for good. On June 18th the Vali of Mosul, Rashid Pasha, reached Berwar and after a few days' rest attacked Tiari, from Asheta the largest village to Lezan of Malik Khoshaba. Then when the people of Lower Tiari, the refugees from Berwar and the other Assyrians saw that the strength of the Turks was greater than they could alone combat, they crossed the River Zab and destroyed the Gemani bridge, which is near Lezan. The people of Asheta and Sarispedo crossed the river and destroyed the Khiu bridge and also the bridge of Malik Ismael de Chamba, which is a little north; and they also destroyed the bridge on the Lower Tiari below Julamerk.

A few days later the sister of the Patriarch wrote to her brother, who had in the meanwhile come to the Russian commanding officer at Salamas in Persia to ask for assistance, saying that the Lower Tiari had already been destroyed by the Turkish army. All that Mar Shimun could get in the way of assistance was some 200 rifles of an old type and a few rounds of ammunition and a few hundred Cossacks. The latter were given him as escort for a certain distance to act as a rearguard. They returned again, and the Patriarch with his own men were left alone to venture into the interior of the country. On the way near Kochanes they met bands of Kurds hiding behind the rocks north of Diz, and when they saw them, on June 28th, after a sharp skirmish they fled. On reaching Kochanes, Mar Shimun delivered an address to his men, asking them to defend their lives and honour of their families and freedom against their persecutors.

The battle in the meanwhile was going on between the Vali and the Assyrian Highlanders. The majority of the villages were, however, empty, and the inhabitants were terror-stricken and fleeing; everything was deserted. They had gone to the top of the mountains with their families, men staying behind to offer resistance to the big armies confronting them. The mountains are so steep here in Waltu that when the Christians saw some dead bodies in the deep valleys they could not climb down to them, but tied on ropes, thus descended to the

valleys, where they found there were the bodies of some Kurds. They took off their precious weapons and ascended with ropes again. For a time here the Kurds got the worst of it, and a great number fell before Assyrian tribes. The latter were fighting on the east and the Vali on the west, with the River Zab between them. But the Christians could not accomplish much against superior modern artillery which was brought against these regions for the first time in their history, and the people were terror stricken. The villages of Sarispedo and Asheta, the latter a place of 500 families, were destroyed, as were also Geramon, Arosh, Halmon, Zaweta, Minyanish, Margi, Leza and Zarni, with ten villages of Berwar. They destroyed over fifteen churches and took off all their old manuscripts and service books, kept for generations. It seems again evident that Mr. Holstein, the German consul, wishing to spare the Nestorian Christians, sent word to the Vali of Mosul to return from his expedition of destruction; and when the Vali went back to Mosul there was quiet for a while again before the final storm broke.

From the middle of June to the middle of July there were at least three small engagements between the Assyrians and the Kurds. In the absence of the Turkish regular troops the Assyrians were more than able to repel the aggressive Kurds and send them back to their various places up to the latter part of August.

But very soon the Assyrians had to give up their homes and take to the tops of lofty mountains. With their families and what they could bring in the way of cattle the Assyrians stayed in the mountains. From twelve various regions and tribes the Assyrians fled to mountain fastnesses and began to suffer from hunger, lack of salt and all the inconveniences of a siege, with no prospect of any immediate relief. Barley went up to fifteen dollars a load, wheat twenty dollars, salt to two dollars a pound and it could not be found anywhere. They formed a very huge camp on the top of the Tal mountains, spreading here and there, one day's journey, with the family of Patriarch in the middle, in the famous Church of Mar Audishu, built in a rock. From it a very small spring of water comes out, which could not be sufficient to give drink to those round about. People could not eat meat without salt and could preserve nothing, and they began soon to become lean and emaciated for lack of proper food. Then food became very scarce among the masses of the people. Everywhere the mountains were luxuriant with flowers and grass. People were sitting by hundreds under mulberry trees that when the fruit was ripe they might pick up something for their little ones. Some would stay for two weeks; they had nothing to eat but herbs and berries.

Up till the middle of August that was the condition of the people. Then there was a short relief when the harvest in the mountains was ripe, but what had been sown in these regions

was very little and did not last long. Sometimes the Assyrians would venture farther away and try to gather wheat from the fields, when often the Kurds would descend on them and kill them.

In the middle of July Mar Shimun came to Mar Audishu in Tal and called together the heads of his tribes and his Maliks to consult as to what was best to do. For it was evident that soon the whole people would starve on the top of the mountains. They all felt they should go to the frontiers of Persia, a few day's journey, and ask Russian assistance to get out. The Patriarch, with forty men, risked their lives, and for two days and two nights they had nothing to eat but what they could get from the ears of the corn on the way. One whole day they had to sleep and bask before the hot sun of July and did not dare to move lest the Kurds near by should recognise them; they would be instantly killed. The Kurds saw them from a distance and took them for rocks. After much hardship they reached the Russian camp and commander in Bashkala near Salamas in Persia. No immediate assistance could be given them at that time. In the meanwhile word came from the south and west that the Pasha of Mosul was preparing a formidable arm, much larger than the first one, to come and destroy the remnants of the Assyrians. Some of them had by this time gone back or some had still stayed in their homes with their families. The people of Tkhuma put up a great defence on September 27th and 28th. But while they were building trenches for themselves the Kurds were destroying them with guns. All they had were a few antiquated rifles and often home-made ammunition. The Turks destroyed Gundikta, Mazraya, Inner Tkhuma and many other places.

When the people arrived at a high pass, they saw the sexton of the Church of Mar Audishu of Tal, without hat, a censer in his hand and the copy of the Gospel used in the Church service in his sack, and the censer full of the incense. He was going 'to assist against the Kurds and Turks.' For he fully believed that the presence of the Book of the Gospels would defeat the enemy.

But the enemy had gathered from everywhere. That very same day, Saturday, September 29th, the Patriarch had arrived at Tal in time for the last rites at the funeral of his brother, Ishaya. On the next morning some 4,000 Kurds came down upon the Patriarch and his congregation, in what seemed to be "the valley of death." It was the most solemn occasion for the little band when the sound of rifles was heard from another direction toward which they were headed. From one party over five hundred were killed and 200 children and women were taken captive, and a very large number of sheep were carried from the people in this valley, with all the household furniture that one could think of, cattle and all kind of goods which the people had saved till the present. The Kurds had come first to the church

to look for the Patriarch whom they had heard had lately arrived there. Not finding him there they unearthed the body of his dead brother, hoping to discover money or Church property. Failing in that they hurled the body down the valley, where it was afterwards seen in the water.

There were some of the Assyrian young men on the top of the high mountains defending Ribbat and shooting at the Kurds. When the latter heard and found out where these young men were they headed for them. These Assyrians were all killed, but they killed a large number of the Kurds and sold their lives dear. Then some of the Tkhuma and Tiari people headed for these high impassible mountains (Bet Dikhni and Bar Shinna). From time immemorial the Assyrians had planned that when they should be hard pressed by the enemy they would climb these high crags; so all who were unable to escape through the valley took refuge here. The Kurds who came from the east and from the north pressed westward and completely blocked the way of the Assyrians, while the government troops and other Kurdish chiefs came from the south and isolated them. For six days and nights these men, women and children had nothing to eat. More than 2,000 were killed and over 500 were carried captive.

The Turks, after losing some 300, were exhausted. As they despaired of climbing the crags, they returned and then burned the whole country of all the tribes. They destroyed more than sixty churches. From one church they carried off booty, over 180 loads, the property of the church and what the people had deposited there as being the safest place.

It is asserted that altogether more than 300,000 sheep were carried off and not less than 50,000 head of cattle, together with all the property which these highlanders had collected for ages. In fact, they subsisted on sheep, cattle and honey. Nearly all the beehives were either destroyed or those near their dwellings were taken by the Kurds for themselves. The destruction of the Assyrian property was complete—nothing was spared.

These Assyrian highlanders were making for the plateaus of Salamas and Urumia in Persia, where the Russian army was. There can be nothing more pathetic, more touching and heart-rending than to leave home, church and everything behind, and then press on to another country. Their only hope for living and for subsistence was in the fact that the Russian army was there. They arrived in rags, barefoot, hungry, exhausted and weary of existence; they began a life of bitter exile, exhaustion and destitution, the like of which the world has never seen. While passing near Kochanes, the Patriarchal seat, on September 30th they were again attacked by wild Kurds from the mountain passes, but the young men once more showed their true mettle and betook themselves to the passes and drove them

off. In the few past months some 50,000 had already escaped for their lives to the plains of Bashkala and Salamas. The Patriarch was now in at last with some 30,000 more of his people.

One party had been left behind, who were besieged in the high mountain passes and had not effected an escape when the Patriarch took the 30,000 to the plains. They were about 10,000 in number and at last made their escape, most of them reaching Salamas on October 7th and 8th. Part of these remained in Bashkala and in the plain of Albaq and began to gather the remnant of harvest for daily food.

*Paul Shimmon of Urmia:*

The Russians for some reason or other never allowed the Assyrians who had escaped to enter the Caucasus, and so they remained in the plains of Salamas and Urmia, Persia. Winter was now approaching and various epidemics had been at work. There was hardly housing accommodation for all the refugees. The Russian authorities tried their very best to house them, but many were seen for months at large in the streets, and often washing their clothes in the bitter cold of November in the running brooks. The Moslems would never consent to the presence of Christians in their families, as they regard them as ceremonially unclean. The homes of the Salamas Christians had been already ruined during the past winter, when the Russians had left the country in the beginning of 1915, so that housing accommodations were extremely limited, and in the winter months many lived in the barns and roofless enclosures. In some houses there were twenty to thirty persons in one room.

Measures of relief were at once begun by the American Missionaries, and the Russians have sent money and clothing. The Archbishop of Canterbury's Committee in London, as well as the Lord Mayor's Armenian Relief Fund, the Friends of Armenia, and other agencies have sent most generous assistance. The contributions of the Rockefeller Foundation have been most liberal. But it is one of the saddest things in life that the majority of those who have died have perished of exposure, want, sickness and unsanitary conditions. Then at the best all that the highlanders have been able to get in the way of relief has been a loaf of dry bread and one quilt for a family of five or more. The best way of appreciating what has been done is to count not those who have perished, for all would have perished, but rather those saved from the clutches of starvation and disease.

*(Source: William Walker Rockwell, The pitiful plight of the Assyrian Christians in Persia and Kurdistan. Described from the reports of eye-witnesses, New York 1916, pp. 29-43)*

Document No. 30

Hakkari: The exodus of the Assyrians in the Summer of 1915

*Report by Paul Shimmon (ACASR)*

**The Attack on the Assyrians in the Turkish Mountains**

The rest of the awful story comes from the Turkish side, where the Patriarch and the larger number of the Assyrians live in the mountains of Kurdistan. It was many months before news reached their brethren in Urmi as to what had been happening some hundred miles away. The Patriarch, Mar Shimun, was driven from his home in Kochanes. He fled to Tiari with all the members of his household. The Patriarch's house was burnt, together with many other houses, including the house of the English Mission. Mar Shimun, writing to England a few days ago, tells us that for four months he has been a wanderer with his people, carrying on a war with the Turks and Kurds. They only gave up fighting when Turkish artillery was brought against them, which made it impossible for them to offer an effective resistance. (...) Tiari and Tkhuma, both of which districts embrace many Assyrian villages, have been entirely destroyed. In August last, 35,000 mountaineers fled to Salamas, Persia, but the larger part of the Assyrians are still in the mountains wandering about from place to place, without food, and with no hope of any one coming to their relief. The most pathetic part of the story is this. Surma, the Patriarch's sister, with Esther, her sister-in-law, and three small children, went down to Chamba in Tiari in June last for safety. With the approach of the Turkish Army they soon had to flee to Dadush, and from there to the great Church of Mar Audishu, in the Tal country. They always had to travel on foot with just the clothes they could carry. Surma spent three months in Mar Audishu, expecting to leave at any moment, when the enemy drew near. During that time there was food but almost no water, and none at all could be spared for washing or bathing. Occasionally they walked to a stream to bathe and wash their clothes.

The last day of their stay there was the saddest of all. On that day their brother Ishaya died of fever. Mar Shimun, hearing of his illness, had come over the day before. The enemy was then very near, and they could hear the sound of the guns in Tkhuma. Just when the funeral of their brother was to take place, Surma, Romé, and Esther with her children were compelled to leave the place, lest they should be caught by the enemy. Mar Shimun, two priests, and a few laymen remained behind at this time of danger to bury their brother. The burial service was quickly said, and the body hastily interred, and Mar Shimun hastened after the fugitive women and children. They were only just in time, for a few hours after their

departure, the Turks arrived and made straight for the church, having heard that the Patriarch's household was there.

When writing to us on October 6th, Mar Shimun says he is in a village in Salamas, Persia, with his sisters and one or two members of his family. At the present moment there are with him 35,000 Assyrians camped out in the plain of Salamas (4,000 feet above sea-level), sleeping in the fields with no clothes to cover them at night, clad in the rags which they have worn for many months, without food or shelter. The British Consul has telegraphed to England to say that unless these people are helped by charitable folk at home, two-thirds of them will die. No Christian nation has ever suffered for their religion as these people; and none has so great a claim on us as this unhappy Assyrian remnant.

*Paul Shimmon, Massacres of Syrian Christians, op.cit. pp. 21-23*

*[147], J. Bryce, op.cit.*

#### Document No. 31

The pitiful fate of the mountain Syrians in the year 1915

*Reports from Persia to Pastor K. Röbbelen, Hermannsburg Mission*

The mountain Syrians are to be distinguished from the Syrians in the Urmia plateau. A small portion of the former can be found in Persia on the Turkish border in the mountainous districts of Mergavar, Tergavar and Baranduz. Most, about 80,000 to 100,000, live in Turkey. Those who live in the eastern district of Gavar and the neighboring districts, also those near the Patriarch's seat in Kochanes, are rayats, i.e. simple subjects of the Muslim government. But the residents of the high mountainous area, which is difficult to access, steep and rugged, the area of Tiari, Tkhuma, Jelu, Baz and Diz, are Ashirets, free Syrians. They enjoyed a certain independence, lived, like the Kurds, separated into individual tribes according to their own constitution and paid only an annual tribute through the Patriarch to the Turkish government. In the valleys of their mountains they can only grow a few crops and they live primarily from their herds, which graze on the mountain meadows. Accustomed for centuries to fighting for their very existence with the Kurds, they are fit to fight, warlike and brave.

When the war between Turkey and Russia began, the mountain Syrians were considered secret allies of the Russians, and the Turkish government also distrusted them. The Syrians in Persia had also received weapons from the Russians, and they said that the Syrians of Turkey were roused by a Russian emissary to place themselves at the Russians' side as soon as they advanced into Kurdistan. When the Turkish troops were forced to retreat from Van due to the Russians' superior force and the Russians advanced into the Turkish region,

the Kurds fell into the rayats in Gavar, Tergavar and the other regions to prevent them from granting support to the Russians. Everywhere they killed the men, dragged the women and girls away, plundered and laid waste to the villages. The Patriarch himself considered his life in danger, so he left his residence and sought refuge with the Ashirets. Kochanes was destroyed, and it seems the Patriarch's church also did not remain intact.

The Russians then advanced into the Gavar region and promised the Patriarch and the free Syrians assistance in case they were attacked by the Kurds. This then indeed happened in the summer of 1915. The Kurds invaded the regions of the Ashirets (tribes) with superior force and were supported in so doing by Turkish artillery. The Assyrians pled with the Russian commander to provide them the promised support. He put them off from one day to the next and finally withdrew with his troops to Khoi.

The Syrians defended themselves bravely, but could not hold their own against the superior numbers of their enemies and their enemies' cannons. They first were defeated in the Tkhuma area, where they were surrounded. Only a few of the men escaped death. The women and children were taken prisoner and in part sold; all the cattle and all the Christians' property was robbed. The Tkhuma district is depopulated and devastated. After intense fighting and great losses, the great part of the Ashirets were confined in a district which was difficult for the enemies to take. There the brave mountain Syrians defended themselves heroically from July through October 1915 with the most terrible of deprivations and exertions. They finally managed to push their way through and reach the Urmia plateau.

The rest of the free mountain Syrians is now eking out a miserable living there. About 40,000, half of the entire mountain people, were rescued from the battle. They are camping in the Salamas region between Urmia and Khoi, and their Patriarch has taken up residence in Diliman, the capital of Salamas. The homeless refugees suffer great shortages of food and clothing and everything needed to live. Our pastor Luther Pera saw many of them scattered in the fields gathering stubble which they wanted to use as fuel. Diseases have also been added to their other afflictions: typhoid fever and cholera have carried many of them off. Without outside help, most of them would perish. The Presbyterian missionary Dr. Shedd estimates the number of those who are completely destitute and exposed to be at least 25,000.

### **Military Operations in the Area of Van and northern Persia**

Meanwhile, Khalil Bey's army in northern Persia had advanced into the area of Urmia and Diliman. 10,000 Kurds from the upper Zab valley had joined the 20,000 regular forces. Djevdjed Bey, the Wali of Wan, also took part in these operations. Djevdjed was a commander of the corps which attacked in Persia, and a cousin of Enver Pasha. The Turkish and Kurdish troops destroyed all the Christian villages in the Persian areas. The Assyrian population of the Urmia region and the Armenian population of the Salamas plateau (near Diliman) were mowed down mercilessly by the Kurds. Only those who were able to flee to Russian territory or find protection on the American mission property survived.

Djevdjed Bey is the son and successor of the excellent Vali Tahir Pasha, who lived in the town as governor of the Vilayet Van for 16 years. He was on the best possible terms with the Armenians, and was equally fair to Muslims and Christians. When Djevdjed Bey returned from Salamas in mid-February 1915, he greeted the Armenian leaders in a friendly manner, promising to put a stop to the plundering of the villages and to compensate those who had been plundered. He asked them only to wait several weeks until the Persian expedition was over. At the same time, they heard that at a gathering of Turkish notables he had said: "We've made a clean sweep of the Armenians and the Assyrians from Azerbaijan (northern Persia). We must do the same thing with the Armenians from Van." (p. 94, F.N., p. 220)

On May 26, 1915, the advancing Russian troops occupied Vostan on the southern corner of the Van Lake, thus blocking the connection between Khalil Bey's army operating in northern Persia and Bitlis and Erzerum. Khalil Bey's army thus had to try to join up with the main Turkish army, which was near Erzerum, through the Kurdish areas south of Lake Van (the tribal areas of the Nestorian Assyrians) or via Mosul. Under the pressure of the Russian troops, they could no longer withstand in the Urmia area. Three weeks after the defeat at Diliman, on May 25, Khalil Bey abandoned Urmia. The Russians advanced into Urmia, making it possible for those Christians who were still remaining and who had been forced to convert to Islam to retreat.

For Khalil Bey, the only way open was in the upper Zab valley, as the Russians had already conquered Dize in the Gavar district and Bashkale. But the upper Zab valley through which the way to Mosul passed was difficult to pass through, and was also blocked at Julamerg by the Nestorian mountain Assyrians. As a half-independent tribe living in the wild mountains of the Hakkari region they, like the Kurds, are armed to the teeth even in peacetime to defend themselves against their Kurdish neighbors. Khalil Bey and his army thus had no choice but to fight their way through between the Russians and the mountain Assyrians over breakneck paths in the Kurdish mountain ranges in order to reach the town of Bitlis.

On this march he was attacked by the Russian troops from the Bashkal direction. Slowly retreating and taking cover, he remained steadfast, and in the end occupied an almost inaccessible mountain chain, 40 to 50 km south of Bashkala. A desperate battle began in these desert cliffs, where the peaks were still covered with snow. On June 4, Khalil Bey's troops were broken apart by a Russian attack and expelled into the Levan valley. The last remainders of his army fought their way through to Seert on mountain paths. Khalil himself made it to Bitlis on circuitous ways and gathered those together who gradually turned up from his Persian occupation army. The Kurds who had joined Khalil Bey's army in Urmia fled to the Kurdish districts of Shamsdinan, southeast of Urmia.

### **Devastation in the Area of Van, Urmia and Salamas**

Summary: The Vilayet Van was emptied of Christians; evacuation by the Russians took place in mid-August 1915. About 250,000 refugees had made their escape to Echmiadzin in Russian Armenia, about 50,000 Christians to Persian territory.

#### Document No. 32

Report by the Nestorian Patriarch Mar Shimun Benjamin about the flight from the Turks and the Kurds to Persia (Oct. 1915)

After his arrival in Khosrava in the Salamas area in October 1915, the Patriarch communicated the following to a visitor:

"My people is made up of 80,000 souls who live as free Ashirets (tribes) in Turkey. Like the Kurdish Ashirets, they had neither to pay taxes nor provide soldiers for the army. No Turkish official made an appearance in our area. Our tribes have been armed since the old days. Even ten-year old boys are trained in using weapons so that we, with our 20,000 armed men, can protect ourselves against the raids of the Kurds living around us.

When the constitution was introduced in Turkey, we believed in the government's promise guaranteeing us safety, and sold a large portion of our weapons. They led us to believe that the Kurds had also been disarmed. In this manner, our people became defenseless. After declaring Jihad ("holy war"), the Turks decided to wipe us out like the Armenians, and let us be attacked by their troops and by the Kurds among whom we live. Our situation got even worse when Khalil Bey retreated with his defeated army through our valleys in April of this year, after suffering defeats in Salamas in the Urmia region.

At the end of May, the Turkish troops from Mosul marched into our area. This is when the official massacres and devastations in our villages began. Our people left their grazing areas and withdrew to the high mountains of Betashin, where they are now surrounded. Their food is in imminent danger of running out, and there are epidemics. The only hope is to break through and flee over the Persian border.“

*(Source: J. Lepsius, Bericht über die Lage des Armenischen Volkes in der Türkei [Report on the Situation of the Armenian People in Turkey], Potsdam 1916, pp. 109-110)*

### 3. 1915: “Seyfo” - The Year of the Sword

#### The Annihilation of the Assyrians in Turkey

Until 1915, about half a million Assyrians lived in the region of eastern Turkey, part of Ottoman empire. Except for a few communities in larger towns such as Urfa, Diyarbakir, Mardin, Mosul, Baghdad, Aleppo and Damascus, these Christians in the Ottoman Empire were purely a farmer population. Besides primitive agriculture, they subsisted by raising cattle and dairy farming. They inhabited about 500 villages in the barren and sometimes difficult-to-access mountainous regions of Taurus, Tur Abdin, Hakkari, in the Mesopotamian plateau further south, and in the Bohtan and Tigris areas.

Armenians and Kurds, who made up the majority of the population, lived in the same area of settlement. It was not until the end of the war that Turks represented a majority in any province of eastern Turkey.

For centuries, this Christian population of farmers suffered under the Kurds. In the feudal system which has remained in place up to the present day, many Christians were treated as serfs by the Kurdish feudal lords (aghas). Other Christians were tenants. With the exception of the independent Nestorian tribes in the Hakkari mountains, the Assyrians were never landowners.

Another torment was the predatory nomads who stole the harvest from the Christians (and the Kurdish population in the countryside), devastated the fields, rustled the cattle and decimated the herds, and abducted women and children. There were also major feuds between individual Kurdish tribes and Assyrian villages. However, they always remained limited to the local level and were finally settled by negotiations between the Kurd sheiks and the bishops, priests, tribal and village leaders of the Assyrians.

Only once, from 1842 to 1843, was there a major massacre in the mountainous Hakkari country: 10,000 in Tiari fell victim to military conflicts with the Kurds of the Bohtan and Hakkari areas under Badr Khan. In 1846, several thousand Assyrians fell in Tkhuma. The European powers considered this a summons to action. They managed to bring about Badr Khan's deportation at the Porte.

The events of 1915, known as the “year of the sword” in Assyrian historical memory, can not be compared to the living situation of the preceding centuries, where at worst life was made insecure by the Kurdish neighbors. Shortly after it assumed power, the Young Turk

government had developed a plan to destroy all Christian groups in the population. In 1911, the Young Turk “Committee for Unity and Progress” drafted the future government program at the congress in Salonika. The two ideological pillars were the primacy of the Turkish race and structuring an empire on an Islamic basis. The declared goal was to “Ottomanize” all Turkish subjects. Promises of equality and brotherhood for all peoples in the Ottoman empire were forgotten; according to the government program, a forcible Turkicization was imminent for non-Turkish nationalities. They would be allowed to practice their religion, but not their separate language. The spread of the Turkish language was included in Young Turk propaganda in 1913 as the most important means of assuring Turkish dominance and assimilation of the remaining elements. Years before the legend arose of treachery towards their enemies by the Christians in the Turkish empire, the destruction of their existence as peoples and ethnic groups was a firm component in the Young Turks’ government program. Pan-Islamism had given way to Pan-Turkism. Instead of the promised equality of rights, an anti-Christian movement arose. In the course of their short bloody history, the Young Turks proved to be more fanatical than the notorious Bloody Sultan, Abdul Hamid II.

#### Johannes Lepsius and the German Orient Mission

Among the German missionary movements which kept contact with the Syrians was the German Orient Mission (D.O.M.), founded by Dr. Johannes Lepsius in 1895. After studying theology, Johannes Lepsius (1858-1926), son of the famous Egyptologist Carl Richard Lepsius, had his first experiences in the Orient as vicar to the German congregation in Palestine, where he was active from 1884 through 1886. One year later, he took up a pastoral position in the southern Harz area and found himself drawn towards the New Pietists, a direction supported by his friends in the mission.

A prayer association for the “Oriental Mission to the Mohammedans” was the forerunner to the “German Orient Mission” in 1896. In that year, Lepsius travelled to Turkey to found two orphanages, disguised as a carpet merchant. Armenians in Germany had called his attention to the massacres, and thus from the outset his missionary efforts emphasized working with the Armenians, similar to the focus by Americans on the Syrian Christians in Urmia. Between 1896 and 1899, Lepsius founded seven mission stations in the Ottoman empire and in northwest Persia.

In conjunction with the massacres of the Armenians, as well as the Syrians in the Turkish-Persian border area, various orphanages and medical and social institutions were founded. On the Turkish side, the mission center was in Urfa, where there was an orphanage, a house of industry, a clinic, a pharmacy, a hospital and a school. The Swiss deacon Jakob

Künzler (1871-1949), who was the only European missionary worker able to remain during the First World War, organized on his own initiative a school for the Syrian Christians in Urfa in 1903. It was financially supported from Switzerland.

This was the only educational institution for the Syrians of the province. The local school director, Pastor Djürdji, was a victim of the 1908 Adana massacre. Later, the German language was introduced for the Syrians. In connection with the construction of the Baghdad railway, German was considered the European language of the future in Turkey. In addition, the German Orient Mission had opened orphanages in both Diyarbakir and Van, where there were also American mission stations.

About 5,000 Syrians lived in Urfa. They were all that remained of Edessa, once the most important center of Syrian Christianity and culture.

In 1899, Lepsius travelled to Persia. Together with Pastor Eduard von Bergmann, who died just one year later, he founded an orphanage in Urmia for Assyrian girls. This orphanage bore the Persian name "Dilgusha" (heart opener). The first houseparents were the German deaconess Marie Paulat and the Syrian David Ismael. In the persecutions of 1896/97, many girls had either lost their parents or, after being abducted by the Kurds, had been abandoned and left homeless. In December 1900, the new housemother Anna Friedemann arrived. She directed the orphanage until she was deported in late 1914, and regularly wrote reports to Lepsius. The reports by Anna Friedemann on the events in "Dilgusha" were printed in the mission newspaper "The Christian Orient," which was founded anew in 1900 (two issues had appeared in 1896 and 1897).

Besides Anna Friedemann, the orphanage employed only Assyrian teachers, tutors and guards. One hundred Assyrian girls were taken in and cared for. Contact was also maintained with other missions. Because there were Lutherans of German origin among the soldiers at the Russian garrison in Urmia, the German Orient Mission also provided this group with church services. Another orphanage which took care of Armenian children was founded in Khoi at the same time as "Dilgusha."

In 1905, the German Orient Mission opened another station in Sauchbulak for the Kurds, once again attracting only Christians. For several years, this station was directed by the German pastor Detwig von Oertzen, who also worked intensively on the Kurdish language and on translating the New Testament into Kurdish.

Lepsius made further visits to Turkey in 1906, 1913 and 1915. He was in constant contact with his mission workers, thirteen Europeans and six Armenians and Assyrians. His main

work consisted of requesting contributions for mission work by giving lecture tours in Germany and Switzerland, conducting correspondence, publishing the mission journal, and managing the organization of the mission work.

If one considers the actual objective of launching a mission among the Muslims, the German Orient Mission, like the other missions, had practically no effect. Its significance was to report in great detail on the annihilation of the Christians during the war.

Johannes Lepsius published three works of documentation.

1. Armenien und Europa [Armenia and Europe] (1896);
2. Bericht über die Lage des armenischen Volkes in der Türkei [Report on the Situation of the Armenian People in Turkey], Potsdam (1916) (later expanded: Todesgang des armenischen Volkes [The Armenian People's Course towards Death];
3. Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918. Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke [Germany and Armenia 1914-1918. Collection of Diplomatic Documents], Potsdam (1919).

The latter two works contain reports, statements and documents which also involve the Assyrian Christians. They provide evidence that the extermination of the Armenians was simultaneously an extermination of the Christians. In several places, Lepsius also consciously stressed the "indiscriminate destruction and expulsion" in order to rebut the assertion that the Turkish measures were justified by Armenian treachery towards the Turks.

Despite his abundant experience in the Orient, his enthusiastic remarks about the "fraternal alliance between Germany and Turkey" can not be distinguished at first reading from other contemporary propaganda writings. In his mission journal, Lepsius stated his opinion immediately after the war broke out. One can only read these articles today with mixed feelings. He does try at this point to portray his Armenian and Assyrian wards to their best advantage: "These are also Christian nations, the Armenians and Syrians, who have formed the border outpost here (towards Asia) for centuries."

"The war will show whether Krupp Steel [a well-known metaphor for German invincibility] lets itself be crushed. Memel and Basra are the final points of the European limes towards Asia." He also appropriated the argument of the German experts on Islam, such as Becker, when he defended and excused the declaration of "Holy War" with a "psychological allowance for the Mohammedan masses' backwards medieval thinking and inflammable religious sensibility" (see *Der Christliche Orient* [The Christian Orient] No. 16 (1915), p. 31).

On August 10, 1915, only a few months later, Johannes Lepsius approached Enver, the Turkish Minister of War, attempting to put a stop to the terrible occurrences against the

Christians. Enver answered the moral appeals to the “Turkish brotherhood-in-arms” with the sentence recorded by Lepsius: “I assume responsibility for everything.”

It was not only in Constantinople with Enver and Ambassador Hans von Wangenheim that Lepsius had to deal with failure. The documents which he smuggled back to Germany, probably pushed on him by well-meaning German diplomats, aroused refusal and icy silence at the Foreign Office in Berlin. The attitude of his own mission board was even worse—they refused to support their founder’s activities. Lepsius became a lone combatant; his documentary report was printed and sent out at his own expense. The copies sent to all members of the Reichstag, which constituted the spearhead of this action, were confiscated by the police and never reached the addressees. Bitterly disappointed, Lepsius officially resigned from the German Orient Mission in June of 1917.

As the only documentation in the German language, his two publications on the annihilation of the Christians in Turkey and Persia are an irreplaceable source; they possess great historical value. Unfortunately, German historians to date have made little use of them. In addition to information about similar crimes against the Assyrian Christians, the “Report on the Situation of the Armenian People in Turkey” also contains statistical material in which the Assyrians are listed as a separate group.

The documents in the “Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke 1914-1918” [Collection of Diplomatic Documents 1914-1918] concerning the various Syrian church groups are even more important. These official documents provide evidence of eyewitness reports which were collected in various English and French publications, but which, however, never became known in Germany. The fate of the Syrian Christians in Tur Abdin (west of the Hakkari mountains) in the towns of Mardin and Midyat is documented in these. This can be seen primarily in the telegrams and messages from Consul Walter Holstein from Mosul, and sometimes also in messages from other German diplomats. In one document, it can be seen that the commander of the Asia corps, Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz, advocated liberating the Syrian Christians in Tur Abdin (Midyat) and in Mardin. (In the case of the Armenians, it is known that General Liman intervened in Smyrna.)

Lepsius had an important voice in the German Evangelical Mission Committee on the Orient and Islam, to which thirteen mission associations belonged. He primarily advocated saving the Armenians. The Persian Committee of the Lutheran Hermannsburg Mission, headed by Pastor Röbbelen and Pastor Otto Wendt’s evangelical ‘Nestorian Charity,’ were the spokesmen in this association for the Syrian Christians.

The members of this commission were among those who signed the petition sent to the Imperial Chancellor on September 30, 1915, following a press campaign in Switzerland initiated by Lepsius. Lepsius' petition and writings to the Foreign Office were a "voice crying in the wilderness." Loyalty to the state took precedence over Christianity. The evangelical church toed the official German government line. After it was no longer possible to conceal the Turkish policy of extermination towards the Christian Armenians, the accusation that the latter had committed treason and collaborated with the Russian army was also taken up by the national church. The small German mission groups and associations had little influence.

The representative and retired Protestant pastor, D. Traub, expressed the following opinion about the missions, particularly those in Turkey, in the Prussian House of Representatives at their 25th session on March 14, 1916:

**Consultation on the State Budget 1916—Ministry of spiritual and pedagogic affairs**

"In this context, allow me to remind you of the fact that recently in Hoch, on Prussian soil, 340 Protestant and Catholic missionaries and their family members from India were welcomed back by their German fatherland. I mention this because the state too has a certain interest in the missionaries. Its interest is twofold. On the one hand, the missions should not let themselves be misused for political propaganda work, as often occurs in England and France. I am glad the German missions have kept themselves pure in this respect, and hope they will remain just as pure in the future.

I would also like to emphasize the state's interest in the mission in another way. Their work should neither interfere with nor render more difficult the political relationship to other allied states. In this instance, I am thinking first and foremost of how mission activity will take place in Turkey in the future. Turkey is not an appropriate missionary goal for us. We should keep in mind that the Turks are now praying for the German and Austrian emperors in their mosques. I don't know if anything similar takes place for the sultan in Germany's and Prussia's Christian churches. The "Holy War" is not a war that has anything to do with Christianity. In my opinion, Islam and Christianity should mutually enrich each other in the future, and exchange some of their spiritual treasures and their particularities. I am glad that, with considerable encouragement on the part of the minister of culture, eleven German professors have been brought to the Turkish university in Constantinople, and that just at this time Turkey has founded a second new university in Jerusalem—these are signs that we have reason enough not to render such a favorable development questionable in the future with precipitous, overly eager work on the part of the missionaries."

Even the board of trustees at the German Orient Mission kept this kind of military and political consideration in mind. For that reason, Lepsius commented bitterly on his resignation (June 1917): “An Oriental mission which silently ignores the dying of a Christian people among whom it has worked for twenty years, and when confronted with the famine of one hundred thousand innocent women and children considers its primary task anything other than saving them, is not the mission that I founded.” (Christian Orient, March/April 1917)

At the end of the war, all mission stations in Turkey and in Persia were destroyed. The work of the newly founded “Dr. Lepsius Oriental Mission,” which had joined the “American Commission for Armenian and Syrian Relief,” thus consisted of all-around refugee assistance.

After the war, the subsequent German government, particularly the civil servants who were still employed, made use of Johannes Lepsius’ activities and rescue attempts as moral camouflage, but it cannot be confirmed that Lepsius consciously intended this. In the plan he made in the last years of his life to found a mission seminar for a mission to the Muslims, it can be seen how incapable of thinking politics he was. Lepsius was not able to realize his plan, which would have been a sort of new beginning.

### **German Protestant Mission and Charity Works in the Orient as Members of the Oriental and Islam Commission (1915/1916)**

1. German-Armenian Society (Marburg), P. Ewald Stier
2. German Orient Mission\* (Berlin/Potsdam), Dr. J. Lepsius
3. German Charity Association for Christian Charity in the Orient (Frankfurt)
4. German Home for the Blind in Malatia (Berlin)
5. Evangelical Brotherly Unity, Lepers’ Asylum in Jerusalem
6. Kaiserswerther Deaconesses’ Institution (Kaiserswerth on the Rhein)
7. Evangelical Carmelite Association (Klein Welka near Bautzen)
8. Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Persia (Hermannsburg near Hanover)
9. Jerusalem Association (Wustrau, Neuruppin County)
10. Board of Trustees of the Syrian Orphanage (Köln, Marienburg)
11. Nestorian Charity\*, P. Otto Wendt (Lerbeck, Porta Westfalica)
12. Necessary Charity, Professor Dr. Rade (Marburg)
13. Sudan Pioneer Mission (Wiesbaden)

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\* Emphasis: G.Y.

### German Responsibility

The Young Turk leadership exploited the disinterest of the German generals in Turkey in what was not directly related to the war to “sort things out with the Christians,” as it was described internally. Officially the security of the Russian-Turkish front was to be guaranteed through the elimination of the Armenians and Assyrians of the eastern provinces. Lepsius’ collection of diplomatic files proves that the German government was informed by its diplomats beginning in 1914 about all measures taken against the Christians in the eastern parts of Turkey.

What was the situation, on the other hand, for those in a position of military responsibility? First and foremost, General Liman von Sanders: “The German government has, to the best of my knowledge, done everything it could do, considering the situation. But it was very difficult for them. I know in particular that Ambassador Count Metternich most emphatically protested the measures aimed at the Armenians.” (*Statement as an expert witness in the Talaat trial, 1921, Berlin*)

General Liman also exonerated the Young Turks after the war ended by blaming them for the deportation order, but not for the order to wipe out the Armenians and other Christians. According to him, the blame for this should lie with the lower-ranking civil servant staff, the auxiliary police, and the Kurds.

At the age of 70, General von der Goltz, long-time friend to the Turks, led the campaign in Mesopotamia where the exclusively Syrian Christian population in the northern province of Mosul made up a quarter of the total population. He was asked before the deportations began whether he approved of this deportation for military reasons from several towns along the border to the interior of the country. Goltz gave his approval.

The German officer von Staszewski, who was stationed in the army headquarters (3rd Army) in Erzerum in 1915 and who must have been involved in the deportations and the atrocities taking place there, expressed his view in a public discussion on Lepsius’ documentation in 1920: “The Turks did well to remove these opponents from the endangered areas in a timely manner. It was their right and their duty. The way in which they carried it out was harsh and cruel. For the three of us [German] officers in Armenia, the situation was not very easy. As a human and as a Christian, one was on the Armenians’ side; as a soldier, on the Turks’ side, as they could expect with reason that foreign officers who were in their pay would not interfere with their internal affairs. (...) The Turks take such matters very seriously, and

unlike other peoples they were free of mawkish sentimentality and often inappropriate consideration.” (in: *Der Neue Orient* 8 (1920), *Letter to the Editor*)

These excerpts clearly reflect the German military leadership’s attitude in Turkey during the world war. Direct involvement of German generals, officers, or soldiers has until now only been clearly proven in the case of the German officer Count Eberhard Wolfskehl, Chief of Staff in Syria, who led a direct action against the Armenians in Urfa as aide-de-camp of General Fakhri Pasha.

The rivalry and tension among the German generals has already been described. The imperial government stuck with those military officers who best agreed with the given political guidelines. For Turkey this was General Lossow, personal friend of the Turkish minister of war. General Liman was frequently excluded. When they found out about such unauthorized actions, the High Command was angry: “The Foreign Office felt itself above all criticism. The imperial offices had difficulty adapting to the idea that when the war broke out, a position arose in the High Command which not only shared responsibility with the imperial chancellor, but also bore responsibility for such monstrous action that it was all the more compelled to action the less this took place in Berlin.” (E. Ludendorff, *Kriegserinnerungen [Wartime Memories]* (1919), p. 5)

Some German diplomats in Turkey tried to bring their government to intervention with lengthy reports and appeals. Unfortunately, most of the extermination of Christians took place during German Ambassador Hans von Wangenheim’s time in office. He approved of the Turkish measures, even when, on the basis of diplomatic reports, he was thoroughly acquainted with the extent of the crimes. He was the buffer between the German consuls in Van, Erzerum, Mosul, Aleppo and the Foreign Office in Berlin. All the reports of violence and diplomatic warnings bounced off him: “I request respectfully that the Foreign Office be informed so that Turkish disavowals do not appear in the German press, which would arouse the appearance of German approval.” (*Telegram from Consul Rössler (Aleppo) to the German Embassy, von Wangenheim of July 27, 1915*)

Wangenheim, who died in October 1915, did not have to confront the moral consequences of his action. His successor Count Metternich attempted to make use of the diplomatic possibilities, but the right moment had come and gone long before.

It was incomprehensible to other countries that Germany, with the help of the German military staff in the Turkish army, had not been able to prevent its ally from committing mass murder and genocide to an extent unparalleled at the time. In France, England and America numerous papers appeared during and after the war denouncing Germany’s responsibility : “But Germany, as master of Turkey, able with a wave of its hand to halt this organized

campaign of rape and malicious agitation against a Christian people, and even, if they had wanted to, to prevent it, Germany watched without moving, obligingly, and as far as we know, perhaps also approvingly. This is an example, and a significant example, of the true nature of a Germanized Turkey.” (*From the speech by the English politician Asquith of November 8, 1916*)

Although the history of the German-Turkish colonial and alliance policy was more complicated than expressed in the polemics of Germany’s contemporary enemies, no important evidence can be found arguing for Germany’s innocence in the extermination and expulsion of the Armenians and the Assyrians. After Turkey’s breakdown, the three Young Turk pashas, Enver, Talaat and Jamal, were able to flee from Constantinople on November 2, 1918 with the help of German military officers. An allied court-martial would certainly have sentenced the triumvirate of terror to the death penalty for their crimes. Former minister of the interior Talaat was able to live incognito for three years in Berlin, equipped with false papers by German diplomats, until his fate finally caught up with him: he was shot in Berlin in the middle of the street on March 15, 1921, by an Armenian whose entire family had been victims of the extermination. The person responsible, the Armenian student Tehlerian, was later pronounced innocent in a spectacular trial. (*see Der Völkermord an den Armeniern vor Gericht; Der Prozeß Talaat Pascha [The Genocide of the Armenians before the Court; The Talaat Pasha Trial]; pogrom series 1006, Göttingen & Vienna 1985, 2nd edition*)

### Statistics

#### **Syrian Christians in the Turkish Vilayets**

(Johannes Lepsius, 1916)

##### **Vilayet Erzerum**

645,700 residents total\*

277,000 Christians

215,000 Armenians

12,000 Greeks and other Christians

Muslims: 240,700 Turks

120,000 Kurds

25,000 Kislbash

##### **Vilayet Sivas**

1,086,500 residents total

271,500 Christians

170,500 Armenians

Muslims: 2/3 Turks, Turkmenes,

Cherkessans

1/3 Kislbash (Shiites)

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\* While this is the figure indicated in this manner by Lepsius, the sum of the individual posts actually totals 612,700.

25,000 Syrians

**Vilayet Kharput**

575,300 residents total  
174,000 Christians  
168,000 Armenians  
5,000 Syrians  
1,000 Greeks

Muslims: 180,000 Kisilbash  
126,000 Turks  
95,000 Kurds

**Vilayet Diyarbakir**

471,500 residents total  
166,000 Christians  
105,000 Armenians  
60,000 Syrians (Jacobites, Chaldeans,  
Nestorians)  
1,500 Jews  
4,000 Yezidis

Muslims: 200,000 Kurds  
63,000 Turks  
27,000 Kisilbash  
10,000 Cherkessans

**Vilayet Van**

542,000 residents total  
290,200 Christians  
192,200 Armenians  
98,000 Syrians  
5,000 Jews  
600 gypsies  
5,400 Yezidis

Muslims: 210,000 Kurds  
30,500 Turks  
500 Cherkessans

**Vilayet Bitlis**

398,000 residents total  
195,000 Christians  
180,000 Armenians  
15,000 Syrians  
5,000 Yezidis

Muslims: 40,000 Turks  
45,000 Kurds (residing)  
48,000 Kurds (nomads)  
45,000 Zazakurds  
10,000 Cherkessans  
8,000 Kisilbash

**Villages of the Syrian Christians in Tur Abdin/southeast Turkey**

1. Midyat (main center), 6 churches, Mar Abraham Monastery
2. Mardin (west of Midyat), Der Za'faran Monastery (5 km north)

## 3. Killit

**North of Midyat:** 4. Habsinas, 5. Kergoze, 6. Salah, 7. Bate, 8. Kafro alaito, 9. Yerdo, 10. Bitkelbe.

**On the road between Midyat and Kerboran:** 11. Zaz, 12. Der Salib, 13. Arbai, 14. Kerboran.

**Further east towards:** 15. Arnas, 16. Halah, 17. Keferze, 18. Shtrako, 19. Hach, 20. Baqisyan, 21. Deirqubbe.

**East of Midyat:** 22. Ainwardo, 23. Mazizach, 24. Mar Gabriel Monastery near Qartmin, 25. Kefârbe, 26. Basibrin, 27. Baminin, 28. Sare, 29. Midin, 30. Temerze, 31. Hazach.

**South of Midyat:** 32. Anhil, 33. Kefro tahtaito, 34. Kharabale, 35. Ihwo, 36. Arbo, 37. Sederi, 38. Badibbe, 39. Kharabe Mishka, 40. Giremira, 41. Mar Bobo, 42. Gundeke, 43. Giremira, 44. Birguriya, 45. Giremara, 46. Abse.

**Other towns:** 47. Nisibin, 48. Hasankeyf, 49. Difne, 50. Denabil, 51. Me'are, 52. Saura, 53. Esfes, 54. Bafova, 55. Mahserte, 56. Khellik, 57. Zahoran, 58. Elin.

#### **Syrian Monasteries in Tur Abdin**

Mar Abraham, Mar Aho, Mar Augen, Mar Azazael, Mar Bozzus, Mar Dimet, Mar Dodo, Mar Gevergis, Mar Jakub, Mar Juhannan, Mar Kyriakos, Mar Loozar, Mar Malke, Mar Gabriel (Deir el-Amr), Mar Salib, Mar Sarkis Bakus, Mar Sharbel, Mar Serbil, Mar Shmuel, Mar Estefanus, Deir ez-Za'faran.

#### Document No. 33

The Nestorian, Chaldean and Jacobite Christians as victims of the Young Turk policy of extermination in the Armenian provinces of Turkey 1915-1916

“Before the days of Van, this pan-Turkish program was behind the expulsions and mass arrests in Cicilien and in Vilayet Erzerum, and it also dictated the campaign of destruction which the Turkish and Kurdish troops undertook in the winter of 1914/15 in north Persia against the peaceful Syrians and Armenian populations of Urmia and Salamas. The program called for the general persecution of Christians in the Vilayets Diyarbakir and Mosul.

Jacobites, Chaldeans, Nestorians and Armenians fell victim to this without distinction.” (pp. XVII-XVIII)

“However, a telegram from Mosul on May 18, 1915, which arrived via Consul Holstein of the Embassy (Constantinople) at the same time as Van fell, could have aroused their suspicions. It reported that, according to messages from the Nestorian patriarch of Kochanes and the Chaldean patriarch of Mosul, ‘the Muslims in the Amadia district were planning a general massacre of Christians and had already begun: Vali was admitting the fact, and though he may not be exactly stoking the movement, he also does not appear to be energetically restraining it.’ But here they were Nestorian, Jacobite and Chaldean Syrians, not Armenians.” (p. XXI)

“Between May 10 and 30, 1915, 1,200 of the most respected individuals among the Armenians and Syrians from the Vilayet Diyarbakir were arrested. On May 30, 674 of them were herded onto 13 keleks (rafts made of inflated tubes of animal skin).” (p. 75)

“In Mardin, too, the Mutessarif was removed from office because he did not want to proceed against the Armenians according to the Vali’s will. After his removal, first 500, then 300 more Armenian and Syrian notables were sent to Diyarbakir. The first 500 did not arrive in Diyarbakir, nor was anything more heard from the other 300.” (*Lepsius, Report 1916; p. 76*)

“Indeed, the Minister of the Interior, Talaat Bey, let slip to an embassy member ‘that the Porte wants to use the world war in order to settle matters conclusively with domestic enemies’—the indigenous Christians—‘without being disturbed by diplomatic intervention from abroad.’” (p. XXVI)

“Lord Hohenlohe summarized the results of all efforts (August 2, 1915): ‘All our presentations have proven ineffective with regard to the government’s decision to eliminate the native Christians in the eastern provinces.’ In order to exert increased pressure on the Porte, he transmitted the memorandum of August 9, 1915. On August 12th, he wrote about this to the Imperial Chancellor:

‘The systematic slaughter of the Armenian population, expelled from their homes, has taken on such proportions in the past weeks that a renewed, urgent presentation on our part against this devastating action, which the government not only tolerated but publicly demanded, seemed necessary. This also because at some places even the Christians of other races and creeds were no longer free of harm. (...) In certain places such as Mardin, all Christians have suffered the same fate, regardless of their race and creed.’” (p. XXIX)

“On September 2, 1915, the Christians of Jezire—4,750 Armenians, 250 Catholic Chaldeans and 100 Syrian Jacobites—were massacred.” (p. XXXIV)

“From the Black Sea to Syria, the Christians’ name has been wiped out, the churches shut down, the schools cleared, the priests and preachers killed or sent away. Aside from a few Levantine towns, all of Anatolia has been Islamicized. The Christian place names have been erased in the registers and replaced by Mohammedan ones.” (p. XXXVII)

“Steps taken by the embassy: Imperial Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg’s answer on October 14, 1915 to a petition from 50 well-known representatives of the Protestant church: ‘The imperial government has considered and will continue to consider one of its most important tasks to use its influence so that Christian peoples are not persecuted because of their beliefs. German Christians can rest assured that, guided by this principle, I will do everything in my power to take into account the worries and desires you express.’” (p. XXXVII)

“Regular troops, and recruited groups of Cherkessans, Kurds and criminal gangs acted together in the mass slaughters of the deportees. Various valis, mutessarifs and kaimakams (governors, district leaders, mayors) believed the pretense of deporting them was unnecessary, and had all Christians butchered on the spot, as in Diyarbakir, Jesire and Midyat (Tur Abdin). (...) The kaimakam of Midyat was killed by order of the Vali of Diyarbakir, Rashid Bey, because he refused to massacre the Christians of his district. Rashid Bey himself, organizer of the massacre of Diyarbakir, was not dismissed, as Consul Holstein had demanded, but transferred to Angora. When, after Turkey’s capitulation, he was to be arrested and held to account by the armistice commission, he committed suicide.” (p. LIII)

“We will soon have a great uproar everywhere if the Turkish central government doesn’t change its program of persecuting the Christians.” (Consul Holstein, Mosul, June 13, 1915)

“A large part of the Young Turk committee is of the opinion that the Turkish empire can only be built up on a purely Mohammedan pan-Turkish basis. The non-Mohammedan and non-Turkish residents thereof must be Mohammedanized and Turkicized by force.” (Scheubner-Richter, Vice Regent in Erzerum from Feb. 17 to Aug. 6, 1915, on December 4, 1916)

“The Minister of the Interior, Talaat Bey, recently said about this (to Dr. Mordtmann) that the Porte intended to use the world war to make a clean sweep of its interior enemies (the indigenous Christians).” (Baron von Wangenheim, June 17, 1915)

“To Turkicize means to expel or kill everything which is not Turkish, to destroy and violently seize other people’s property. For the time being, Turkey’s famous renaissance consists of this and the repetition of French phrases tinged with freedom.” (Count Wolff-Metternich, Ambassador on a special mission from November 15, 1915 to October 3, 1916)

“The history of the Turkish empire, from its beginnings to most recent times, proves the sentence correct that in the Orient, religion and nationality are identical. Every Ottoman is convinced of this inside.” (Count Wolff-Metternich, July 10, 1916) (LXXXVII-LXXIX)

“However, one should not forget that there has never been religious persecution for its own sake. Persecutions of the Christians in the Roman empire were dictated for reasons of state; persecutions of the Jews in the Middle Ages and in modern Russia were the result of greed. The pogroms which Mohammad himself organized focused exclusively on the spoils. The Young Turk persecution of the Christians, perhaps the largest of all times, was based on the same reasons: reasons of state and greed.”\* (Dr. Johannes Lepsius, p. LXXX)

*Source: J.Lepsius, Germany and Armenia 1914-1918 (Excerpts)*

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\* Emphasis: G.Y.

## **The German Foreign Service in Turkey 1914-1918**

### **Imperial Chancellor**

Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg (1909-1917)

### **Undersecretaries of State**

Gottlieb von Jagow (1913-1916);

Artur Zimmermann (1916-1917);

Richard von Kühlmann (1917-1918).

### **Embassy in Constantinople**

Hans Baron von Wangenheim (1912-October, 1915);

Ernst Lord Hohenlohe-Langenburg (July-October, 1915);

Konstantin Baron von Neurath (Oct. 25-Nov. 15, 1915);

Anton Count Wolff-Metternich (Nov. 15, 1915-Oct. 3, 1916);

Embassy Councilor von Radowitz (Oct. 3, 1916-Nov. 16, 1916);

Dr. Richard von Kühlmann (Nov. 16, 1916-July 24, 1917).

### **Consulates**

#### Mosul

Vice Consul Walter Holstein, vice regent from 1911 to late April, 1918, official trip to Van from Nov. 1 through Dec. 19, 1914;

Official trip October 1915, leave of absence July 22 through Sept. 23, 1916, represented by Vice Consul Max Otto Schünemann;

Leave of absence from May 1 through Sept. 19, 1917, represented by Vice Consul Wustrow; Vice Consul Wustrow, vice regent from late April through July 23, 1918.

#### Erzerum

Vice Regent Max Erwin Scheubner-Richter from Feb. 17 through Aug. 6, 1915

#### Aleppo

Consul Rössler

Document No. 34

Documents of German diplomats in Turkey 1915-1918

**No. 46:** Telegram from the Imperial Embassy, Pera, May 10, 1915

The imperial ambassador H.von Wangenheim to the Foreign Office

On the basis of the Vali's message from Mosul on May 8, the consulate there wires: Christian population of the province of Van has been in uproar for several days. Armenians raided Mohammedan villages near Van, ostensibly attacked the citadel of Van. Weak Turkish garrison lost 300 men when defending against attacks. Town itself, with daily battles in the street, mostly in rebels' hands. Uprising particularly intense in Shatakh district near Van.

Nestorian tribe of the Tyari in the Bashkale district rose up at the same time. 2,000 well-armed Tiari raided Mohammedan villages and barricaded themselves in north of Julamerg. The embassy is telegraphing directly to Rev. Spoerri on fate of German orphanage. (*Wangenheim, p. 65*)

**No. 57:** Telegram from the Imperial Consulate Mosul; departure from Mosul, May 18, 1915

Arrival in Pera (Constantinople), May 20, 1915

To the German Embassy, Constantinople

The sovereign of the Nestorians, Patriarch Mar Shimun in Kochanes, let me know that the anti-Christian movement in the Amadia district is growing daily. Muslims there plan general Christian massacres and have in part already begun. The Chaldean Patriarch here told me the same today. Vali admits this fact and to me it seems—though he may not be exactly stoking the movement, he also does not appear to be energetically restraining it, which is very unwise. If he intended to influence Kurdish sheikhs, restraint would not be difficult to apply. I request permission to communicate these orders to the Vali. (*Holstein, pp. 72-73*)

**No. 113:** Telegram from the Imperial Consulate Mosul, departure from Mosul, July 15, 1915

Arrival in Pera, July 16, 1915

To the German Embassy, Constantinople

The Chaldean village of Feshkhabur near Jazire (Vilayet Diyarbakir) was raided by Muslim Kurds last Sunday, and its population, consisting only of Chaldean Christians, was

massacred. As long as the government does not undertake anything against the Vali of Diyarbakir, it cannot be assumed the massacres will stop. (*Holstein, p. 103*)

**No. 118:** Telegram from the Imperial Consulate Mosul, July 21, 1915

To the German Embassy, Constantinople

Up to now, about six hundred women and children (Armenians, Chaldeans, Syrians have arrived. Their male relatives were massacred in Seert, Mardin and Feshjabur. Just as many are expected in the upcoming days. . . (measures of assistance). (*Holstein, p. 107*)

**No. 124:** Telegram from the Imperial Consulate Mosul, departure from Mosul, July 28, 1915

Arrival in Pera on July 28, 1915

To the German Embassy, Constantinople

1. The rebellion of Christian (both Chaldean and Syrian populations between Mardin and Midyat continues. Telegraph line to Diyarbakir destroyed. This rebellion is a direct reaction to the extreme actions against Christians by the Vali from Diyarbakir. They are defending their very skin. (...) (*Holstein, p. 114*)

**No. 126:** Imperial German Embassy, Constantinople, to Pera, July 31, 1915

To His Excellency, the Imperial Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg

Since the beginning of this month, the Vali of Diyarbakir, Rashid Bey, has set out to systematically exterminate the Christian population of his administrative district, without discrimination among race and creed. Among others, the Catholic Armenians of Mardin and Tell Ermen, and the Chaldean Christians and non-uniatic Syrians of the Midyat, Jezire ibn Omar and Nisibin districts are particularly affected. As a result, according to reports from the Mosul Consulate, the Christian population between Mardin and Midyat has risen up against the government and destroyed the telegraph line. (*Hohenlohe, p. 115*)

**No. 153:** Telegram from the Imperial Consulate Aleppo, August 26, 1915

To the German Embassy, Constantinople

An Armenian who fled the military with his weapon killed three policemen during a house search in Urfa on August 19. As a result, a mob staged a real massacre, in the course of which about 200 men, Armenians and Syrians, were killed. By the next morning, the government had regained control. (*Rössler, p. 143*)

**No. 207:** Foreign Office Berlin, December 1, 1915

To the German Embassy, Pera

The Syrian Christians who are near Mardin and Midyat are probably identical with the Nestorians [This is an error; these were Jacobites, not Nestorians *Editor's Note*]. As far as is known here, the Syrians (Assyrians) principally involved withdrew into the mountains in order to escape the Kurds' acts of violence, but not as an act of rebellion against the Turkish authorities. It thus seems urgently desired that the difficulties which have arisen be resolved amicably. May I request that Your Excellency use his influence on this matter in the manner which appears appropriate, and then report on what steps have been taken. (*Zimmermann, p. 201*)

**No. 240:** Imperial German Embassy, Pera, February 14, 1916

The difficulties which have arisen between the Syrian Christians near Mardin and Midyat and the Turkish authorities have been eliminated. The influence which General Field Marshal Baron von der Goltz is capable of wielding on military territory played a decisive role. (*Metternich, p. 238*)

**No. 303:** Imperial German Embassy, Pera, October 9, 1916

To His Excellency, Imperial Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg

The Turkish newspaper here, 'Tasviri Efkiar', discussed the Armenian question in an editorial, in connection with the exposé by the committee 'Unity and Progress' which Your Excellency is familiar with. The conclusion was reached that the policy of unification and fusion of the various elements in the population originally employed by the committee had 'failed completely', and instead, that 'purging' the empire of all non-Mohammedan, i.e. Christian, elements must be envisaged. The article must have communicated rather accurately the convictions held by the ultra-nationalist circles. To some extent, these thoughts have already been put into action by expelling the Syrian Christians residing in the eastern border provinces and the Greeks in individual districts in Asia Minor and Rumelia. In addition, the author seems to demand the evacuation of those Armenians from Constantinople and Smyrna who had thus far been spared expulsion. (*Radowitz, p. 298*)

**No. 309:** Scheubner-Richter (vice regent at the German Consulate Erzerum from Feb. 2 to Aug. 6, 1915), Munich, Dec. 4, 1916

To His Excellency, Imperial Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg

(...) The first point in their program (the Young Turk committee's) was the execution of the Armenians. (...)

2. At about the same time, the Nestorians in eastern Kurdistan were expelled from their homes by Turkish troops from Mosul after offering brave resistance, and they were partially destroyed. Their fields and homes were laid to waste. The survivors fled to the Russians and are now fighting in their ranks against Turkey.

3. Khalil Bey's campaign to north Persia resulted in the massacre of his Armenian and Syrian (Assyrian) battalions and the expulsion of the Armenian, Syrian (Assyrian) and Persian populations from north Persia. They leave behind a great bitterness towards Turkey. (*Scheubner-Richter, pp. 305-309*)

**No. 406:** Royal Prussian Legation, Munich, July 12, 1918

To His Excellency, Imperial Chancellor Count von Hertling

The nuncio has just requested that I determine whether it would be possible to send urgent assistance for the Armenian and Syro-Chaldean populations in the Caucasus and in Persia through the German government, as it is not possible to send the same through the English government via Constantinople. The nuncio is charged with making this request by the cardinal undersecretary, and sets great store by a rapid answer. (*Preutler, p. 405*)

**No. 412:** Foreign Office Berlin, July 18, 1918 — to the Royal Prussian Legation Munich

Answer to report from July 12, 1918

I ask Your Excellency to tell the nuncio that we are in principle pleased to take over transmitting support monies to the Armenian and Syro-Chaldean populations in the Caucasus and in Persia. Whether and to what extent carrying this out—particularly in Persia—is possible in practice, remains to be seen. (*Baron von der Bussche, p. 411*)

(*Source: J. Lepsius, Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918. Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke [Germany and Armenia 1914-1918. Collection of diplomatic documents]; ed. and introd. Potsdam, 1919*)

#### Document No. 35

Report by the Syrian Protestant Kenan Araz from Midyat (Tur Abdin)

Military thoroughness demanded that the Jacobite Assyrians around Mardin could not be spared, as people who represented a threat to security in one area could be just as dangerous elsewhere.

Mardin was one of the most important towns on the deportation route towards the south. For months refugees filed through the town, and on the plateau below temporary camps were set up over and over again. It was Mardin's turn in July and August, 1915. It followed the same pattern everywhere—deportation and massacre of the Armenians of the town and of many Assyrians (both Catholics and Protestants).

Towards the middle of July, the government had about a hundred Christians from Midyat arrested. Among them were most of the leaders of the Protestant church, men who had become strong over the years through the word of God. These men now sat in prison.

The basement below the old mission house was very suitable as a prison, as it had no windows and its only door led to the courtyard, which was surrounded by high walls. It was mid-July and very hot. Without windows, and with one hundred men squeezed into a room which was set up for a few cows, it was suffocatingly hot.

One week later they were chained to one another and led out of the cell. Each one knew what was coming. Singing with their heads held high, they marched out of the city. Small groups of wives, family members and friends gathered together on the flat roofs to see them file by. Suddenly an unusual sound rang out. It was the Kileli, that unique high tone which is produced by Assyrian women at the back of their throats at times of great exultation—such as weddings or the healthy birth of a child without complications. Some one had begun the Kileli, and it was quickly picked up by other women who had to watch as their men were led to certain death.

That one shrill tone said more than a hundred sermons. The contrast to the lamentation and crying at the usual Muslim and indeed Christian burials in the area could not have been more extreme.

In Midyat itself, these men's families were placed under house arrest. The level of tension in the town was high. A much bigger massacre was expected. Little by little, families in danger were smuggled out of the town by night. Within a few weeks, the major part of the Christian population of Midyat had fled to Ain Warde, a mountain village about ten kilometers away.

The fury raged in Midyat. Every Christian who was still in the town, whether Protestant or Jacobite, was either killed or forced with great suffering to become a Muslim. Many children were abducted and adopted against their will by Muslim families in nearby villages.

They soon found out that most Christians had fled from Midyat to Ain Warde. As a result, the village was surrounded by soldiers and besieged for three months.

Completely cut off from the outside world and expecting every day to be slaughtered, many people found their way to Christ at this time.

In the end, the government decreed that the attack should end. The people of Midyat returned to their devastated town and found their houses plundered by the soldiers. Everything of any value had been stolen. There was hardly a family which had not lost at least one member.

*(Source: B. Farnham, Im Lande Allahs [In Allah's Country], Stuttgart 1987, "Terror in Midyat", pp. 28-31)*

**Report by Deacon Asmar from the village Ainwarda (Tur Abdin): experiences in the First World War**

I am Deacon Asmar, son of the minister Gevergis from Ainwarda. I am currently a teacher at the Assyrian secondary school Mar Severius in Beirut. I will tell you what happened in Ainwarda in the year 1915.

The village of Ainwarda is east of the town of Midyat on the Tur Abdin. When the Muslims descended upon the Christians and killed them, the Ainwarda residents braced their defenses in the village. They also let the people from Midyat know what was happening so they could save themselves. The Muslims attacked the village from all sides; they had gathered from all over the region. Many Christians from other villages had fled to our village, for instance from Keferze, Arnas, Bate, Kafro. Facing the village were about 12,000 soldiers. There were also Muslims from the villages. They came with their women and children because they believed the village was small and easy to seize. They then wanted to seize the residents' possessions and kill the people in order to take over the village. But Ainwarda fought for two months and six days until the government tired of this war and negotiated.

They said: "We don't want to kill you nor do we want to keep fighting with you. Give up and submit to the government." But the Christians did not trust the government. They demanded: "Send us a Kurd sheikh to negotiate with us. First have the soldiers and the Muslims withdraw." They wanted to negotiate with Sheikh Fatullah of Ainkaf. He came, together with his nephew Sheikh Sidqi, and they demanded the Christians send two men. The mayor of the village and two other men went there. They agreed on what followed. The

sheikh vowed he would find out from the government whether the offer of peace was a trap for the Christians or not. The sign was to be: "If I tell you—on my honor and my conscience—you can agree and give yourselves up. If I do not say this sentence, then don't believe their promises."

In fact, the situation was that the sheikh negotiated with the government about his people's safety and received their word. The soldiers were then withdrawn from the village.

There were other occupied villages, and negotiations turned to them. The people said: "We still have three occupied villages: Der Salib, Hakh and Azakh. The soldiers must retreat from them too." The commander demanded they send a man to negotiate. He found one who went with the Turkish military, but to be quite sure it was not a trap, the nephew of the Sheikh, Sidqi, stayed in the village as a hostage. He lived for a week in the mayor's house, and then they released him. The mayor first negotiated in Der Salib, and the military was withdrawn. This was also done in Hakh. But in Hakh the Turkish commander refused, saying: "The Christians killed many of my soldiers; I will not let them retreat."

In the end, a disagreement broke out, and he demanded that they wire to Mardin. The answer arrived: "You should withdraw immediately from Hakh." These negotiations lasted for two months, from September through November (1915).

#### Document No. 36

Report by Sleman Hanna Maskobi of Midin, Tur Abdin (Turkey) about the events of the years 1914-1915 according to what his parents and relatives told

I am Sleman Maskobi from the village of Midin (Tur Abdin). I was born in the year 1913. Midin is a village in Tur Abdin. The area where it lies is flat, and the landscape stretches out all around. Vineyards, fields for cultivating wheat, barley, chickpeas, lentils, millet, muskmelons.

In those days, in the year 1914, Turkey's government was conscripting soldiers. They came into the villages and gathered all the young fellows; they also took them from Midin. My father was among them. They took him away when I was just a year old. After all the young men had been conscripted into military service, the news from Midyat arrived for alke Hanna in Basebrino. The message was: "They have killed the Hirzimis, a Protestant family in Midyat, and begun slaughtering Christians. It's a matter of Christianity and Islam. Be on your guard and kill the soldiers that are there with you. Take their weapons away."

Malke Hanna sent someone to Midin—Basebrino is close to Midin—with the message: “It’s like this. Call on the soldiers who are with you, and make sure you take their weapons away.” There were thirty Turkish soldiers in the citadel in Midin. When the villagers got this news, they became frightened. They assaulted the soldiers in the citadel and took their weapons away. The soldiers could do nothing against it. They then released them, telling them: “Go! We don’t want to kill you.” The soldiers went out and withdrew.

The village leaders and clergymen came together and conferred. “Now they’ve gone away. From here they will proceed to Midyat and then to Diyarbakir, and there they will take action against us. The government will come and we can do nothing against the government.” They sent the people after the soldiers to bring them back to the village, and returned their weapons. They, the Muslims and the Turks, became vicious and angry. They harbored a secret resentment in their hearts after first being disarmed and then having their weapons returned.

They were billeted in the Be Jallo family’s house. At night, several of them went to the Kurds. There are several Kurdish villages around Midin. The Turkish soldiers said to them: “Come with us! Let’s kill the people (Christians) of Midin together, and then you can raid the village and take whatever you want with you.”

The Kurds informed their people and slipped away at night to the soldiers’ lodging in the Be Jallo family’s house. When the people got up the next morning, rifle bullets rained down from all sides. They barricaded themselves in the citadel and in the Addai family’s house, as well as in the Mar Yaqub church. This big church is like a fort. The citadel of Midin is such that one can look out over the whole area and see everything. The Kurds approached from all over the region. The Christians from the neighboring towns sought refuge in the citadel. There is a lake in the middle of the village, and a well in the courtyard of the Mar Yaqub church, so they had drinking water.

For ten days, the Kurds and the Turkish soldiers besieged Midin and were not able to seize it. On the last night they attacked from all sides, but, by a merciful act of providence, all their leaders were killed. They say that thirty of their aghas died that night. In the morning, no one was there when the people of Midin looked out, neither soldiers nor Kurds. They then conferred about what they should do. The village leaders said: “Basebrino will not fall in this war, but Hazach will be lost if the slaughter begins. It is better for us all to leave Midin and go to Basebrino. We will withstand them there, together with the other Christians.” They sent for Malke Hanna and asked his advice. He answered: “Just come; we will share and share alike whatever we have, until we are released from these massacres.”

That night, they all got ready to leave Midin; each one loaded as much as he could onto his donkey and his own back. The women and children, too, carried as much as they could, driving their cattle herds before them. In this manner, they wandered to Basebrino, which is about four hours away from Midin on foot. They marched at night. They reached Basebrino without catching the Kurds' notice. When the Kurds noticed that the Midin residents had fled, they tried to catch up, but could only kill three or four old people. The others had arrived.

For a while, they all lived in this village. Soon the store of provisions got low, as there were too many people. They had no choice but to form a few patrols and steal cattle from the Kurds. They responded by trying to ambush the Christians.

News about this situation reached Midyat. The government sent a delegation of thirty people to Malke Hanna, Hanna Haido's son, to convey the message: "We, the government, want to protect you with these thirty soldiers against the Kurds." Malke Hanna believed this message and billeted the soldiers in the Mar Dodo church. He went there each day to play cards with the officer. After a while, the officer ordered his men: "When Malke comes, aim at him and shoot." However, when he arrived, none of the men dared carry out the order. Several weeks passed in this manner. When Malke was with the officer again one day, the latter left under a pretense and locked him in. The room had no windows, and there was no other way out. The door was very heavy. The officer ordered his people to start a fire with hay and suffocate him with it. They did this, placing the smoldering strands of hay under the door of the room in which Malke was locked. He hissed like a snake, but could do nothing.

In the corner of the room was a false ceiling, typical of churches to be used to climb out on to the roof. As there was a bedstead in the room, Malke climbed onto it and attempted to escape onto the roof through the false ceiling. However, he could find no hatch. When the soldiers noticed that nothing moved inside, they opened the door. They then saw the bedstead in the corner and the ladder to the false ceiling. They pulled the bedstead away and brought in smoldering hay. They then locked the door. After Malke searched in vain for an exit, he jumped down into the room, believing the bedstead was still there, and fell onto the ground. His rifle got stuck in the chimney. After a while, he suffocated.

Meanwhile, the Turkish soldiers sent word to the Kurds: "As soon as we climb onto the roof of Mar Dodo in Basebrino and fire a round, you attack the village from all sides." After Malke Hanna, village leader of Basebrino, was killed, they climbed onto the church roof and gave the signal agreed upon. Then the Muslims forced their way in and took all the men into

custody. They tied their hands together, took them to a large building and killed them, shooting them one after the other from the doorway.

(Source: Helmut Ritter, TOROYO. *Die Volkssprache der Syrischen Christen des Tur Abdin. Band I, Texte* [TOROYO. *The Vernacular Language of the Syrian Christians of Tur Abdin. Volume I, texts*]. Beirut 1969, pp. 328-331)

## Statistics

1915/1916

### Mosul and Tigris Area

#### Chaldean and Nestorian Christians

Districts:	Residents
Mosul	100,000
Sapna	10,000
Zibar	15,000
Bohtan	5,000
Lower Bervar	<u>5,000</u>
	135,000 Chaldean and Nestorian Assyrians

Death Rate 45,000 (one third of this population)

Destruction of 100 villages and 80 churches

#### List of the Chaldean and Nestorian (Assyrian) villages in the Mosul and Tigris area before 1915

**1. Mosul** (Chaldeans): Tel Kef, Batnaya, Tel Iskof, Bakufa, Alqosch, Kermelis, Piyyos, Anserriya

**2. Amadiya** (Chaldeans):

a) *western Rabban Hormizd*: Dohuk, Maltaya, Shiyoz, Mar Yakob;

b) *Mazuriya district*: Dizzi, Bidvil, Bebozi, Mezi, Chaman, Atush;

c) *Sapna-Bahdinan*: Amadiya, Mengesh, Daudia, Tineh, Araden, Inishk.

**3. Jazire** (Chaldeans): Jazire, Zacho, Takian, Peshchabur, Girki Petros, Tel Kabbir, Beidar.

**4. Kirkuk** (Chaldeans): Kerkuk, Shaklava, Armuta, Ainkava.

**Mosul--Jacobites**: 5 villages

TOTAL: 40 villages, 44 churches, 3 monasteries

**Nestorian Dioceses of Mar Abraham from Gunduk (through 1915)**

1. **Zibar and Aqra** (Nestorians): Shermen, Shosh, Gunduk, Artun, Ba Mishmish, Erdel, Bekole.
2. **Jabel Gara**: Esyen, Ergen, Talnita, Mezi, Barmin, Adech, Armashe.
3. **Sapna**: Amadiya, Deri, Chomane, Dirgni, Biledshan, Bibeidi, Hamziyya, Dehe.
4. **Nerva**: Karu, Alih, Bash, Velah, Tashish.
5. **Bervar**: Jdide, Bekolke, Tutu Shamaya, Maya, Deriski, Aina d-Nuna, Iyyet, Bishmiyaye, Duri, Helva, Malachta, Akri, Bebaluk, Hayyis.
6. **Bohtan**: 23 villages

Document No. 37

**The Nestorians of the Bohtan District:** Letter, dated Salamas, 6th March, 1916, from Rev. E. W. McDowell, of the Urmia mission station, reporting information brought by a young man (with whom Mr. McDowell was previously acquainted) who had escaped the massacre; communicated by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

There was a general massacre in the Bohtan region, and our helpers, preachers, teachers and Bible-Women, with their families, fell victims to it among the rest. The man who brought the word is known to me personally. This young man tells the story of how, by order of the Government, the Kurds and Turkish soldiers put the Christians of all those villages, including Djeziré, to the sword. Among those slain were Kasha (Pastor) Mattai, pastor of the church in Hassan; Kasha Elia, one of our oldest and most honoured pastors, recently working as an evangelist; Kasha Sargis, superannuated; Muallin Mousa, pastor of our church in Djeziré, and his sixteen-year-old son Philip. There are three preachers not heard from, and one of them is probably killed, as his village, Monsoria, was put to the sword; another, Rabi Ishak, is possibly alive, as there is a report that his village had been preserved by the influence of a Kurdish Agha. It is to be feared, however, that this Agha would not be able to protect them for long, as from every source comes the word that the Government threatened such friendly Kurds with punishment if they did not obey orders. The third man is reported as having fled to Mosul. Whether he reached there or not is not known. The women and children who escaped death were carried away captive. Among these were the families of the above mentioned brethren. The wife and two daughters of Muallin Mousa, the daughters of Kasha Elia, and Rabi Hatoun, our Bible-Woman, were all school-girls in Urmia or Mardin. Kasha Mattai was killed by Kurds in the mountain while fleeing. Kasha Elia and Kasha Sargis, with

other men of the village of Shakh, were killed by Turkish soldiers who had been stationed in their village by the Government.

The three villages of Hassan, Shakh and Monsoria were Protestant, and it is to be feared that they were wiped out, as were all the other Christian villages of the plain. Many of the women of Monsoria threw themselves into the river (Tigris) to avoid falling into the hands of the Kurds. Mar Yohannan and Mar Akha were still safe at the time my informant fled. The terrible feature about it was that, after the first slaughter, there were Kurds who tried to save some of the Christians alive, but the Government would not permit it. My informant had found refuge with an Agha and was working for him, when a messenger from the Government came with orders to the Kurds to complete the work or be punished. Word was brought to my informant in the field, and he with a few others fled to the mountain and made their way to Van, and so came here. The villagers of Attil, where we had work also, all escaped to Van. Their Kurdish Agha, who was a warm friend of our preacher and of our work, gave them warning that he would not be able to protect them, as the massacre was being pressed by the Government. It was their pastor who fled to Mosul. His way would take him to Djeziré and Monsoria, the home of his wife. They may have been killed there. There is no word about them.

This terrible calamity grieves me more than I can tell you. And more than those who died, the fate of those carried off into captivity weighs upon me. I think of them often—Sarah, Hatoun, Priskilla and little Nellie and others, young girls whom I knew in the home almost like my own children. What is their condition? This word of my informant is confirmed by a woman of Djeziré, who made her escape also to Van and thence hither. She tells us that Sarah and her two daughters were released and were last seen on the plain beyond Djeziré, wandering in a destitute condition.

*[41], pp. 180-181, J. Bryce op.cit.*

**P. Joseph Naayem:** Eyewitness Reports on the Massacre of the Assyro-Chaldeans in Urfa, Seert, Kharput and Diyarbakir

The Chaldean priest Joseph Naayem was the editor of an important collection of eyewitness reports which appeared in French in Paris in the year 1920. He came from Urfa, provincial capital of the Urfa district, and was a member of a well-off Chaldean merchant family who themselves were victims of the massacre. For that reason, his report on the 1915 events in Urfa is also a description of his own experiences. After an adventurous flight to Aleppo, Naayem was able to save himself, and was sent by the Chaldean vicariate to Constantinople to provide religious support for the war prisoners interned there. Pope Benedict XV had negotiated about this with the Turkish government since the beginning of the war.

In the course of his work as chaplain to the prisoners in Fort Afiun Kara-Hissar at the end of 1916, Naayem found himself once again in a dangerous situation due to his contacts to the British, French and Russians. He was suspected of conspiracy by the Turkish prison commander. He spent several months in prison under terrible conditions, was sentenced to death but then released. He stayed in the Chaldean residence in Constantinople until 1918. Here a number of victims came forward, as had done in the bishop's residence in Aleppo where Naayem recorded his first eyewitness reports from Chaldean survivors. These individual reports confirm the documents published by the German missionary Johannes Lepsius on massacres and deportations, with all their horrors: the government measures carried out against the Armenians in the Eastern provinces were also carried out against Assyrians living in the same area.

Besides Naayem's collection, there is another which more thoroughly depicts the massacre of the Assyrians. The author, Ishak Arnalé, a Syrian Catholic priest from Mardin (1879-1954), wrote a two-volume work (in Arabic) on his experiences during the First World War, published in Beirut in 1920 under the title "The Worst Christian Catastrophes." Unfortunately, Arnale's work remains untranslated, and hence is not available in any Western language.

The Roman Catholic church made possible the publication of Naayem's book (Paris, 1920) for timely appearance at the Paris Peace Conference. Shortly thereafter, the English translation appeared in New York with a foreword by Lord Bryce, English undersecretary and editor of the Toynbee documents.

Ten months after the armistice, when negotiations on peace were well under way, Naayem received a letter from the Chaldean patriarch Joseph Emanuel II of Mosul, who had sent an appeal for help to Rome. The Chaldeans of Amadia and Zakho, not far from Mosul, had become victims of a Kurdish invasion, and thousands among the Christians had died, despite the allied troop presence in Mesopotamia (1919).

A general overview of the Assyrians' losses shows that the Chaldean Christians lost two thirds of their followers between 1915 and 1916. The Chaldeans in the provinces of Diyarbakir and Seert were particularly affected: large parishes were completely destroyed. Constantinople, Aleppo and Mosul were not affected by these major massacres. The Chaldean and other Syrian parishes there survived. Three Chaldean bishops were among the victims, including the archbishop Adday Sher (1867-1915), well-known in Europe as an Oriental scholar.

The Syrian Catholic parishes in Diyarbakir, Mardin, Urfa and Kharput were particularly affected, as were the Syrian Orthodox Assyrians, whose parishes were the largest. In Mardin they were able to avert the fate of expulsion by paying large ransoms; nonetheless, some 80,000 Syrian Christians were killed by Kurds in the villages.

The smaller Protestant parishes, particularly connected to the American mission, also lost more than half of their followers. While in Urmia the American mission could offer protection to many thousands of Assyrians in 1915, the missions in Turkey were not capable of doing the same. In Urfa, the American mission station was taken by storm and partially destroyed; the last missionary, Mr. Lesley, committed suicide when he was accused of collaborating with the Armenians.

### **Urfa**

One third of the 45,000 residents of the town were Armenians. Among the 5,000 Assyrians who lived in the country town of Urfa through the summer of 1915, there was also a small, relatively prosperous Chaldean community to which the Naayem family belonged. There were respected merchants among the Chaldeans, whose mother tongues included Arabic and Turkish . The extensive trade, which extended as far as Aleppo and Lebanon, was dominated by food and agricultural products from the region. The railway station Tell Abiad of the Baghdad railway line was about 60 km away. There were three foreign missions working in Urfa. When the war broke out, the French one had to close. The German Orient Mission stayed open even during the war because of its hospital. The main responsibility was in the hands of the Swiss deacon Jakob Künzler, who was also an eyewitness to the massacres in August and September 1915. After the unfortunate death of Mr. Lesley, the American mission was closed.

With the Russian advance further east in May 1915, deportations of the Armenians began. They were usually preceded by raids and massacres undertaken by the civil population, under the protection of the militia. From March on, the deportees streamed through the town. The former German orphanage, an impressive building, served as a transit camp. In Urfa, too, the deportation program was first directed against the Armenians, who were considered "traitors and collaborators" with the Russians and the other allies, and then it widened to include to the Syrian Christians. The local Turkish instigators of these crimes were: Haidar Bey, governor (Vali) of the town; the head of the Young Turk committee in Urfa, Barmaksis Zadé Sheikh Muslim; and the former provincial representative Mahmud Nadim, the police commissioner Shakir.

The mullahs inflamed the population in the mosques. Shortly before the spark caught fire, two Young Turk functionaries arrived at the beginning of August 1915 to found special militias (Chettas). This was the pattern of the machinery set in place to destroy the Christians in all Anatolian towns: local important figures, mullahs, functionaries from outside to organize the militia, gendarmerie.

A call to all Christians to give up their weapons was issued. After that, the most influential personalities of the parishes were seized. Killed by the militias at the beginning of August in Kara Köprü, they were the first victims of the destruction. Naayem's father and other Assyrians were also among them.

On August 19, a terrible massacre broke out in Urfa when an Armenian resisted detention and a Turkish gendarme was shot. A bloodbath took place in the Christian quarters. All persons who were found on the street were killed; there were 600 victims. The Muslims dipped their hands in the blood and wrote slogans on the walls of the houses. The missionary Jakob Künzler describes this inferno:

*"I saw how my neighbors, the Kurds, hurried home, got their guns, swords or hunting knives and then fell into the town slaughtering any Christian they saw along the way." (op. cit. p. 55)*

Even some interned foreigners were victims of this bloodlust and had difficulty saving their skins.

One month later, the Armenians barricaded themselves in their quarter. When the siege by the town gendarmerie remained unsuccessful, the governor had reinforcements sent from Aleppo. An artillery troop arrived under Fakhri Pasha's command. Their aide-de-camp, Officer Count Wolfskehl, was a German. He also directed various attacks on the barricaded Armenians. Lepsius later corrected the misunderstanding in his documentation (Germany and Armenia 1914-1918) that arose because of naming the wrong name. The cooperation of a German officer named Eckard is discussed in the English blue book (No. 134, p. 530), and Jakob Künzler is given as a source. Eckert himself was a German missionary and director of the German orphanage in Urfa. Of course, this was not the man referred to. It remains curious that Lepsius remains silent about the fact that although the name is not right, the affair took place. In his book of memoirs, "Dreissig Jahre Dienst am Orient" [Thirty Years Service in the Orient] (Basel 1933), Künzler mentions the German aide-de-camp of the Turkish general Fakhri:

“On the 9th day of the siege, General Fakhri arrived with several hundred soldiers and also cannons. His aide-de-camp was a German count. (*p. 64*) (...) The court demanded an oath from the three Europeans in the town, Mr. Eckart, the German, Miss Jeppe, the Dane, and me, the Swiss man. We were supposed to swear an oath that we did not know where the priest who was sought could be found. This came after the first unsuccessful house search at Miss Jeppe's. We asked the German aide-de-camp [Wolfskehl] who was to administer the oath to change it into a word of honor. He agreed.” (*Ibid, p. 70*)

It can be assumed that Künzler handed on these findings to Lepsius. He had asked him for an explanation and had straightened out the confusion about the names in the introduction to his documentation (*p. LVII*). However, Lepsius does not mention a word about the German aide-de-camp, continuing instead to refute foreign accusations of German participation in the massacres of the Christians.

The capitulation of the captives was followed by a new bloodbath with 5,000 deaths. 15,000 Armenian women and children were deported; most died en route. Among them was just a small group of Assyrian women who were married to Armenians and who now shared their fate of annihilation. No distinction was made among the groups of Christians during the raids and the first massacre on August 19. Some of the surrounding Assyrian villages were completely destroyed by the Kurds. Some of the Assyrians could take shelter in Aleppo. In any case, after the world war there was no longer any Assyrian community in Urfa.

### **Seert**

The town is situated in the Bohtan region; the Christians here were exclusively members of the Chaldean church. Seert was a bishop's residence and metropolis; on an administrative level it was part of the Diyarbakir province. About thirty Chaldean villages surrounded the town; in the west the area bordered on the Syrian Christians in Tur Abdin.

These Chaldean dioceses must have had at least 20,000-25,000 followers. In Seert alone there were 2,000 according to the bishop's statistics, and in the main villages about 18,000. If the latter figures are to be believed, the American charity gave much too low a figure.

When Djerdjet Bey, general governor of Van and commander of a corps of volunteers, was pushed back by the Russians after his defeat in Persia in May of 1915, he withdrew into the Bohtan area with his troops, known as “Kassab Taburi” (executioner troops). There was a great massacre in Bitlis on June 25.

At the beginning of June, the Chaldean archbishop of Seert called for a gathering in the large cathedral in the Chaldean section of town called Ain Salibe. He spoke words of encouragement to his parish and promised them they would be saved with a high ransom payment of 500 Turkish pounds. Tragically, Monsignore Addai Scher was one of the first victims. When they tried to arrest him in his residence, he was able to flee. He placed himself under the protection of one of the Kurdish aghas from Tanze, who took him in for a while disguised as a Kurd. This flight caused a bloody raid in the Chaldean section, ordered by the fanatical Mutessarif Hilmi Bey. He was supported by the commander of the gendarmerie, Hamdi Bey, and the mayor, Hami Effendi. All the men they could get their hands on were killed.

Many village priests looking for protection hid themselves in the cathedral. During the massacre, which was as extreme as the Armenian massacres in its cruelty, the mutessarif Hilmi Bey watched from a window. None of the survivors dared to leave their houses. Again and again groups broke into individual houses, murdered and raided.

In the village of Mar Yakob, all Chaldean Christians were killed. The mullahs rejoiced about the bloodbaths in their mosques and swore never again to allow another Christian into Seert. Influential Muslims, merchants and officers who participated in the atrocities, are listed by name in Naayem (pp. 57-58). In July 1915 the Chaldean women and children were deported.

### **Statistics**

#### **Chaldean Villages in the Seert District**

	<b>Residents</b>
Seert	2,000
Sadagh	2,000
Mar Guriya	1,000
Gedianes	500
Hadide	1,000
Redvan	500
Dehuk	500
Ketmes	1,000
Der Shemekh	200
Piros	1,000
Tentas	500
Tellimshar	1,500
Tellnevro	500

Benkof	200
Mar Shmuni	300
Hartevin	200
Der Mar Yakub	500
Bekind	500
Ain Dare	200
Berke	500
Borem	500
Arshanes	500
Galvaye	500
Goredj	500
Artun (Upper)	300
Der Mazen	300
Der Raban	300
Sharnak	200
Artun (Lower)	1,000
	18,900

Source: Joseph Naayem (o.p.cit.)

Document No. 38

From the report by Jalila, daughter of Gabriel Musa Gorgis, about her deportation  
*Recorded in Aleppo by J. Naayem on February 18, 1918*

On a Sunday morning in July, we women and children were rounded up in the courtyard of the barracks. We spent a night there. On the next morning we were taken to the hospital courtyard, where the men had been rounded up several days before. There they wrote our names in a list. At the same time the deportation began in Bitlis, we (too) set out. There were more than a thousand women, young girls and children under six; only a few were twelve or thirteen years old. We had a few possessions with us, mostly blankets. Four gendarmes accompanied us. All of us were on foot.

The oldest among us, those who were not able to walk long distances, were killed right away. In the village of Gyazere, a band of Kurds fell upon us and tore away our clothes, provisions and money. The gendarmes had us cross the river single file and searched us for money and jewelry. They did this again and again during the entire length of the trek.

During the rest stops they fell upon us, searched out the prettiest young girls and women and abused them. Many of my relatives were among them, and I too was not spared.

Three days after we marched out of Seert, a gendarme named Taher Chaush rode up, stopped in front of me and demanded my daughter Eudoxia, who was eight years old and whom I had with me. When I refused, he said: "You need not be scared, I will treat her well, and later you will have her back again, unscathed and healthy." I began to cry and scream. The soldier tore her violently away from me, remounted his horse, placing her behind himself, and galloped away, not concerning himself any more about my crying and lamenting.

We continued our march for several days, passing through many villages. Most of the women carried their babies in their arms. The sun shone down without mercy. In a mountain range we were assaulted by hundreds of heavily armed Kurds, men and women: they were out to get us. We were led through a valley named Vali Vaveli. Here the Kurds fell over us like beasts, throwing stones at us, even the women, and ripping our clothes off our bodies. One Kurd came to me, and when he saw that I still had my dress and shoes, he tore both off and gave me a heavy punch before taking off. I tried to flee. Suddenly my eyes fell on a completely naked woman who had been wounded by the thrust of a dagger. She was bleeding heavily and held her intestines in her hands, as they were pouring out of her body. She was also fleeing from the beasts. I had my baby in my arms; my three-year old son Fuad was with my sister-in-law.

The Kurd horde followed our trek through the valley. I fell to the ground due to exhaustion and fear, trembling throughout my body. At that moment a Kurd came dragging a young girl along with him. It was Sayud, Petros Kas-Chaya's daughter. He came to me and asked: "Are you a girl or a woman?" I answered him: "You must see my child." Just when he wanted to go, the gendarme called from afar: "Don't take any women, kill them. Take only the young girls." The Kurd shouted back that his booty was a young girl. I gathered my strength and tried to leave. The Kurd then took a large stone and threw it towards me. He hit me on the head, and I fell to the ground and lost consciousness for half an hour.

I awoke because of my baby's crying. He was lying on the ground in the hot sun and was completely worn out. The sight of this tortured creature made my stomach turn. I picked him up, pressed him to my heart and sat down under a shady tree.

I reached instinctively for my head. The wound was bleeding heavily. Several Kurdish women passed by. They were carrying large bundles of clothing which they had stolen from

the unlucky ones who were deported. When they saw me, they said: "Here's one they didn't kill. Let's take her clothing." One of them came to me and tried to pull my stockings down. She was unsuccessful because my feet were swollen; the bloody wounds firmly glued the stockings to the skin, and it was impossible to pull them down. The Kurd then went on her way and left me in peace. Shortly thereafter, four Kurds with large crooked daggers in their hands turned up. When they saw me, they came and wanted to kill me. An old Kurd who was accompanying them dissuaded them. That saved my life.

After they were gone, the old man came back and calmed me down. He suggested I could come with him to his home, but that I would have to give him money for this service. I told him that everything had been stolen from me. His eyes fell on my child, whose miserable state touched him. He took off his vest and gave it to me, saying: "Cover your baby with this and wait here. I'll come back soon." After a while he came back and took me to his village, which was near Mardin. For several days his wife took care of me. I tried as best I could to show them how grateful I was and to make myself useful.

One of my aunts lived in Mardin. I hoped to reach there. After a while I met another deported Chaldean woman from Seert in the village. She told how she wanted to walk to Mardin with a dozen other women. I got up my courage and asked my Kurdish protector to let me go. We went on foot; several Kurdish women came with us. I found my relatives in Mardin. I also managed to buy back my daughter Eudoxia from the Kurds. One year later I had the chance to travel to Aleppo, where I was received by a cousin.

Document No. 39

From the report from Halata Hanna from Seert

*Taken down in Constantinople on Oct. 10, 1918 by J. Naayem*

The extensive report from Halata Hanna, 55 years old, contains many details which complete the picture of those events in Seert which took place against the Chaldeans. The planned killing of the deportees by the militia was directly ordered by the government and supervised by Young Turk functionaries who were members of the Committee for Unity and Progress (Unionists).

"The arrested men were interned in the barracks square; they had to remove their clothing and were led into the Zeryebe valley at night where they were killed by the militia. There were many criminals and deserters among the militia members. Many of our young men tried to escape the massacre by hiding themselves or disguising themselves as women.

However, they were usually discovered. They were then dragged through the streets until they died, bound hand and foot, heads towards the ground. The women sought protection under the roof of houses and formed groups of 30 to 40 in order to be able to better protect themselves against trespasses. One day the Muslims began to gather all children between the ages of 6 and 15 and led them to the police commissioner's office. From there these poor little children were brought to a mountainous area called Ras el-Hadjar and killed; their corpses were thrown into a mountain gorge.

"A few days later guards were posted in front of all the houses in our quarter so that none of us could leave our homes. They told us that we would be deported in the days to come. Several days later, two government representatives arrived, and they began drawing up a list of names. Each person got one and a half piasters, with the promise that they would receive this sum every day. In reality they intended to register the exact number of names so that no one would have the possibility to hide. Five days later we had to be on our way.

"Everywhere along the way we saw corpses of women and children deportees in front of us. The soldiers gave us nothing to eat and did not allow us to quench our thirst when we passed streams or springs. When night fell and we were resting out in the open, the militia came and looked for pretty girls by lighting a match in each one's face. After abusing them, they left them to the Kurds, who then killed them. In this way 200 girls died en route.

"With a large sum of money, I succeeded in bribing a Turkish sergeant into letting me escape with my daughter to a Kurd I knew in Telane, Sheikh Asso. Six other women who had paid him money were also able to go with us. When we reached a mountainous region, a band of Kurds, both men and women, descended upon us; they were waiting for us there, making signs that we should come closer: 'Waren, waren' (come, come), they called to us. 'We'll lead you to the village.' Then they fell upon us, taking everything we owned away from us, even the clothes on our backs. 'Now you can go to Sheikh Asso,' they laughed.

"Several Kurds who continued to accompany us along the way suddenly assaulted two or three young girls who were with us and raped them before our eyes. We lagged behind, naked and exposed, as no one knew the way. The next day, a Kurdish shepherd found us and took us to the sheikh.

"He felt sorry for us, gave us sour milk to drink and a few old pieces of clothing to cover our nakedness. However, he couldn't put us up, but rather sent us to Bekind, a village where Chaldeans also lived. He gave us four men as an escort: 'Give them some money so they don't kill you,' he said. Challe, Isa Chore's daughter, was stabbed by a Kurd en route. In

Bekind one of the Kurds led us to a house where Amina lived; she was a Christian convert to Islam. She gave the escorts some money for us and hid us in the stable. Her husband, Sophi Hamza, was a soldier and had been conscripted. However, the Kurdish neighbors soon discovered we were there, and we had to appear in front of the mayor. We were supposed to be brought by four gendarmes to the place where the Chaldeans of Bekind were also killed, and they were to kill us there. After the horror we'd experienced, we were in such a state that no one tried to plead for mercy. Death seemed merely a release to us. Together with the children, we totalled eight people.

"The gendarmes led us for several hours until we had almost reached the place where we were to be executed. Suddenly, wonder of wonders, a gendarme called from afar: 'Come back. The mayor is calling you.' There we learned that the mayor's brother Sabri Effendi, who knew me from Seert, had persuaded his brother to pardon us when he heard of our fate. We then stayed a week in the village, working as servants and sleeping in the stable.

"A new governor had arrived in Seert, Bayram Fahmi Bey, and I was called upon to be his cook. I had lodged my daughter with Amina in Sheikh Asso's village. My companions in misfortune wanted to accompany me and hide in Seert. But when the Turks learned that several Christians were in the city, all were killed, one choked, the others stabbed to death. I alone was under the protection of the governor.

"I learned the following about the death of our revered archbishop Monseigneur Addai Sher:

"After the government pursued him, the archbishop fled with the help of Osman Agha of Tanze, tribal leader of the Hadid and Atamissa Kurds. Osman Agha disguised him as a Kurd and brought him out of the guarded residence by means of a secret exit. He stayed several days with the Kurds in Tanze; however, the gendarmes had tracked him down and wanted to catch him and kill him. They had found out that he was hidden at the Kurd leader's, and demanded he be surrendered. At first the Kurds refused, but when the threat increased, they showed the gendarmes his hiding place. The archbishop tried to flee, but was shot down with eight bullets. An officer cut the ring finger off the corpse in order to take possession of the bishop's ring. His secretary, Priest Jibrail Musa Gorgis (Adamo), was arrested and brutally killed. Before that, several Chaldean village priests from the surrounding area had sought protection in the cathedral in Seert, including Kas Gorgis of Berke, Kas Hanna of Sadagh, Kas Musa, Kas Thomas, Kas Yusef from Gedyanes and Kas Michael from Mar Yakub (Kas = a priest title). They were all killed. I myself stayed for six months in Seert serving the governor, whose predecessor had ordered the massacre. The Turks of the town attested to their joy that all the Christians in Seert had been annihilated and expelled. The mullahs who lived in the vicinity of the governor, including Mullah Elias,

Mullah Cheder, Mullah Ahmed and Mullah Taher, and who had taken part in the massacres, explained to me while they were visiting the governor's house that from now on not a single Christian should dare to return to Seert. If he did, he would be killed immediately.

"I passed our cathedral several times. My heart constricted. They had transformed our house of God into a stinking stall. Our Christian cemetery was completely desecrated, all the gravestones broken and the graves dishonored by being sullied with excrement."

Document No. 40

Report by the 13-year Karima Jerjis about her experiences during the deportation from Seert  
*Taken down by J. Naayem in Constantinople in 1918*

At the end of 1918, Muslims from Seert showed up in Constantinople with young Chaldean girls who had been abducted from their families by Kurds in 1915. Because of the famine which then prevailed, the owners tried to sell the girls to get rid of them and to get money for doing so. In this way, 13-year old Karima came to her relatives who lived in Constantinople.

When the massacres began, I had just turned ten. My father worked for the customs inspection office in Seert. My family consisted of my mother Hanne, my father Jerjis, my three brothers Kerim, Yusef and Latif and my old grandfather. In the spring (1915), our house in the town quarter Ain Salibe was raided by twenty robbers. During this, my father and my grandfather were killed with daggers. My mother, my brothers and I were abducted to a foreign place. After a great killing started up in the town, all my relatives were killed and thrown into big pits, and the Kurds seized me and took me to the village Zevida, along with other Chaldean girls. I was detained there for about a year. At night the Kurds came and raped me. Under threat of death, I had to tolerate everything they did with me.

One year later I returned to Seert with a Muslim lady. She brought me to Abdul Ferid, who was living in our former house. She believed he would take pity on me and help me. But, to the contrary, Abdul Ferid threw me out. A Chaldean lady who worked for a Turk as a nursemaid used her influence; I was employed as a water carrier. When I was carrying the water back from the well one day, a soldier came; he was named Abdullah and was a water carrier in the Seert hospital. He dragged me violently to his place. His mother, Fattum Hanem, led me to the place where the poor Chaldeans had been murdered, and said to me: "If you don't obey, you too will be murdered like your fellow Christians." This place was a frightening charnel house where there were many bones, skulls and human hair. On the way back, Fattum said to me: "Did you understand, dirty gaur (infidel), what I told you?" I didn't dare to answer and was terribly frightened.

The water carrier Abdullah abused me and did the worst things to me. I had to stand the bad treatment and the old witch's moods for three years. Then there was a famine in the village; everyone except for the human slaughterer Abdul Riza suffered from it. He had a lot of supplies he had stolen from the Christians' houses. The water carrier Abdullah could not feed his family. He told his mother she should take her children and go begging. The woman then decided to proceed to Constantinople. On the way I had to tolerate much I cannot even describe from her and the children. This trip lasted three months. In Constantinople old Fattum sold me to another Muslim woman. This woman just happened to know one of my relatives. I begged her to bring me there. I now live there; his name is Zeki Chrize and he is a shoemaker.

These are the names of my relatives who were killed in the massacre:

My mother Hanne; my brothers: first Kerim (by Abdul Ferid, who now has our house), then the second one, Yusef, and the third, Latif; my paternal uncle, Pithion; my maternal grandmother, Rahel; my paternal grandmother, Susanne; my paternal aunt, Chatun; my maternal aunt, Helane; my uncles Taufik and Bulos.

Abdul Ferid, who now lives in Seert, stole all our property, the house, the furniture, carpets, gold and jewelry.

### **Kharput**

The town of Kharput is directly on the Euphrates, northeast of Urfa. Another name for Kharput was Mamuret el-Asis. One third of the total population of the province were Christians (see Lepsius' statistics). The Assyrians belonged almost exclusively to the Syrian Orthodox church. There were also several influential persons among the 5,000-6,000 Assyrians, including Ashur Yusef, who taught at the American Euphrates College and edited the journal 'Murshid' (Gazette) for the Assyrian community. The eyewitness Jorjis Tuma Kashisha reports that Ashur Yusef was among the first victims arrested and liquidated at the beginning of May, 1915. The district governor Sabit Bey had all the schools closed under the pretense of a typhoid epidemic.

### Document No. 41

Eyewitness report from Jorjis Tuma Kashisha about the events in Kharput and the annihilation of the Assyrian parishes

*Taken down by J. Naayem in Constantinople in late 1918*

"My father was a merchant. At the beginning of May, 1915, I hid in our church so as not to be conscripted into the military. One evening my younger brother Yokhannan, aged seven,

came into the church. He was crying and said that my father urgently had to speak to me. When I snuck back to our house, I found the whole family gathered with many relatives; everyone was distressed. They had arrested my father's brother, Barsom Kashisha, who was also a merchant. My father had been at the governor's and he was together with the commander at that moment.

"Suddenly the square was surrounded by soldiers. All Christians were indiscriminately detained. My uncle too was among those arrested. My father had been warned by Kovork Agha shortly before and was able to flee. There were many Syrians among the Christians arrested. On the next morning one could hear everywhere: 'Those Christians who do not open their businesses will be put on trial and sentenced to death. You have nothing to fear, and there is no danger.' My father didn't dare open his business, but my uncle came and got the key. Shortly thereafter it became known that all Christian businesspeople had been detained. In the course of the day the police came to us. They had a list of names on which my father's name also appeared. My mother declared to the policeman that all men were out of the house. This was indeed true, as we had fled out a back exit and gone to the house of our bishop, Mar Mansur. The honorable bishop was praying, his house was barricaded. If we sought refuge there, they would detain him. For that reason we went to Ashur Effendi (Yusef) and hid ourselves there.

"After a while my mother came, completely in tears, and said that she had been molested by the soldiers the whole time. They wanted to bring my father to the governor, where they only wanted to ask him a few questions. For my mother's sake, my father went home. At that moment my aunt arrived crying, with her child in her arms, and shouted at the gendarmes: 'You cowards took my husband away to Mezre. And now you want to take my brother-in-law away too. You should fear the wrath of God!' The men were picked up in all the Christian parts of town. About 1,500 of them were taken to Mezre to a large building called Kirmisi-Konak. No one was allowed to speak with the men, but their relatives could bring them food.

"The Turks said they only wanted the Armenians. Our bishop Mansur went with several of our influential men such as Elia Effendi Takho, Bedik Zade Arakel and others to the governor, the commander and the town representative to speak up for the Syrians. They said that they were neither Armenians nor members of any political party and should for that reason be spared. An influential Muslim named Begzadé who was present also championed their cause. The governor and the officials promised to inquire in Constantinople and to submit a petition for the release of the Syrians. A few days later a favorable answer indeed arrived from the central government that the Syrians should be spared. Nonetheless, they

did not let our people go. They were brought to Mezre together with the Armenians, and all met their deaths.

“Fortunately my father was still in prison in Kharput. It was publicly announced that all Christian residents who were registered had to leave the town and betake themselves to Urfa. On Wednesday it was the Syrians’ turn. As my father was the district mayor of our quarter, he was released so that he could draw up the lists of all the families. No sooner had he finished this work than he was thrown into prison once again. 556 Armenians and Assyrians were imprisoned here. They were released to be deported.

“The Christian quarter then emptied out, based on the lists. All of a sudden they said the Syrians could stay. You can imagine the joy in our community. The head of the parish brought the governor a gift of money, 500 Turkish pounds. They then spoke up for the Syrians who lived in the villages surrounding the town. An Syrian village mayor was also present who asked that his village community be spared according to the government order. He brought presents from the village residents. The governor promised to do everything, but when the district mayor returned to his village, all the residents had already been killed by the barbarians, including the women and children. In Adamyran, a small village, no trace remained of the Christian residents. They had all been slaughtered and thrown into the river. The priests in particular were brutally tortured beforehand. The same thing happened in the Syrian villages Shiro, Aivtos, Guarguar and in the town of Malatia.”

### **Diyarbakir**

In 1915, the town had 50,000 residents. The proportion of Assyrians among the Christians was very high in the province of Diyarbakir. The number 60,000 given by Lepsius does not include the district of Mardin and the villages in Tur Abdin. The Christians living in Diyarbakir were divided into a strong Chaldean parish with a bishop and a Jacobite group.

Until March 1915, Hamid Bey served as provincial governor. He instigated the massacre in the Chaldean village of Karabsh, not far from Diyarbakir, under the pretense that the residents wanted to flee to Erzerum without permission. The bloodbath was very cruel: the corpses of all the residents were completely dismembered. In March Hamid Bey was replaced by Rashid Bey, whose bodyguard was a member of a Circassian militia.

He himself was also a Circassian. The first thing he did was to organize a militia under the command of the important local figures. Members hereof included Yassin Aghe Zadé Shauki (commander of the militia), Jamil Pasha Zadé Mustafa Bey (lieutenant), Haji Baki (lieutenant colonel), Ali Haito Said’s son (second lieutenant), Attar Hakki Effendi, president of

the Young Turk party in Diyarbakir, and a number of other well-known individuals. All Christians had to hand over their weapons, which were collected in the barracks. Rashid Bey then photographed the weapons they had voluntarily handed in. He later claimed the weapons had been found in the Christians' houses.

The men were formed into work battalions, ostensibly to work on the roads. One month later, 1,500 men were killed near Kara Jorun and Karabagh, towns two hours away from Diyarbakir. There were many Chaldeans among the victims, including the director of the Chaldean school and other well-known members of the community. The atrocity occurred in early July. The representative from Diyarbakir, Fauzi Bey, was particularly bloodthirsty, and wanted nothing to stop him from reaching his goal of completely eliminating the Christians. That was why he sent several telegrams to the central government and the Young Turk committee claiming that the Christians were threatening the Muslims, who had for that reason barricaded themselves in the mosques out of fear.

They began to divide the Armenian and Chaldean residential quarters of the city into zones guarded by the militia members. They combed the houses; women, children and old people had to get ready to be deported. The trek was organized by Shukri Bey, president of the town's municipal council.

Document No. 42

From the report by the Chaldean Hanna Shimun from Diyarbakir on his deportation  
*Taken down in Constantinople by J. Naayem in the winter of 1918*

"A large part of the deportees were killed in the villages, which were Shukri's property, and the rest near the town bridge. The murderers took the victims' belongings. Such proceedings occurred several times, together with deportation marches from Diyarbakir. Many Chaldeans from our parish were among the victims. Meanwhile, the central government in Constantinople issued an amnesty for the Syrians and the Chaldeans. Only a small portion of them were still alive to benefit from it. When our archbishop Monsignore Suleiman recognized that despite the amnesty Chaldean families were continuing to be deported, he bravely protested against this to the governor and to the representative Zulfi Effendi. The latter reassured him hypocritically that nothing else would be done against his parish. That was not true, as they continued to take action against us Chaldeans. The representative in question, Zulfi Effendi, extorted 200 Turkish pounds in gold from me to spare my brother Joseph from death.

“The massacre of all the Diyarbakir Christians lasted four months. Governor Rashid stayed at his post for a year. On the day he departed, 150 store-owners were rounded up and murdered in the town of Siran Tepe, a few minutes away from the barracks. Many Chaldeans whom I knew well were among them. All items of value were stolen from our houses; many of our girls ended up in Muslim harems.

“In order to save the lives of the rest of the community, Bishop Suleiman brought another 1,500 Turkish pounds to bloodthirsty Rashid. All he could attain with that was that part of the community be spared from deportation. Instead, they were sent to the nearby village of Fiskia, where the men were assigned to work on the roads. The bishop paid the daily bread rations for the Chaldean forced labor convicts from his own pocket. All the Chaldean churches in Diyarbakir were pillaged and destroyed. Hospitals and stalls for the Turkish military were made out of some church buildings. Rashid Bey sent 24 wagons to Constantinople with the property seized from the Christians and distributed the rest among his friends. A large portion went to the representatives Fauzi and Zulfi.”

#### **An unforgettable encounter between a murderer and a victim**

These few eyewitness reports on the massacre of Syrian Christians in the eastern Turkish provinces are representative of Joseph Naayem’s collection. Habiba Turkoghlu, a deported Chaldean Assyrian woman who herself came from Diyarbakir and was married to an Armenian in Trabezunt, experienced something which was probably unique. There was no Syrian or Chaldean community there, so that the deportations which began on June 18, 1915 affected only the Armenians. Habiba, Zaki David’s daughter, shared the fate of her husband. She experienced the men being shot, the girls and women being raped. It is worth mentioning the description of how the men were shot: ten were lined up in a row behind each other and shot with one bullet. The Turks called this the “German system,” the eyewitness noted. Details of her life of suffering included the participation of the Muslim civil population, raids during the treks, deportations of children, and indescribable atrocities such as the preservation of the beard and facial skin of an Armenian archbishop from Erzerum as trophies in Representative Khalil Bey’s house in Kamah (Habiba worked there as a servant and was compelled to make this gruesome discovery).

On February 16, 1916, Erzerum fell, the Russians advanced and the Muslims fled Kamah. A ward of the Turkish Crescent (similar to the Red Cross) was opened for the wounded Turkish army soldiers who were streaming back. Habiba had gotten a position there as a nurse and worked in the wards, together with twelve other Christian women who survived. Shortly thereafter, this ward was transferred to Kaiserie (Cesarea) to the building where the

German orphanage had formerly resided. Until the war broke out, it was managed by a Swiss woman. Habiba advanced to head nurse of the ward, which had 1,500 beds. One day, a visit to the hospital by Minister of War Enver was announced, and Habiba, together with the chief physician, Dr. Salahedin Bey, had the task of showing the Minister of War through the sickrooms during the course of his inspection. In the process, the following dialogue took place:

**Conversation between the Chaldean nurse Habiba Z. David and Minister of War Enver in the military hospital, late 1916**

“Enver asked me who I am.

A Chaldean, I answered, and my husband is from Trabezunt.

After a small break, Enver Pasha asked very quietly where he now was.

Deported, I answered.

He said: And you have no news of him?

None.

The pasha insisted: No news whatsoever?

No. Unshaken and as if nothing had happened, he thanked me for the service I had rendered to the soldiers and gave me a tip of 10 Turkish pounds, as is usual in such cases.”

*(op.cit. pp. 216-217)*

*(Source: J. Naayem, Les Assyro-Chaldéens et les Arméniens massacrés par les Turcs. Documents inédits recueillis par un témoin oculaire. [The Assyro-Chaldeans and the Armenians, massacred by the Turks. Unpublished documents collected by an eyewitness] Paris 1920, p. 283)*

Document Nr. 43

The victims from the Chaldean nation during the massacres in Armenia

Report from a Chaldean priest (Abbé Joseph Tfinkdji)

*Conveyed by the managing director of the French Consulate in Basra to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, St. Pichon, January 16, 1918 (excerpts)*

**Van**

The Chaldean bishop of Van, Monsignor Eugen Manna (1867-1928), had the time to flee with several Chaldean families (a hundred followers) to Russia; they sought asylum near Tbilisi. The fate of many neighboring Chaldean villages where there were numerous Catholic converts is unknown. I know only that about 200 women and children, Armenians and Nestorians, were deported from Bashqala and Julamerg to Mosul. They were interned

there in the Dominican priests' khan, where almost all of them died of hardships and illnesses.

### **Seert**

The Seert massacres took place three days before those in Bitlis and were even worse than the others. I know the terrible details of this massacre, which have agitated me very much, but it is not possible to mention them all in this short report. In summary, it can be said that our Chaldean dioceses in Seert have been completely exterminated. The lists include the names of only 767 men, but these are only the names of the men shot on the slope of a hill about an hour north of town. The number of people killed in the houses and in the streets is much greater. The massacres lasted for more than a month. They began towards the middle of May 1915 and were not over before June. No one was spared. The militias took on the Christians in town, and the Kurds the Christians in the surrounding villages.

The Chaldean women behaved with extraordinary courage and dignity, despite their unfortunate fate. After resisting the indecent trespasses of the Turkish officers and the shameless rabble of soldiers for a whole month, they were treated mercilessly because of their virtue. It was promised that they could remain in their houses after their husbands and children had disappeared. In order to better protect themselves against the perilous situation, they gathered in the five or six larger houses in the Chaldean quarter. In the end they were expelled from there and deported to an unknown region. Dressed in black, they left the town as in a funeral procession. Sixteen Dominican women singing litanies headed up the procession.

The Turks had killed the abbess, an old nun who was no longer capable of taking part in the march. They had crucified her. They say that there were young girls among them who threw themselves into the river rather than fall into their persecutors' hands. Others were abducted by the Kurds. Most of them perished en route because of blows they received from the gendarmes, who chased them back and forth. I saw nine women and girls from my area arrive in Mosul in a miserable condition. Several others ended up in Mardin and Aleppo, and some were brought by the Kurds to Tello, about an hour east of Seert. A total of hardly one hundred persons survived the extermination: that's all that remains of the entire diocese of Seert, which once had 7,000 or 8,000 souls. The rest—the bishop, the priests from the town and the thirty villages of which this diocese was made up—have all been wiped out.

### **Diyarbakir**

Bishop Monsignor Salomon (Suleiman), three priests, and about forty families from the town survived from the Chaldean diocese of Diyarbakir. The Chaldean population of the villages

surrounding this diocese suffered the same fate as the Armenians in the entire province. The blame lies with the bloodthirsty governor Rashid, the most hideous executioner of all those the Young Turks have brought forth.

### **Mardin**

It was possible to rescue the two archbishops (the Syrian and the Chaldean) and some of the priests and Christian residents of Mardin. About fifty families (men and women, Catholic Armenians and Syrians) are in Mosul. About 500 men fled into the Sinjar mountains.

### **Jazire**

The Chaldean diocese of Jazire, including its archbishops, priests and residents, has been completely exterminated. Only two priests, one from Peshkhabur and one from Guerke, managed to escape with 400 or 500 people and were the last to arrive in Mosul. His Holiness, the patriarch, has taken them under patriarchal protection.

### **Zakho**

In this Chaldean diocese bordering on Jazire, only two villages were affected: Mar Yakob and Kiose. The Kurds wanted to seize these villages, but the government vigorously prevented them from doing so. Only one person died, but the two villages were completely pillaged and the residents now live in great affliction.

### **Amadiya**

The villages in the Amadiya diocese suffered and still suffer very much from the Kurds' raids and from the emigrants from the province of Van. Isolated murder cases are not unknown. For the past one and a half years the diocese has had no priest. He was wrongly suspected of being in contact with the Russians, two days away from his diocese. They accused him and sent him to prison for two weeks. After his innocence was proven, he was released, but not permitted to return to his diocese.

### **Hakkari**

Our Chaldean church suffered severe losses in the Nestorian mountains [Hakkari]. Alas, all the Catholic missionaries' work and propaganda were completely destroyed. The mountain valleys have been deserted completely by their population. Under the pretense that Armenian deserters and Russian soldiers conspired with the Nestorians in order to attack the Mosul district, the Turkish government has sent troops and cannons there to destroy the villages of these unfortunate people.

*Source: A. Beylerian op. cit., No. 492, pp. 475-479*



### **Assyrian Refugees in Persia**

In the course of four waves of refugees, about 100,000 Assyrians were expelled from their settlements in 1915. Fleeing from the Turks, 25,000 of them came from the Urmia area over the Russian border to Armenia and Georgia at the beginning of January. Here they lived very poorly in villages near Yerevan and Tbilisi, supported by the local village residents. The Armenians had organized refugee assistance for their expelled compatriots; both national and religious charities took care of the refugees. The Assyrian Christians could expect only a small amount of support from the small minority of their own compatriots, who lived in a few villages and in Tbilisi. The Russian government provided free railway transportation.

At the beginning of August, there was a second wave of flight to Russia as a result of the Russian troop movements in Persia; this time, the American missionaries from Urmia also joined in. It was stopped en route, because the Russian troops had received orders to return to Urmia. Nonetheless, several thousand Assyrians crossed the border.

In two groups, 35,000 mountain Assyrians reached the Salamas plateau in Persia in August and in September/October, 1915, after their unsuccessful battle against the Turkish army and the Kurds. Another 20,000 remained in Albag and Bashqala. The situation of these refugees was extremely bad: one third of them were then wiped out by the effects of illness, lack of food and clothing and homelessness. Many of them could have been saved if the charities active among the Assyrian refugees had worked more quickly and had been better coordinated, and if more relief goods had arrived.

The general secretary of the Presbyterian church committee, Robert Speer, received the missionaries' extended reports on the events in Urmia and started up relief measures. He organized the "American Commission for Armenian and Syrian Relief" (ACASR). This refugee organization worked together with local committees, from which they received statistics and lists of goods needed. The American consul in Tabriz, Gordon Paddock, and the missionaries under Dr. Shedd conducted the relief programs with great circumspection.

The "Persian War Relief Committee" was also an American foundation. In order to receive public donations through the American government, it was necessary to call notice to the Assyrian refugees' situation in Persia by means of publications. Robert Speer had contact with representatives from all the Assyrian Nestorian church groups and associations in America. An important contact was Paul Shimmon, a Nestorian Assyrian from Persia (Gulpashan), who contributed as a correspondent and translator of Assyrian reports. Isaac Yonan and Abraham Yohannan also worked in the ACASR office in New York. They wrote

extensive reports which were published in English during the war. Speer was in close contact with James Bryce, English permanent secretary for foreign affairs, whose assistant Arnold Toynbee was given the task of collecting documents about the Turks' actions against Armenians and Assyrians. Toynbee received the missionary reports from Urmia and Tabriz from Speer, and they were included in the English blue book in 1916. The war diary itself was also edited and published as a brochure by the journalist Mary Schauffler Platt. Through Bryce, the archbishop of Canterbury also took part in the relief measures. His support went primarily to the mountain Assyrians. In addition, he was in personal contact with the patriarch's family. The book by Surma d-Bet Shimun (London 1920) also was made possible through the archbishop's support.

The campaign for donations directed by Speer resulted in the following donations for the Assyrian refugees in Persia in the time period between November 1915 and September 1916:

1. Persian War Relief Committee	\$ 70,144
2. American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief	\$157,110
3. Assyrian Relief (under ACASR)	\$ 4,820

An "Urmia Relief Committee" was formed to administer the expenses. The distribution of the donations to the various refugee groups was run by Missionary McDowell. The relief included food, clothing, bedding, tools, seeds, oxen for plowing, medical supplies, rent for lodging, interest costs, securities, administration.

However, the greatest assistance probably did not come from America, but rather from Russia. Through the Russian consul Basile Nikitine, who also wrote numerous essays and treatises on the Assyrians after the war, donations from the Caucasus Relief Committee were directly distributed to the refugees. 35,000 rubles, 7,000 pieces of clothing and blankets, as well as medical supplies from the Russian Red Cross, were among the relief actions. From May 1915 through November 1917, the Russians were diplomatically and militarily the Assyrians' patrons, and the refugees placed the most trust in them.

Through the ACASR, many Assyrians emigrated to America if they had relatives there and could pay the travel expenses.

Despite good organization, the relief actions were only a drop in the ocean. They did not prevent the refugees from being in terrible misery. A normalization of the situation came about only very slowly. The final exodus from Persia then followed in 1918.

Refugee Statistics**1915 (November/December)**

Refugees from Turkey	11,392
Refugees from Persian border districts	4,397
Destitute inhabitants of the Urmia plain	<u>13,723</u>
	29,512

**Relief measures by the Persian Relief Commission for refugees from Turkey to other districts of northwest Persia:**

Salamas	12,000
Khoi	3,500
Albaq	6,000
Salamas (Armenians)	<u>9,000</u>
	30,500

**(February/March)**

Salamas	10,985
Khoi	3,200
Albaq and Bashqala	<u>3,500</u>
	17,685

Death rate in three months: 15 % to 30 %

*(Source: Rockwell, W. (ACASR), op. cit.)*

Document No. 44

First exodus from Urmia, January, 1915: report dated 1st March, 1915 from the Reverend Robert M. Labaree, of the American mission station at Tabriz to the Hon. F. Willoughby Smith, U.S. Consul at Tiflis; communicated by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

In view of your interest in the welfare of the Persian Christian refugees here in the Caucasus, and your efforts in their behalf, may I submit to you a report on their condition as I have seen it in my journey hither from Tabriz? Commissioned by the American Presbyterian Mission of West Persia to investigate the affairs of the many thousands who have fled

recently from Persia into Russia in order to escape the cruel vengeance of the Kurdish border tribes, I left Tabriz over two weeks ago and have spent the intervening time visiting the various centres where these refugees are congregated. It is hard to estimate exactly the number of these refugees from Persia, for mingled with them are a multitude of fugitives from Turkey. The total number of all these unfortunates in the district of Erivan, where most of them have found refuge, was stated by a good authority to be seventy thousand. The Persian contingent is pretty consistently estimated at from fifteen to twenty thousand. The refugees from Turkey are almost entirely Armenian, and are being taken care of by the wealthy Armenians of this province through their well organised relief committees. Those from Persia are less fortunate, for a majority of them are Syrian; and, although the Armenians have been very generous to them also, they have no influential friends to speak in their behalf and minister to their needs. It is also safe to say that the fugitives from the Urmia plain are the most sadly in need of assistance, for they had no previous warning of the impending disaster, and most of them have come out without any preparation whatever for their prolonged sojourn in a strange land.

I doubt whether the story of that awful flight can ever adequately be told. Few tales that I have ever heard can compare with it in heart-rending interest. The whole northern section of the Urmia plain learned of the departure of the Russian troops about ten o'clock on the night of Saturday, the 2nd January (1915). By midnight the terrible exodus had begun, and by morning the Christian villages of that district were practically deserted. People left their cattle in the stables and all their household goods in their homes, just as they were, and hurried away to save their lives. If anyone possessed a horse or a donkey or any other beast of burden he was fortunate, and if he happened to have ready cash in his home he was even more so: but, well-to-do as a man may be, cash is not always on hand in the villages, and so many who, according to the standards of the country, were rich, started on their long journey with a mere pittance, and the vast majority of men and women and children were on foot. Before the seven days' hard walking through the slush and mud to the Russian border was accomplished, all encumbrances were cast aside, quilts, extra clothing, and even bread, for it became a question with the poor, tired, struggling crowd which they would carry—their bedding or their babies. Of course, very many of the weaker ones never reached Djoulfa at all, but lay down by the roadside for their last long rest, and those who did reach the Russian border were so haggard and emaciated that their own friends did not recognise them. Almost worse than the weary tramping by day, in the most terrible mud, were the nights in the villages by the way. Every possible shelter was so crowded that there was no room whatever to lie down, and the air became so foul before morning that the occupants were nearly suffocated; and yet those who could find no shelter and lay out all night in the wet were even more miserable. As one has heard the same sad

story repeated a score of times with only a difference in details, one has wondered what human flesh and blood can stand in a great crisis like this. I should like to give two instances that have come under my personal knowledge; such stories might be multiplied a thousand times.

One old man with two daughters-in-law and six grandchildren started on that fatal night from the village of Karagöz. All were afoot, and the women carried their little ones by turns, while the old man stumbled along as best he could, unable to carry any burden. He at last gave out, lay down by the roadside and died. The two women and their little charges pressed on for a day or two longer, when one of them gave birth to a baby, also by the roadside. The mother tore off her dress, wrapped the baby in the pieces and resumed the weary tramp. Fortunately for them, the two women found their husbands waiting for them in the Russian Djoulfa; but, alas, in the new complications arising from the coming of the baby two of the other children were separated from the party and lost. Two days the parents waited separated in Djoulfa, until a wagon-load of little waifs was brought in by kind-hearted soldiers. They found their two little ones among the number, but so emaciated by their hardships that they died shortly afterwards. People dying and children being born by the way are commonplaces of this journey; but it is not every one that has had a combination of such misfortunes.

Here, again, is another instance no less sad. The pastor of our Cossi congregation set out, as others did, in the dark, together with his wife, married daughter, and five-year-old granddaughter; but he became separated from them very soon, so that the women were compelled to make the journey alone. They reached the town of Nahichevan, in Russian territory, with hundreds of others in a wholly exhausted condition. All three of them were sick and were taken to the local hospital, where a few days later the father of the family found them. But shortly afterwards, when the thousands of refugees were cleared out of the town and scattered in the villages, he was forced to leave, and his family have not seen him since. The daughter and grandchild were dismissed from the hospital, and the old mother, rather than remain alone, sick as she was, left also. For five days they stayed with a crowd of others in the railway station, when they were moved on to another village; and there, the old woman's dysentery having become so bad and the little girl having developed the prevailing scarlet fever, they were taken to the village hospital. I found them there a couple of weeks later, or rather the younger woman and her child; the mother had passed away two hours before I arrived. I buried the dear old woman, in whose house I have been many times. I gave her a better funeral than most of the other dying refugees; but it was only a rough coffin with shavings as a pillow for her poor tired head. And then, with a little money put into the hand of the daughter and a promise to do what I could to find her father, I left her, dazed

as a woman in a dream, and came away. The father cannot be found, and I fear that he has dropped down in some unknown spot and died.

I have wondered time and time again whether this panic-stricken flight was not some terrible mistake, and whether the people had not better have stayed at home and cast themselves on the mercies of the Kurds and their Moslem neighbours; but as the stories of the sufferings of those who remained behind begin to reach us—stories of bloodshed and forced apostasy, and of women and girls carried off to a life worse than death—I have revised my judgement. Even all this untold misery by the way and in a strange land is better than the fate of those who remained at home.

But I must pass on to report the conditions as they now exist among the refugees. In my effort to get the facts, I have had interviews with the Exarch (the Metropolitan Bishop of Tiflis), the Governor of the Erivan district, the Armenian Bishops of Tabriz (now in Nahichevan) and of Erivan, members of the various relief committees and the village elders, who act as local relief committees, together with a very large number of the refugees themselves in various sections of the province. Whatever one may find to criticise in the administration of relief, one cannot but recognise the tremendous burden that has descended upon the people of this region and the serious problems they have had to face. While one cannot say that there has been an adequate effort to grapple with the difficulties, yet much has been done. The Government officials have given free railway transportation to the interior, and they have wisely had the people scattered among the villages, where they can best be taken care of. The energetic Armenian committees have taken care of their own people, and have been unexpectedly generous to the Syrians who are quartered in their midst. In Tiflis the Syrians themselves have done much for their own race in that city, and have had an efficient committee working in conjunction with the municipal committee.

But more worthy of praise than any of these together are the humble kind-hearted villagers themselves, who have carried the heaviest end of the burden, taking in the homeless wanderers, giving them shelter and even bedding, and furnishing them with food. Had it not been for this unorganised relief, the misery would have been many times more intense.

In one village, of 50 houses, I found 307 refugees; and in another, of 100 houses, 850 dependants. In the former place all that had been received from outside sources had been 220 roubles, and in the latter the extent of outside relief had been about six pounds per head of poor flour. But the farmers of that section have had a bad year of it, and are themselves feeling the pinch of poverty; and the burden of all this multitude of destitute people is getting to be almost intolerable. At best, too, what has been done by all agencies combined has

failed to save the wretched refugees from their sad plight. With often twenty of them in one room, sleeping on the grass, destitute of bed clothing and having unwholesome-looking bread to eat, their lot is not to be envied. No wonder that after the hardships of the journey scores and hundreds of them have died, pneumonia and enteric troubles and scarlet fever having carried off a multitude. The scarlet fever has been especially virulent, and there was scarcely a house which I visited where from two to five little ones had not been carried out to the cemetery. One could hardly hope to save a man with dysentery on the five kopecks a day given for his support, or with the coarse flour given in other districts. While one cannot but pity all, yet one's especial sympathy goes out to those whom one has seen in their own country living in comfort and, for this country, even in luxury, yet here, in this strange land, dependent on the dole of bread given them.

With such conditions I have not dared to do anything in the way of relief, except to leave here and there small sums for the sick and for those particularly suffering. As long as I have not found anyone that has died or is dying from hunger I did not think it justifiable to expend our little funds in the hopeless task of making men comfortable. More and more am I persuaded that we must reserve our efforts to the time when these people begin to return to their homes. If the way opens for such a return, it must be our first endeavour to restore them to their villages; for very many of them have their wheat-fields and vineyards, and if these are not looked after this spring, the relief problem of the future becomes many times more serious. But how are these unfortunates to get home? Some of them had a little money when they came out and some reserve strength; now both funds and physical force are gone, and after the hard journey back they will reach homes plundered of everything, and in many cases burnt. Officials here have declared that there is not question but that the Government will send them back by rail to Djoulfa free of charge; but when they are once in Persia, then all relief committees save our own cease to act. It is on this basis that I wish to make my appeal to the American public. In a report which I subjoin, Dr. Shedd, of our Mission in Urmia, gives us a picture of the conditions there among those who, to the number of 10,000 to 15,000, have found shelter in our Mission yards. Up to the 25th January I learn that he has spent over £800 pounds sterling in their support; and he names £3,000 as the minimum of what is needed for the people there. He himself considers this an underestimate, looking at the problem only from the limited knowledge he had at his command; and I am sure that it is. £5,000 for those in Urmia and £5,000 for those who have fled, seems to me a more reasonable estimate. £10,000 is a big sum to ask, especially at this time, when so many other portions of the world are stretching out their hands to our country for aid; but most of these have many eloquent tongues to voice their cry, while for this people that have lived so far away among fanatical Moslem masters, who is there to speak. I can only hope that this little story of their sufferings may bring some relief, even if it is not

the sum asked and so much needed. I wish I might hope that others would help in this work; but the French Mission has little assistance to give, and the Orthodox Mission, that has made a big bid for the friendship of this people, seems to have completely flattened out. I doubt whether anything can be hoped from that source, and I am very sure that nothing will be given in a large unsectarian way. And so it appears to me that we of America are the only ones that can be relied upon to come to the assistance of this old historic people, who have now endured the heaviest blow that has fallen upon them for centuries.

*[28], pp. 105-109, J. Bryce, op.cit.*

Document No. 45

Urmia district: report on the distribution of relief, covering the period 1st June to 31st December 1915; communicated by the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief

At the beginning of June, 1915, when the people emerged from our premises emaciated from sickness and malnutrition and crushed by the blow that had fallen upon them, they were confronted by a seemingly hopeless situation. Practically all their household furnishing and food supplies had been plundered; the same was true of their domestic animals, on which they depended in large measure for their subsistence. Their houses were without any doors and windows, and probably a full third of them had been demolished. They were in terror about going back to their villages; they feared their Moslem neighbours, who had despoiled them of their property, outraged their wives and daughters, and killed many of their relatives; they feared, too, lest the Russian troops might again withdraw and leave them to the mercy of their enemies; and they were anxious lest the missionaries who had sheltered them for the previous months might forget them when they were out of sight. Everything tended to make them cling to our Mission compounds or their vicinity. To permit them to do this was of course out of the question. Our efforts, however, to scatter them to their village homes formed one of the most pitiful phases of our relief work. The people had to go, but as long as they received their bread from our yards they would not; and so we had no choice but to cut off the food supply, after giving each family sufficient flour to support them a week. At the same time, with the help of the newly arrived Russian Consul, pressure was brought to bear upon the landlords of the Christian villages to support their tenants until harvest. Some of these could not, because they themselves had been plundered; others would not, in spite of Consular pressure; and others promised to give the needed assistance, but delayed it from day to day with all the ingenuity of excuse for which the Orient is notorious. The result was that our yards were thronged daily with hundreds of people clamouring for food. To give way would have nullified all our efforts to get the people on to their own feet; and only when it was absolutely clear that nothing could be gotten from the

landlords of any one village did we assume any degree of support for the people of the village. Little by little progress was made, and although the villagers were wretchedly miserable, the approaching harvest made subsistence by their own effort possible, and virtually all food distribution ceased for a period of three months.

There was another form of relief, however, that was imperative. In the vast majority of villages there was not a spade to use in repairing their houses, in ridding their vineyards of weeds or in burying their dead, and there was not a scythe or sickle with which to reap their harvest. The best and surest way to help the people was to give them these implements, and so for upwards of a month we virtually subsidised all the blacksmiths of the city in our endeavour to get these instruments in time for the harvest. When we closed this department of our relief work, we had distributed 2,661 scythes and sickles and 1,129 spades at a cost of 18,909.90 krans. (The exchange value of a silver kran is approximately 4 1/2 d.)

By the beginning of August the situation was considerably more hopeful. The people with Consular help had succeeded in collecting a good deal of their plundered property, including bedding, household utensils and a few cattle; the harvest was good, although the acreage was below the average, and the promise of the vineyards was excellent. Then fell another blow, what seemed an inexplicable Providence. Events in another section of the war necessitated orders for a sudden withdrawal of the Russian troops, and the evacuation was actually carried out, with the exception of a small force which remained with the Consul on the hills outside the city. With the going of their protectors the whole Christian population of the plain, with the exception of some 200 sick and aged who again took refuge in the Mission yards, fled, some only to the northern edge of the plain, but many to Salamas and Khoi and even Djoulfa. Fortunately it was summer time, but even so the misery was intense, and cholera and want and hardship claimed many victims in those few weeks. Worse still, much that the people had reclaimed of their stolen property and gathered from their fields was taken once more by their Moslem neighbours; and so, after nearly a month of miserable hardship and uncertainty, the poor Syrians and Armenians returned to their twice plundered homes. Very little relief, however, was given during the next few weeks; for from the fields and vineyards much could still be secured in the way of food.

At this time we calculated that about 10,000 to 15,000 of the Christian inhabitants would have to be supported during the winter months, and we were making our plans accordingly, when a new and overwhelming burden descended upon us. For months the Syrians of Kurdistan had been holding their own in the mountain fastnesses, hoping for succour from the Russians. When this failed and their enemies increased on every hand, they had to flee—many, many perishing in the attempt. Some 30,000 of them arrived at last in Salamas and the neighbourhood in almost absolute destitution. A few succeeded in bringing a part of

their sheep, but most came with nothing, half-naked, and without any means of livelihood. This army of wretchedness was halted by the authorities on the plain of Salamas and on the hills surrounding it, until their location should be determined upon. McDowell of our Relief Committee, who has had years of experience among these people, left at once for Salamas and grappled with the serious problem of their immediate relief. But for the assistance given by our Committee there, hundreds of them would have perished from hunger. As it was, cholera, typhoid and pneumonia did their worst among a people wasted by hardship, unprotected from the cold and without shelter. Shortly the streams of suffering humanity began to pour across the pass that separates the Salamas from the Urmia plain, and to scatter themselves in the villages of this section. A few weeks before we had been wondering how the inhabitants of the plain would find shelter for themselves in their half-ruined villages; but from the accompanying statistical report it will be seen that they have made room for nearly 16,000 refugees from other districts. For example, the village of Geogtapa has doubled its population, having received as many of these guests as it had inhabitants of its own.

About the middle of October we began to take steps in preparation for our winter relief work. The first thing was to buy up all supplies of wheat that we could secure while the price was low—the lowest for years, for the purchasers were few and the owners anxious to turn their crops into cash before any more untoward events might transpire. The wheat thus secured was stored in different parts of the plain accessible as distributing centres. The doing of this required quite a force of reliable men, who could act as wheat buyers and weighers.

The next step was to get accurate lists of the actually destitute in every village. This was no easy task, for many felt themselves entitled to assistance who were not wholly destitute, and to discover who were really in want, among the hundreds of poverty-stricken, plundered inhabitants of each village, required both tact and firmness. The task was made doubly hard by the constant stream of new arrivals from Salamas. On the basis of these lists tickets were issued for bedding and for food—the two, most crying needs.

For bedding it was decided to issue large wool quilts, large enough to cover several persons. These we found could be made for three or three and a half tomans (12s.) per quilt. Under the efficient direction of Miss Lewis, and later of Miss Lamme, a quilt factory was started, which in time employed over a hundred needy women in carding wool and sewing the quilts. This factory during its three months' existence consumed over 84,000 yards of calico, 35,000 pounds of wool, and some 1,500 pounds of cotton, and expended over 18,000 tomans; it taxed the resources of the dry goods merchants to supply our demand and it quite exhausted the wool supplies of the city. Our plan was to give only one quilt to four persons, families of over four to receive two or more according to the number of members; but after

the issue of tickets we found that we could not possibly supply the need, and so regretfully we had to limit our giving to one quilt to a family. The inadequacy of this relief was seen when we began to distribute to the families of mountaineers; for with them all the brothers and their wives and children form one family, and it was not uncommon to have families of over 20, one being as high as 36. But in spite of their inadequacy, the 5,510 quilts issued have saved the lives of many, for literally thousands were facing the rigours of winter without any bedding whatever.

Our wheat distribution, too, had to be of the most economical nature. We issued what was supposed to be a two months' supply at one time, giving a Russian pood and a half per capita for this period, that is, about 60 pounds. To the widows and orphans and to the new comers from the mountains we gave flour instead of wheat, the actual cost of this assistance in food at current prices being two and a half shahis per day to a person, or between a half-penny and three-farthings. But even with this small gratuity, the total amount given of wheat and flour was 4,000 poods, or about 140,000 pounds, costing about the same as the quilts, that is, about 18,000 tomans.

With these small gifts to individuals amounting in the aggregate to large figures, and with the similar work that has been done in Salamas and Khoi, and even for the district of Albek, our funds have been exhausted, and we are waiting now to see what the generosity of America will do about it. Had it not been for this generosity, many would have died of hunger and cold the last two months, for, apart from what our Committee has done, very little has reached the people from any other source. We are grateful indeed to acknowledge the receipt of considerable sums from his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury for the Syrian refugees from the mountains, but still the largest part has come and must come from America. We shall have to look to our friends in America for their continued aid, if this unfortunate people, the victims of Mohammedan hate, are to be kept this winter and established in their homes once more.

*[44], pp. 187-190, J. Bryce, op.cit.*

#### Document No. 46

Second exodus from Urmia: letter dated Tabriz, 20th August, 1915  
from Mr. Hugo A. Müller (Treasurer of the American mission station at Urmia);  
communicated by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

On Thursday, the 5th August, the rumour spread that the Russian troops were again to be withdrawn from Urmia. This very naturally frightened the entire Christian population, and on

Thursday evening all Christians, except those already on the road and those physically unable to be on the road, were in the streets of the city and on the roads leading northward from the city, waiting for the departure of the foot-soldiers, with whom they intended to leave. Knowing the probable fate of any who might stay behind, we were, of course, not ready to discourage the people from going. Still, we had no official word of the anticipated evacuation, and were, therefore perplexed as to our own duty.

The breaking up of a good proportion of our missionary work, the removal of the bulk of the relief work to a different place, and the uncertainty of America's future position all contributed to indicate that a portion at least of the Station should move in case of an evacuation. On Friday morning we learned that the foot-soldiers had left, and one of our men, on visiting the Russian Consul, was told that all who were going should be off by 2 p.m. that day. The Station felt that its force should be reduced to the minimum, and that at least all women and children should leave. Very hasty preparations were made.

Mr. McDowell, Mr. Labaree and Dr. Packard volunteered to stay in Urmia, and all the rest were to leave. When we got on the road, however, we found that Mrs. Packard and her children and Miss Burgess were not of the party. Mrs. Packard had decided to brave the Station vote and stay by her husband, and Miss Burgess stayed to be with Mrs. Packard and to assist the medical work. The fugitive party, therefore, consisted of Dr. Shedd and his two daughters, Mr. and Mrs. Allen with their two sons and one daughter, Dr. and Mrs. Coan, Mrs. Cochran, Miss Lewis, Miss Lamme, Miss Schoebel, and Mrs. Müller and myself with our daughter. We went in carriages, using some donkeys and horses bought the last two hours before our departure.

At the end of our second day's journey we reached a village, Kudchi, where we found perhaps 20,000 or 30,000 Syrian refugees, whose further flight had been arrested by the Russian commanding officer with the good news that a decisive victory had made the evacuation of Urmia unnecessary. All were told to go back. Unless the missionaries would return, however, the natives were unwilling to trust themselves alone. Nothing was left but for some to return, especially since this was requested by the officer in command of the troops there. Dr. Shedd and his daughters, Mrs. Cochran and Dr. and Mrs. Coan consequently turned back. This gave the crowd heart and they, too, went back. But the tables were soon turned again, and before the foot-sore crowd reached the city they were again turned back with the word that there was fighting with the Kurds on Mount Seir. The missionaries had reached the city and were there during the fighting on Mount Seir. It seemed advisable for them to leave again, as conditions were very uncertain, in spite of the fact that the Russian Consul with a number of Cossacks had stayed by his post during all

this time. They, that is Dr. Shedd and his two daughters, and Dr. and Mrs. Coan, left for the second time on Friday the 13th August. This time Mrs. Cochran stayed behind.

Meanwhile, those of us who had continued on our journey from Kudchi arrived in Tabriz on Friday the 13th August, after a journey free from mishaps, but nevertheless wearing for us who were still typhoid and typhus convalescents. Everyone in the party with the exception of Mrs. Allen and the Allen children had recently had the fever.

[42], pp. 182-183, *J. Bryce, op.cit.*

#### Document No. 47

Second exodus from Urmia: Narrative of a Nestorian victim, the wife of the Rev. David Jacob, of Urmia, published in the Armenian Journal "Ararat" of London, January, 1916

As a native of Urmia and myself a refugee who has fallen into great trouble, I am writing a few short details about my unfortunate nation. For centuries as Christians we have been crushed by the enemies that surround us. Our best-looking girls have been forced to deny their creed; our men have been killed, our homes plundered, and our property has been robbed.

In all these troubles we have lived under the Persian Government, and obeyed their rules; we have never been untrue to them, or disobedient. For the past seventy years the only help we have had has come through the English and American Missions that have been in Urmia. When the Russians arrived at Urmia it was a delight to us, we thought our rights would be more clearly established; of course, things were much better than before; all the country was safer than it ever had been. This was like a dream for a few years; all of a sudden, when this terrible war began, we felt almost certain that it would harm us, although we never dreamed that it would bring us under such a curse.

In that cold January, when even the beasts do not wish to go out from their caves, the people were left homeless, bleeding impoverished and starving. This all happened when the Russian forces withdrew from Urmia; very many left their beloved and comfortable homes, and started with them on an endless journey, which caused the death of many dear souls from cold and hunger. The rest of the Christians crowded into the American Mission compounds, with nothing left; here they were fed on a morsel of bread which came through the kindness of the Missionaries. There is a great deal to tell of the misery of the people during the last winter; it was a life too wretched for humanity. Those that were used to comfortable beds now slept on the bare ground. For five months of captivity we lived

expecting death every minute, surrounded by sick people who needed help; our little children died of measles; our young and strong ones could not stand the terrible epidemics of typhoid and typhus, while the elderly people could not live such a hard life; they died in the first weeks, of dysentery. Now the villages were plundered and mostly burned, a good many people killed, and our little girls and women wickedly tortured (very many even now have not been found; they were mercilessly carried into captivity); through all this long time of anxiety and expectation, during which our time was given to weeping, we prayed that God would once more save us by sending the Russians to our rescue.

It was a great relief when we heard that the Russians, for their own interests, were coming to Urmia once more. After their coming the people were at liberty, and were able to go out into the country once more. For three months they tried to live in the villages, though a very poor and wretched life it was, with everything gone and most of the buildings burned. In these hard times we were thankful to the American Missionaries and the Russian Consul who helped us in settling down. Although at this time we did not do any evil to our enemies who had treated us as unkindly, we heard them say that if once more the Russian army should leave Urmia, no Christian would be safe.

On the 4th August the peasants crowded into the city of Urmia; they had heard indirectly about the armies leaving. It was a sight that could not be described. The sick, helpless little children were terrified. All night and the next day the road that led towards the Russian border was full of refugees, although the Consul assured us that he would not leave without warning us; but the fear was so great that nothing could keep us back.

In the first invasion of Urmia (by the Turks and Kurds) some of those that dwelt inside the city gates were in more security than those in the villages, although they had also suffered many hardships and losses of property, and there had been deaths in almost every home; but this second attack meant that we must leave all and flee. On Friday morning, with sober face and heavy heart, I left my dear home. I am grateful to God that until now my home had not been robbed, so that it was very hard for me to leave its comfort and start out into the world with no hope of returning again. With many other comrades in the same plight, we began our dreadful journey. For two families we had a little cart in which we put a few necessary coverings a little bread, and my three little children. It was very hard for us to leave our property, but life is dearer than all the riches of the world.

On the way we met all classes of people, the rich and poor were reduced to the same level; very few had carriages, because our neighbours would not hire us any, some had horses and donkeys, but the majority had to walk with great bundles on their backs. We were quite

unused to such a hard journey; some sat on the roadside and wept from sore feet; it was hard to walk in shoes, and without shoes the sun burned them until the blood came; dear, innocent children died on the way; it broke the parents' hearts to part with them; old and feeble men and women were left behind; little unlucky babies were born in the sight of the passers-by; everyone was in need of help but none could be found. We were like the Israelites scattered in the desert, only they had Moses to conduct them to Canaan, while we had no one.

The first night we were so tired and exhausted that we stopped in a place that had very little water, a dry, dusty place; our bed was the ground, our pillow a stone, the sky our quilt. The little excited children cried all night; large crowds of people were coming all night; while some rested and went on, others from behind took their place. The next day we were so tired and hopeless that we wished we had died at home and had not started on such an endless and aimless pilgrimage.

It broke my heart when I met a little girl; her feet were sore and she could walk no further. She cried, "Oh, mother! Oh, God!" The mother had a heavy load and could not carry the child, the father was killed, they had no friends. I carried the little girl on my back for about half-a-mile, but could not any further. It was too heart-breaking. Why should innocent children suffer so?

Our next stop was a better place; it had splendid, cool water, and shade; but the people were so many that bread was scarce, starvation was upon us. A great many were sick by this time and could not move. This was a Moslem town; they did not like to have us there, but they could not turn us out on account of the Russian soldiers being near. There were Christian villages on our way, but by this time they had all been destroyed. Here we stopped a few days. We heard that the Cossacks had not left Urmia entirely; they had moved their headquarters a few miles, so that we had hope that we would not lose all. From here some of us went to Tabriz, which is a larger city, and a little safer than other places. Now we are a nation scattered like the flock without a shepherd, some living here and some there, a miserable existence. Some have gone back to Urmia; most of them have found all their crops gone. If we had not left Urmia this second time, our condition would not be so hard as it is now, the places near the city having mostly been kept safe by the kindness of the Russian Consul, who did not leave Urmia; but in the more distant places the crops and vineyards have all been destroyed. We are more than grateful to the Americans who have ransomed our lives from death by the money that has been spent for us the last winter. We hope and pray for the victory of the Allies, that through their kindness the rest of us might live. So far one-third of our nation has perished, and even we who, survive are so broken by

the strain we have suffered that sometimes we are hopeless. Now we are facing a winter of famine and wretchedness, homes without bedding and clothes. Of course nobody can supply all our needs. In addition to our own trouble, our countrymen from Turkey are taking refuge in the Urmia district, and their condition is worse than ours.

*[43], pp. 184-186, J. Bryce, op.cit.*

Document No. 48

Refugees from Hakkari: letter dated 9th October, 1915, from a relative of Mar Shimun, the Patriarch; communicated by the Rev. F. N. Heazell

I have not written to you for a long time. I think you will know the reason is that the war with Turkey has stopped the post to Europe. As you know, during past years there have been difficulties between the Turks and ourselves, but now the truth of the matter is made clear. When we saw many Christians of Gawar and Albek killed without reason, we thought our turn would come. Every kind of warfare commenced, and since then, for months, we have been fighting in the mountains; in the end we were not successful, because the Kurds were helped by the artillery of the Turkish Government. Of course when our cartridges were exhausted we could not stand before the great force of Turkish artillery. Then first of all Tiari was destroyed; we then thought we could flee to the mountains in the hope of victory, but soon the Turks came to the entrance of Tkhoma and our hope was destroyed—either we must deliver ourselves to Turkey and be killed or flee to save ourselves. We did the latter, but even then half the nation was left behind.

Now we are here in Diliman, Salamas; but the larger part of Tiari and Tkhoma is conquered. Up to the present time we have no news of those people; whether they are alive or have been destroyed, we know not.

Many of the refugees who come here are dying of hunger; they have no bedding, and many men just died on the way here. Would you were here to see with your own eyes our state; your sympathy would indeed be aroused. All the houses have been destroyed (also Mar Shimun's house and your Mission house in Kochanes) and burnt and robbed; we are in rags and hunger and in a strange land. Many of the houses where you have spent the night as a guest have no bedding, the house of Malik Ismail, for instance, and the house of Khiyu.

Of all these the condition of the Tkhumnai is the most miserable—they are quite destitute. If some help is not forthcoming for the nation all hope of survival is at an end, for three parts will die of hunger. Our thanks are due to the Russian Consul, who is taking care to distribute

the people among the villages to prevent them dying of cold, for all are under trees and in fields in the open.

In the course of February, Esther and I and her children went down to Malik Ismail's house in Tiari, for we thought it would be safer there. Then we soon moved from Tchumbar to Dadush, a small village of Tiari. When the Turkish army drew near that place we fled to the Church of Mar Audishu of Tal. In each place we were obliged to leave behind some of our clothes and our bedding; many times we were hungry; we made our journeys by night, and Esther's little children would fall asleep on the road. Three months we stayed in Mar Audishu, the whole time the fighting drawing nearer. Our brothers are fighting in Dizan, and there every three or four men are sleeping together for want of quilts at night. We sleep with our clothes on, ready to start when it may be necessary. In Mar Audishu the food was good, but the provision for sleeping and bathing was bad. Soap there was none; water could be had for drinking and cooking only. Sometimes we would go down to one of the Tal villages to wash our clothes and to bathe.

From Kochanes everything we possessed was carried off and our house destroyed. A few quilts we brought to Dizan; these we could not bring away with us because we had no mules, for the Kurds had carried them off, and I think they will now remain for our neighbours (the Kurds). Of clothes to wear we had only enough for the road, but not enough for the cold of the winter. When we came here, on the road, we saw some women who had never known want entirely naked; we divided our clothes among them, giving them just enough to prevent them dying of cold. During all these years our state has been, glory to God, that only our souls have been chastened, but finally one thing has befallen us which we can never forget. I recall the last days that I stood in the Church. I had gone down to Dizan because Paulus, my brother, was sick and Ishaya was ill with fever in Mar Audishu. It was at the time when the guns of the Turks were drawn up before Tkhuma and were moving forward; then it was he sickened and died. Mar Shimun had arrived there a little before. Romi and Esther and her children, at that very time of great sorrow, when they least wished to leave, had to set out, weeping, with their families. Only Mar Shimun with two priests and a few men remained in the Church for the funeral service, for as quickly as they could they had to place the body of Ishaya in the grave and hasten after their families. Going quickly on foot they arrived at Darawar, where Malik Ismail was. Those little children (God bless them) went on foot, without a servant, accompanied by Romi and Esther. That day, if our families had delayed in Mar Audishu, they would have been prisoners now in Turkey. The day after they left, the Turkish army entered the Church, for they knew we were there. But, thanks be to God, we had escaped.

Paulus is better, and now our family is with Mar Shimun in Diliman. Up to the present time we have not hired a house, for we do not know where we shall settle down. There is a Church here.

Mr. McDowell came from Urmia to see us and they hope to help this people as much as they can with food and clothing.

Of all the things that were left in our house I am sorrowing most of all for my English books that have gone. Those of our own language are hidden; I do not know whether they will be safe or not. I only left about forty in Dizan.

[39], pp. 175-176, *J. Bryce, op.cit.*

Document No. 49

Urmia, Salamas, and Hakkari: statement by Mr. Paul Shimmon, published in the Armenian journal "Ararat", of London, November, 1915

Seeing that *Ararat* is truly a searchlight on all the sufferings of Eastern Christians, a comforter to the broken-hearted and a fighter for their rights, I have felt it my duty and privilege to write just some bare facts of the past and present position of the Syrians in Urmi (Urmia) and Salamas in Persia, and in the Kurdistan mountains south of Van. What I will say of Urmi and Salamas applies equally to the Armenians of the two places, in the latter of which they predominate.

The Russian troops had been in occupation of Azerbaijan, north-western Persia, for a number of years, and their presence meant safety, prosperity and security of person and property both to Christians and Moslems alike. Under the conditions then prevailing, the Kurds had been restrained entirely from their occupation of plunder, and the Turks were deprived of prominence in that part of Persia which they have coveted for years. The Persians also have been restless, and their attitude towards the Christians was somewhat doubtful. On the 2nd January, 1915, it was suddenly known that the Russian army, consulate and all were leaving Urmi—and not that alone, but it was found late that they were withdrawing from all northern Persia. It came like a thunderbolt, for it had been positively stated all along to the Christian population that the Russian army would under no circumstances withdraw from Urmi. Here, then, in the heart of winter, some 45,000 Christians, from nine to ten days' journey from the nearest railway station to the Russian border, found themselves in a very precarious position. No conveyances, horses, etc., could be had for love or money. Roughly speaking, one-third of the people who happened to know

of this withdrawal, through whose villages the army was to pass, left for Russia. The great majority simply left their homes and walked out. Some only heard of the withdrawal during the night, and so could hardly make any provision for the journey. A good number of people from Tergawar and Mergawar, and outlying districts, who were already refugees in Urmi having been plundered on two or three occasions previously left with the army. So there was a concourse of over 10,000 people, mostly women and children, walking in the bitter cold, scantily provided, sore-footed, wearied, that had to make their way to the Russian frontier over mountains and along miserable roads and through swamps. Their cries and shrieks as they walked were heart-rending. The people of Salamas had left two or three days earlier and under somewhat better conditions. There was a swamp between Salamas and Khoi where people actually went knee-deep, where oxen and buffaloes died of cold, and where there was no real resting place and provisions could only be procured from a distance of some ten miles. The agonies of the children were inexpressible. Some mothers had two or three children to take care of, and they dragged one along while they carried the other on their shoulders. Many died on the roadside, many lost their parents, many were left unburied, many were picked up by the Russian cossacks and were taken to the Russian Caucasus to be there cared for by Armenians and others. Such was their plight when they reached Russia, and in some way or another were provided for in the Syrian and Armenian villages in Erivan and in Tiflis, where they passed their time till the spring, when they again wearied of their lives and returned to Urmi and Salamas in the months of May and June.

About two-thirds of the people who stayed behind at Urmi had the cruellest of fates. No sooner had the Russian forces withdrawn than the roads were closely guarded, and no one was permitted to come in or go out of Urmi for over four months. The Kurds poured in from every quarter, and the Persian Moslems joined hands with them. They engulfed the Christian villages; plunder, pillage, massacre and rape were the order of the day. Every village paid its share. First they killed the men, then they took the women—those who had not escaped—and carried them away for themselves or forced them to become Moslems, and finally they plundered and burned the villages. In one village 80 were killed, in another 50, in a third 30, and so the thing went on in varying degrees among the 70 odd villages in Urmi. About one thousand people were disposed of in this way. In the mean-time all that were able escaped to the city to the American mission quarters, whose premises were soon filled to suffocation, and altogether some 20,000 people or more found shelter in the American and French mission quarters, while some hid themselves among Moslem friends and landlords. These refugees, in their flight, were repeatedly robbed on the way by soldiers and officers sent for their protection, and by civilians as well. Many a woman came terror-stricken, shrieking, and bleeding, and almost naked; and many were forced to become Moslems. Some 150 cases or more of these unfortunate women came under the notice of

the American missionaries, who tried to restore them to their own folk. One woman had two sons, four and six years of age, who were thrown into a brook to freeze, while the brute of a mullah set to work to force their mother. She at last escaped and took away the children alive, but they died of exposure the next morning.

Thus in the course of a fortnight all the 46,000 Syrians and Armenians were plundered—not one village escaped. There was one exception. The village of Iriawa was in the keeping of an Armenian—a Turkish subject. He, with twelve other Armenian soldiers, was shot, and the village plundered. Gulpashan was the last to be attacked, when, on the 1st February, 51 of its elders were taken during the night to the graveyard and there murdered most horribly and their brains knocked out. The orgies committed on women and tender girls can be left only to the imagination. I have known the village from childhood and all its inhabitants.

The refugees in the French and American mission yards remained there for over four and a half months, in daily terror and fear of their lives; the quarters were crowded to suffocation, and no man dared leave the premises. Seeing that a few houses of Christians were left in the city which were not plundered, the dozen or less of Turkish officials, who had control of things, began to fleece the people. They forced them to pay a fine of 6,600 tomans (a toman is about one pound sterling), on the pretext that the Christian stores, offices and shops in the city would be saved from plunder. But no sooner was this sum extracted through the kindly offices of the American missionaries than they began to put up to auction and dispose of all the shops, offices and stores. Not satisfied with what they had done, they obtained 6,600 tomans as blood money for Mar Elia, the Syrian Bishop, whom they found in hiding on the roof of a house, and threatened to kill him unless the money was paid. Then, again, such prominent men as Shamasha Lazar, Shamasha Babu and Dr. Isaac Daniel had to pay 3,000, 2,000 and 1,000 tomans respectively to save their lives. Such was the perpetual terror in which the whole community lived.

Soon disease broke out, typhoid played havoc, and over 4,000 died of the epidemic alone. There was scarcely any life left in the remnant of the people when the Russians retook Urmi in May. They were worn out and so emaciated that one could hardly recognise them. It was the first time for months that they were able to crawl out of their filthy winter quarters and inhale fresh air. The Americans, who had fed these people all through the winter, now gave the men and women spades and sickles to return to their villages, and some flour to start life in their ruined homes. I have seen villages turned to ashes, where not one window, door or any woodwork was to be found. Indeed, one day a woman came and said to me: "I have one room out of seven left on the second storey, but what shall I do? There is not a single ladder in all the village that I can borrow so as to mount to it." What they had left in their

homes, these people found on their return to have been eaten by dogs and cats. They have not sown anything this autumn, nor were they able to do any sowing or cultivating in the spring. Ninety per cent of them have absolutely nothing left, and they sleep on the bare hard earthen floor, with no bedding or any other protection beyond their ordinary rags. This is their second winter!

The majority of the Salamas Christians had left for Russia by the time the Urmi people reached Salamas. But there were some left who had hidden themselves among kind Moslems here and there. When the Turks took possession of Salamas, they used every means to find out the whereabouts and number of all the Christians that had remained behind, and one night during March last they took some 723 Armenians and Syrians to the fields in Haftevan and mangled and butchered them in a most brutal manner. Three days later the Russians retook Salamas and buried these people in some trenches which they dug for them. The same fate was awaiting the women, and perhaps worse, but the advent of the Russians saved them.

The troubles of Mar Shimun's independent tribes of Tiari, Tkhuma, etc., in Kurdistan, south of Van, began last June. Mar Shimun's seat in the village of Kochanes was attacked by regular troops and Kurds, destroyed and plundered. Most of the people escaped to Salamas. Mar Shimun at the time was in the interior with the main body of his congregation. A regular Turkish force with artillery and some 30,000 Kurds, etc., marched on the Christians. The forty villages of Berwar, those nearest towards Mosul, were destroyed first, and only some seventeen of them are known to have escaped. The women of many of the others have been forced to become Moslems. For forty days the people defended themselves against superior forces, and that only with flintlocks and antiquated rifles. At last, unable to withstand the onslaught of modern artillery, with which the Turks also bombarded the Church of Mar Sawa, the people withdrew to the interior of the mountains with the Patriarch's family in their centre; and here they subsisted on herbs and some sheep they had taken with them, while many were daily dying of starvation. Mar Shimun came to Salamas—I had an interview with him there, and he has sent me to speak for him and his—to effect the escape of his people, or at least of as many of them as could be saved. All this happened in the latter part of September, when, according to the telegram received here from H.B.M. Consul Shipley at Tabriz, some 25,000 had already arrived, and with them Mar Shimun, himself as destitute as the rest, while 10,000 more were to follow. The condition of the remnant, for in all there are over 100,000, is very precarious, but let us hope not hopeless. Assistance can be sent to them through Mar Shimun and through H.B.M. Consul Shipley.

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission and the Armenian (Lord Mayor's) Relief Fund have sent £500 and £550 respectively to these people. I understand that the Lord Mayor's Fund is telegraphing a further £600 for the relief of the Christians in Persia, or which I for one feel infinitely grateful, as it cannot but assuage some of the terrible suffering that exists.

Let us now survey the whole situation. As over 90 per cent of the Christians at Urmi are destitute, and the condition of some 10,000 to 16,000 Armenians and Syrians in Salamas is not much better, we have at once some 80,000 people and more who must be assisted, if they are not to starve during the coming winter. In this we are not taking into account the remnant of Mar Shimun's people or any Armenians that might have found their way to Persia, where the Russians are now in occupation, and where the condition of the Christians will be, so far as personal safety goes, more hopeful. The turn events are taking politically in Persia seems also favourable, but one must never be too confident of the political situation there.

**Hakkari: further statement by Mr. Paul Shimmon; published in the "Churchman" newspaper, and subsequently issued as a pamphlet; communicated by Mrs. D. S. Margoliouth, of Oxford**

The following is the story of how a Bishop, nay, an Archbishop, at the risk of his own life, saved 35,000 souls—one-third of his flock—from the pursuing Kurds and Turks, and from impending starvation on the heights of the Kurdistan Mountains. He was already in the zone of safety, where he could well have stayed; but he turned back, saying:

"I am going back to die with my people." By so doing, he rescued a multitude of his people from almost certain massacre.

It will be remembered that the Assyrians (better known in Church history as the Nestorian or Syrian Christians) dwell on both sides of the Turco-Persian frontier. The bulk of them live in the very inaccessible mountains of Kurdistan, east of Mosul, which is in Mesopotamia, and south of Lake Van; while a goodly number live in the beautiful plains of Urmia and Salamas in north-western Persia and in the adjacent country districts bordering on Turkey. Over the former district Mar Shimun, the Patriarch, is the supreme ecclesiastical and civil ruler.

Early last June the Turkish forces with irregular Kurds, under the leadership and direction of the Kaimakam, made an attack on the court of Mar Shimun in Kochanes—a Turkish governor making an attack on peaceful subjects of the Turkish Empire for the simple reason that they were Christians. Kochanes is an isolated place. The Patriarch and members of his

court were in the interior with the main body of his church, so the people of the village could hardly be expected to make more than a bare resistance. For two days they fought from within the church, but soon their ammunition was exhausted, and the women and children were in a desperate position. At night they set out for the plains of Salamas in Persia, where I saw them in a most pitiable condition. The Patriarchal house, the English mission, and the larger part of the place was plundered and burned. Even the tombs of former Patriarchs were violated.

In the meanwhile a formidable army was being gathered against the independent dwellers in the valleys of Tkhuma, Tiari, Baz, etc. Both Turkish regulars and Kurds, it is said, to the extent of some 30,000, made a combined attack on the people who had kept their independence since Tamerlane and Ghengis Khan had driven them to the craggy mountains, where in some places they have to carry soil on their backs to make artificial fields. For the first time in the life of the people, artillery was brought up to bombard their ancient and venerable churches, while they themselves made a stout resistance with flintlocks and ammunition of their own make.

For forty days they carried on an unequal warfare against tremendous odds, until at last with their families they took refuge on the top of a high mountain in the Tal country. The Patriarchal family took shelter in the famous church of Mar Audishu, and the others who had been able to effect an escape surrounded them, making a big camp. The Turks and Kurds, after having destroyed the Christian villages in the valleys below, carrying away the crops and plundering everything, endeavoured to starve the fugitives out. Near the church mentioned above there is a small fountain gushing from a rock which was hardly enough to supply drinking water, and for washing and bathing they would often steal at nights to the valleys beneath. The people stayed here for nearly three months, never taking off their clothes and always on the lookout for an attack by night. The few sheep that they had taken with them on their flight were almost eaten up now—they had no salt at all, and soon hunger and sickness began to make their ravages. There was no necessity to deport this Christian population. Its mere starvation in the mountains was all that was needed to make an end of the oldest Apostolic Church in existence.

In the meantime Mar Shimun, the Patriarch, with a few brave men, had stolen out by night and made his way to the Russian army operating in Salamas, Persia. He was received with great distinction, but it was found out after many precious weeks of delay that it might not be possible to send any relief for the people in the interior who were not in the line of march. Later on, the Russians sent their army to Van, and then Mar Shimun with a few faithful followers and good rifles—he himself is an excellent shot—set out again for the interior to

reach his flock and his brothers and sisters. They soon made ready to take the congregation through the valleys and defiles to the plains of Persia.

The last day of their stay was the saddest of all. On that day Ishaya, a brother of the Patriarch, died of fever. Mar Shimun, hearing of his illness, had come over the day before. The enemy was then very near, and they could hear the sound of the guns in Tkhuma. Just when the funeral of his brother was to take place, Surma and Romi, his sisters, and Esther, his sister-in-law, were compelled to leave the place, lest they should be caught by the enemy. Mar Shimun, two priests and a few laymen remained behind at this time of danger to bury Ishaya. The burial service was quickly said and the body hastily interred, and Mar Shimun hastened after the fleeing women and children. They were only just in time, for, a few hours after their departure, the Turks arrived and made straight for the church, having heard that the Patriarch's household was there.

I shall not dwell on the horrors of those caught and slain on the way nor on the many beautiful villages ruined and the women taken captive, nor on the thousands of others who have met the same fate. In one district of forty villages, its Bishop said to me, only seventeen had been able to make an escape, and he knew but very little of the fearful fate of the rest. I want only to speak of the living who are anxious to die, but to whom death does not come. They arrived in Persia at places already ruined; they camped out in the plain of Salamas (4,000 feet above sea level) sleeping in the fields with no clothes to cover them at night, clad in the rags which they have worn for many months, without food or shelter. Some assistance has gone to them from America and England. Some quilts were bought to be distributed, one for each family of five persons, to serve as cover in the bitter cold. Some families have as many as ten members, indeed one had twenty-eight. These are the people who have been living on one dollar a month, and to whom flour is served in quantity barely sufficient to allow each person one small loaf a day and nothing more. I dare say that even their Bishops and other clergy are in not much better condition than their flock.

Assistance, however, can now be sent out to them and will reach them immediately. Urmia and Salamas are now in the zone of safety, where there are many Russian troops, and these have been very kind to the suffering Christians. Money is being sent through the American Consul, the missionaries and the Patriarch, and is at once distributed to the sufferers. The Rev. Y. M. Nisan, who is still alive, although he has lost his wife and daughter, is on the distributing committee. The defeat of the Turks at Erzeroum means peace and safety of life for all Armenia and Persia. In the latter country there are over 80,000 destitute, the majority of them Assyrians, and some Armenians as well. Money is distributed to all without discrimination.

I have purposely avoided saying anything of the horrors that we have suffered at Urmia and the agonies we have passed through, simply because I have felt that the condition of these mountaineers is even more pitiable. I hope Christian people will be moved at once to make an effort to save them from the clutches of starvation. The gallant Patriarch has saved them and brought them out of Turkey, where relief will get to them. I therefore appeal to all my friends and to others who may be so disposed to help rescue this ancient Church.

*[37], pp. 169-171, J. Bryce, op.cit.*

Document No. 50

Refugees from the Hakkari district: series of extracts from letters by members of the American mission station at Urmia; communicated by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

(a) Extract from a letter, dated 8th November, 1915, from the Rev. E. T. Allen

As you know, the first attack by the combined force of Turks and Kurds was made in June and was partially successful. The people were driven out of their valleys into the high mountains central to Tiari, Tkhoma, Tal and Baz. In this movement not many lives were lost, but many villages were destroyed. The hostile forces were for some reason withdrawn, and for some weeks there was comparative quiet, broken only by spasmodic attacks by local forces. About three weeks ago there was another concerted attack made by the Turks and Kurds on their stronghold in the mountain top, and they were driven out. Between fifteen and twenty thousand, with great difficulty, made their escape, part of their road being held by the Kurds. They came down the Tal and Kon Valleys, followed by the Kurds, and attempted to turn up the Zab to get out by way of Djoulamerk. They found the Kurds in force at the Djoulamerk bridge, and were forced to turn down stream. At the head of Tiari they crossed the Zab and went up into the hills, which they found deserted by the Kurds, who had gone to war. They then made their way round behind Djoulamerk, meeting no hostile force until they reached the ridge between Kochanes and the Zab. Here again they found a force of Kurds waiting for them. They had quite a sharp fight with them and the Kurds were worsted. From there on they had no more trouble, reaching Bashkala in safety, and later coming down to Salamas.

These are the people I found in Salamas. They number, according to my estimate, between fifteen and twenty thousand. Among them are Mar Shimun and his family and all our helpers, with one or two exceptions. (Mar Shimun is the Patriarch of the Nestorian Church.)

With reference to those who were left in the mountains, perhaps a thousand more succeeded in getting through. There are still some thousands shut up there, and their fate is still uncertain. How many were killed in this last attack, I have found no one who could give even an estimate, but undoubtedly the number must be large. This is in reference to those in Salamas. All the facts cannot be given out, but this is their case in brief. The mass of them are without shelter of any kind and also without bedding. They are sleeping on the bare ground without covering. The rains have begun and the winter promises to set in early. What all this means to these thousands who are without shelter, you need not be told.

Since coming down a great many of them have been take sick with a peculiar form of bowel trouble, such as the mountaineers have been having here. Dr. David Yohannan estimates that there are as many as one thousand cases. The fatality is not as great as might be expected, but there are a great many deaths. One tribe reported forty deaths within a week. I have seen the dead lying on the roadside, and the women carrying their dead, orders to move on giving them little time to die decently or to be buried with respect. I gave no relief while there. Along the road they had gathered up a little grain; the Russians were giving out 1,200 loads, and help was being given on the threshing floor and from door to door. I have been making a complete list, so that when we are ready to begin we shall have them classified and shall be able to handle them. We shall give flour or wheat in weekly allowances. The cost per head will be about five shahis (1 d.). I shall refrain from giving as long as I see they can subsist on what they get from other sources.

Bedding is needed as badly as food. There is not much choice between dying from hunger or dying from cold. We shall have to supply several thousand outfits, cost of each about three-and- a-half tomans (12s.). You may rest assured that I shall use the utmost caution in the giving of relief.

There is no further word from those left in the mountains. There is still hope that some of them may succeed in getting through, but undoubtedly many will be lost.

(b) Extract from a letter of later date, from a missionary

About 150 or more of the Mutran's people came down. Some of the children were a sight to see for destitution. I had a tableful of women to breakfast with me the next morning, including one of our own pupils who was married into the Mutran's family. They said that 200 Turks had been living off them since a year ago, but that their flocks had been so multiplied that they were able to sustain the burden. At last the Turks began sending twenty men every day with packs on their backs to Mosul, loaded with the spoils of their houses, so

they feared their own end or deportation might be near; they found a chance to escape one day when their guards were a mile or two away, and silently stole away with some of their possessions.

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(c) Extract from a letter of later date, from a missionary

Some of the refugees in Salamas had flocks and possessions, but all were ravaged by disease, so that even if they had work they could not do it. A boy who was with me found his relatives among the people. One uncle of his had been living in the barracks. He had lost his three children one after the other, and then his wife died and he had no one to care for his affairs but himself. He was so weak he could not do anything—reduced to skin and bone himself—but he got a rope and tried to carry the body of his wife on his back to bury her somewhere. He had not even strength enough to dig her grave. There the story ended. The boy said the man broke down and could not tell any more, and he did not have the heart to ask what had become of her.

Another of our preachers has lost three of his four children and the last was very ill when we saw her. His wife had lost her brother and two sisters—one of them a pupil in the Fiske Seminary.

Document No. 51

Desperation in Bashkala

Letter written in Syriac in February, 1916, by an eyewitness, Yoel B. Rustam, of Charagushi (Urmia - Persia)

Those who live in Bashkala, on the frontier of Turkey and Persia, are in a most wretched condition. Up to the present (February), once only have some ninety loads of wheat been sent to them by the American missionaries. But what will this do for some 6,600 souls? Some have gone into the fields and villages to find remnants of unharvested wheat and pick them up to live on. Here and there a man had a sheep or a mule which he was able to take along in his flight; that has since been sold and entirely eaten up. Now starvation is carrying them off mercilessly. Over one-third of them have died this winter. Of the 6,600, some 2,000, tired of life and existence, thought to themselves that unless we find a remedy we will starve. They said, 'Let us return to our homes in the heart of Kurdistan, where we will either find a shelter for ourselves and live, or else we will die in our homes, and be buried with our fathers.' They have gone. For the past two months not a word has ever been heard from them. Whether they are living or dead no one yet knows.

About 4,000 have gone to Khoi, a city in the north-western corner of Persia, and there they were in just as bad a condition. Nearly 1,500 of these have already died. There are no houses in which they can live. Khoi is now altogether inhabited by Moslems, and they could not think of polluting their premises by the presence of Christians, whom they consider religiously unclean. The Mohammedan governor compelled the Moslems, through the influence of the Russians there, to open their barns and stables for some to live in. The Christians are so lean and emaciated that death will get at them wholesale.

I went into the villages of Salamas in Persia, where these Christian Highlanders are existing and went from house to house and in person saw their condition. I visited Khusrabad first, a great centre, where in normal times some 500 Assyrian families used to live, beside the newly arrived 113,000 that had been scattered through the villages of this plain (Salamas). In Khusrabad there were 3,200 refugees at the beginning. For some of them there are houses in which they have been accommodated. Others are living in barns, woodsheds or stables. For others not even these are to be had, and they are living out in the streets, sitting under the walls on the highways. They suffer from cold, as they have nothing in the way of bedding and winter clothing, and winter months are severe. (It is 4,000 to 5,000 feet above sea level.) In every room, stable or barn there are living anywhere from five to thirty souls. They are given six rubles per month for their support. The ruble has very much depreciated in value, and they do not know what is the best to do with this money; whether to spend it for wheat, bread, fuel, clothing, kerosene, etc. Bread is now high. Many, therefore, purchase wheat and grind it with hand-mills and then boil and eat it.

These people are dying for actual lack of nourishment and from bitter cold. Those who are so fortunate as to be in the houses gather around the oven, (which is dug in the ground, and spread a quilt on a low table placed over the oven, in which they have put a few pieces of charcoal) and then they tuck their feet inside the quilt to get warm. They call this arrangement a kursi. A quilt has been given by the missionaries to each family of five or more to spread over them. They have nothing under them, and they sleep on the bare ground. Those who are sick and those who are well are all huddled together under this kursi.

There is hardly a house in which there are no sick. In some families two or three members are sick and they do not talk, having almost no voice left, for there is nothing for them to eat excepting dry bread, and this is secured with difficulty. Those who are well, when the sun shines stand in the sun to warm themselves, while the sick ones cannot do even that and remain on the bare ground. It was most pitiable when passing through the streets and

villages; I saw sick persons prostrate on the ground under the walls here and there. There is hardly a family in which deaths have not taken place. In some places parents have died and the little ones are thrown on their own resources.

In passing through a village I came to woods on the outskirts. Near it there was a barn which was partly unroofed; it had also no door. I saw two boys of fifteen and five years of age sleeping outside this barn. On going inside I saw two other boys about ten and eight years of age. They had buried themselves in the chaff. I asked them, 'Why do you do so?' They answered, 'Because there is no room for us in the village. We have nothing to cover ourselves with, so we have buried ourselves in the chaff; it is both a quilt and a mattress.' They further said, 'We four are brothers. Our father died only day before yesterday. Our mother died a week before he did. We have also lost another brother.' Their colour was pale, so it made one almost sick to look at them. They had no fire. There were no other relatives to look after them. I doubt very much if they could keep alive much longer in that condition. All that I saw they had of this world's goods was an old teapot and one dish. Then they had bought a quilt a few days before for their father, which they were now using for themselves.

In one family of seven three had died and two others were so sickly that one could not expect them to get well. I went a little way into the woods near the village and saw a person who had been buried four days previous. He had been ill and had been thrown into the woods, as he had no one to look after him. After he had died one of the boys in the barn had gone and dug a place for him in the woods and had merely thrown some dirt over him. In some cases the wife or the daughter buries the family dead. Many are so lightly covered that very soon the dogs get them out.

Out of the 3,200 refugees in this village 1,000 had already died, and there were many who were very ill. In another place I saw a mother and two children, a girl and a boy, sitting under the kursi warming themselves. The mother was groaning faintly, but the voice of the little girl could hardly be heard, as she had nearly starved to death. The little boy was lying quietly beside his mother and made no sound. The father and two daughters had already gone to their rest. Just to think, also, that many of these people were once well-to-do and had plenty to eat and to wear, and have now been reduced to this condition, longing for a warm meal to satisfy their cravings.

In another village, Ula, I was told many of the people from Kochanes (the seat of Mar Shimun, the Assyrian Patriarch) and other people were living there. At the beginning, in the fall, when they came here there were about 900 people there altogether. Now only some

350 are left, and they are in the condition that I have described already. Late in the evening, while passing through this same village, I saw a woman with nothing but a thin spread wrapped over her, and she was lying near the wall in the street, and could not be expected to live many days.

In another village I saw people lying on manure piles in the open and in the streets; nearly all were sick. One woman was knitting, but she was wailing bitterly and shedding floods of tears, as she thought of her former home, and now she was left at the door of strangers with nothing on which to live.

From all the investigation that I was able to make and from my own personal observation, I am sure that over 5,000 out of the 13,000 that had come to the plain of Salamas must have perished, and this is the opinion of others also. These refugees are too far removed from centres of interest and are still surrounded by Moslems, so that very little practical help comes to them other than that which is given by the charitable organisations; and this is not sufficient to satisfy their hunger for bread and to give them enough clothing and bedding to be comfortable at night.

*Source: W. W. Rockwell, The Pitiful Plight of the Assyrian Christians in Persia and Kurdistan; described from the Reports of Eyewitnesses; New York (ACASR), 1916, pp. 44-49*

Document No. 52

Azerbaijan: statement, dated Tiflis, 22 February, 1916, by Mr. M. Philip Price, war correspondent for various British and American newspapers on the Caucasian front; communicated to Aneurin Williams, Esq., M. P., and published in the Armenian journal "Ararat", of London, March, 1916

In October of last year I came to Diliman on the plain of Salamas in north-west Persia. I had been in Urmia during September and had seen the condition of the Assyrians (mostly Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant) in the low country round that lake. The American missionaries of Urmia were doing a great deal, and on the whole the condition of the country was not so very bad. There was housing accommodation and a good deal of corn, and it seemed as if the Americans would keep the situation in hand. But in Salamas there was a very different state of affairs. At the end of September, 25,000 mountain Nestorians from the Tkhuma, Baz and Tiari regions, who had been fighting with the Kurds all summer and had had to flee for lack of ammunition, came pouring into the plain led by their Patriarch, Mar Shimun, and began to plant themselves down in the orchards and gardens round the villages. All the villages of the plain were already occupied, and, as the winter was just

setting in, their condition without housing, food and clothing was desperate. I sent a message to Mr. Shipley, the British Consul at Tabriz, telling him of the situation, and he telegraphed to the Archbishop of Canterbury for financial assistance. Meanwhile relief committees were organised under the Russian Consul Akimovitch, the Armenian Bishop Nerses, who lent funds from the Armenians of the Caucasus, and an American Missionary from Urmia, Mr. McDowell, with funds from America, and they began to organise relief during November and December. The method adopted was to distribute to all the refugees, Armenians and Assyrians alike, a daily allowance of 10 kopecks a day, since increased to 15 kopecks, and to distribute warm quilts and coats from materials purchased in the bazaars of Diliman and Khoi. Some medical detachments of the Russian Red Cross and Soyus Gorodof were sent with medical aid to combat typhus and dysentery, which was beginning to and still is taking many in toll of the refugees. As regards the medical side of the relief, I am inclined to doubt the possibility of making effective provision under the circumstances. There are not sufficient skilled doctors, and it is impossible to get drugs through from the Caucasus in sufficient quantity to do much good.

I did not observe on my return to Salamas after a journey to Van in November any real improvement in the health of the refugees. Every day a hundred or more Assyrians and Armenians were dying in the villages round Diliman, and the same thing is going on now. It seems to me (and these friends of mine, who have also been there and have seen the conditions, agree with me), that it is impossible under the circumstances to combat the disease by medical assistance. The hardy mountaineers from the head-waters of the Great Zab and Tigris can best be helped by giving them the means to resist disease. Once disease has hold of them, no half measures of medical relief can help. I am therefore strongly of opinion that; if more relief is sent, it should take the form of money, which should go to increase the daily allowances of the refugees, enabling them to buy for themselves, from the Persians of Diliman, food and clothing, which alone will enable them to resist disease. The position is now as follows. When I left Diliman for Van at the end of October, I saw in the regions round Bashkala another 5,000 or 6,000 Assyrians and a sprinkling of Armenians living in caves of the rocks or in the open, and feeding on raw grains of wheat, which they were picking from the ruined corn-fields. On my return in January most of these were in Salamas, and so I think about 30,000 Assyrian and Armenian refugees are now there—that is, after deducting 15 per cent as lost from disease in the last three months. The Russian and American relief organisations which are working there of course stand in need of more money to carry on their work effectively. In order to save the refugees from starving, doles of money must be given out to them till next harvest at least. I should certainly think that the Americans, whose committee is centred in Tabriz, under the American Consul there, are doing the best work with the means at their disposal. With the Russian organisation

there is more delay and greater leakage. Relief is being given impartially by the Americans to Assyrians and Armenians of all denominations. This cannot always be guaranteed for the Russian organisation.

I would therefore strongly appeal for further help for the distressed refugees of this ancient Assyrian Church, together with their brethren of the Armenian Gregorian, Catholic and Protestant faith, and should suggest that it be sent to the British Consul at Tabriz to distribute with the American missionaries in the form of increased daily allowance for food and clothing.

*[45], pp. 191-192, J Bryce, op.cit.*

Document No. 53

Refugees from Hakkari: letter, dated Diliman, 1st/14th April, 1916, from Surma, the sister of Mar Shimun, to Mrs. D. S. Margoliouth, of Oxford

I was very glad to get your sweet letter, for which I was longing and looking forward, my dearest friend. I know how you loved Ishaya, and he always asked after you. I wonder if you ever got his letter that he wrote to you in Syriac.

I wrote to you while at Kochanes (before the war) but got no answer; I wondered if you might be away from home. I wonder if Mr. Wigram and Mr. Heazell got my letters, written since we came to Diliman; I am afraid you won't get yours, the address was incorrect.

You most kindly asked after Hormizd. I wish we knew his fate, dear boy; we have no news of him since the 20th February (5th March), 1915. I asked Mrs. Wigram if she would be able to tell us something of him by way of Dr. Wigram's letters; we are most anxiously looking forward to the answer.

The hospitals which are endowed by great Russia to help the sick are a great help. Now the people get nursed well, and, of course, the sickness is growing less. But outside the hospitals, although they do get help from Russia (recently some clothes, too), England and America, still their miseries are great, and their living very poor.

I trust and hope you will read the report recently written by Mr. Paul Shimmon. A copy has been sent to Mr. Heazell. It is all quite true, and there you will see our nation's wretchedness. Really, Russia couldn't have done more than she has by helping with hospitals, money and clothes.

Now the Russian Government wants us all to go up to Bashkala, the people to be provided with oxen and wheat to be able to plough land for themselves. Of course, Mar Shimun is quite willing to make the people do what they are ordered, and what is best for them. It really is a very good thing, but I am much afraid it won't come to pass, for two reasons—first, the difficulty of finding enough oxen and corn, and, secondly, because it is getting too late for sowing. Soon after Easter Mar Shimun intends to go to Khoi and talk the plan over with General Tchournazoukov.

I wanted very much to go to England, but Mrs. Wigram wrote to me that my friends didn't think it advisable. I don't understand well what you say in your letter about directing to me through Mr. Shipley. If it is anything to help the poor, it is most welcome.

One can't help longing to read the London Times and the Church Times, especially the Bishop of London's sermons. What will be the end? Is the world being refined? Who will endure to the last? We can only pray for mercy. His will be done. My heart is yearning to hear that "England has conquered"; pray God it will prove so—although one does feel for all the young men's lives, whether friend or foe, no difference, and for the world's misery.

Last October David and I went down to Urmia and stayed with dear Mr. Nisan. His house seemed to me quite desolate with no Beatrice or her mother, but he was the same, cheering and helping others. His daughter-in-law Nanajan is very nice, and, with her little dear boy, she will be a comfort for his old age. Samuel is still in America; it is rather hard for the young wife. I have twice written to Mr. Nisan to send service books, which he kindly sent. We often wonder what our church would have done if it were not for English printing presses? Nearly all our church books are gone. Mar Shimun has consecrated little tablets, and nearly every priest in Diliman has one to celebrate on for the people; it is the same in Urmia and Khoi.

You will like to hear that David, Zaya, Paul and Ishaya fought most bravely in Dizan. Twice the Kurds were driven away with twelve killed, and the third time Paul and Zaya alone with four servants fought against the foe and saved the little ammunition they had. I intend to write a report of all that happened (what I saw and heard) in the mountains. But really I can't, as long as I am with ten children playing in the small yard and making as much noise as a herd of the Kurds, poor little kids. I don't think you know that David is father of two boys and four girls, and Romi is mother of three girls and two boys. Are not they old? The children are as happy as children ought to be, only they are disappointed at not having as many new clothes as they used to have at home, and especially the boys, for they are not going to have any new clothes for Easter as they had theirs at Christmas, and now it is the

girls' turn for Easter. The market is another difficulty for them—seeing new toys and sweets (they were free from that in Kochanes) and with no money to buy them. However, they get used to it, poor dears.

I teach the four boys for two hours a day; they are promising pupils if properly taught. The little girls read their alphabet, too. Romi and Esther have suffered very much under the circumstances. It was too much for them, although they have gone through it quite bravely, especially Esther, who was with child all this time, and during the last days of flight was expecting the child every hour. However, God was merciful, and the baby girl was born nearly a fortnight after we arrived in Diliman. She is baptised Helena. I am rather uneasy about Esther. She is very weak, and after Easter she will go to Urmia, both to visit her father's house (the Mutran's brother) and see the doctor.

I can't say it was too much for me; if it were not for certain reasons I should have been rather enjoying the struggle between the Kurds and Turks and us. Thank God we are very well at present, except for being over anxious for our poor nation's misery. The living here is very hard for us; we simply have no money for our ordinary necessities, and at times we have people coming to our door who can hardly stand on their feet for hunger; how could one turn them away?

However, all the world is suffering, and so must we and our nation.

Would you kindly tell Mr. Heazell that Mar Shimun got the £50 which he sent. I never wrote to him that the Mutran was let free by the Turks and has come to Urmia safely, although quite broken and very weak.

I rather enjoy the plan of going up to Bashkala after we have lost our country and home. It will suit us to turn into nomads, like the Israelites—Mar Shimun for Moses; can't make David into Aaron, he has no beard, so dear old Peter for Aaron, with his white beard; I suppose I must be Miriam, and we must take a tent, too, for celebration, which we will call the "Assyrian Tabernacle"; and very likely we shall always be having skirmishes with the Canaanites to get to our fathers' land. Wouldn't you like to come and see us, the new Israelites?

The houses in Bashkala are all ruined.

Mar Shimun sends his blessing to you and Professor Margoliouth, and we our best regards.

[40], pp. 177-179, *J. Bryce, op.cit.*

Document No. 54

Letter from the Nestorian Patriarch Mar Shimun Benyamin to the Society of Relief in London, 25th of April, 1916, addressed to Paul Shimmon

From the Patriarchal Cell, receive prayers and blessings!

To our beloved son Mr. Paulus - peace and blessings in the Lord Christ.

It was necessary that we should have written you long before this, but we thought that it would be better that we delay till we could send you the list of the names to whom money was distributed. Now we are sending the list. When it reaches your hands translate it into English and send it to the Society in London. We have sent our acknowledgement to the Society directly.

We are very much afraid concerning our letters that they may not reach you at all. In this post at Diliman (in Salamas, N.W. Persia) they do not accept registered letters for America and England.

Indeed, we owe great gratitude to the exalted kingdom of Russia; it has assisted our nation with money, clothing and medicine. At the time that we received the money which was sent by you, it was especially beneficial to the latest refugees (the Tiari people) in Bashkala. They were dying of starvation. We hired some mules and sent wheat, which was bought by Mr. McDowell (a missionary distributing funds of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, and also funds from England), and we also gave money for some to come here to purchase food for themselves and their families. Though we have received help for our nation from Russia, England and America, again the needs of our people are very great and heart-breaking.

Even now some people are dying of starvation. Very often some come to our door when they are barely able to stand on their feet from hunger. Who can refuse those who are in such condition? Now they have also a new kind of disease; the feet are swelling and getting blue, so that they cannot move at all, and they have to be assisted in everything. There are families in Bashkala whose sick members from November till now are eating bread only. How can they live? They ask for some milk when dying; it cannot be supplied them. The condition of our nation is very wretched. Mr. McDowell is now giving seed for those who can sow, but they have not enough oxen. The Russians also will give, but the things are getting delayed, and we do not know what is to become of us in the meanwhile. We are hoping that you will do everything in your ability that the Christians in America may assist and that part of

our nation may escape misery. Surma has written you before this; we do not know if you have received her letters or not. We will hope that you will write us everything.

The Grace of our Lord Christ be with you.

Mar Shimun Benyamin

*Source: W.W. Rockwell, the pitifull Plight of the Assyrian Christians in Persia and Kurdistan.*

*New York 1916<sup>2</sup>, p.50-51*

## **5. The Assyrians as the “Smallest Ally“ in the First World War**

In historical research about the First World War, it goes almost unmentioned that the Assyrians took part in the fighting between 1916 and 1918, first as an ally of the Russians, and later of the British. The Russians awarded their troop leaders decorations, and the British promised that they could return to their homeland of Hakkari after the end of the war. A series of documents presented to the League of Nations during the post-war negotiations attest to the official Assyrian participation in the war on the Allied side and at their express invitation.

In 1920 a booklet was published in London under the title, “Our smallest Ally—A brief account of the Assyrian Nation in the Great War” (*W. A. Wigram*). The foreword to it was written by H. H. Austin, British camp commander of the Assyrian refugee camp Bakuba, in which 45,000 Assyrians encamped on the edge of the Mesopotamian desert from 1918 on. The Allies were victorious in the war, but the Assyrians sacrificed their homeland.

### **Alliance with the Russians in 1916**

On January 2, 1916, Patriarch Mar Shimun, whose temporary residence since the mass flight in the summer and fall of 1915 had been in Salamas, received an invitation from the Grand Duke Nikolai, supreme commander of the Russian Army, to come to Tbilisi. He accepted the invitation and travelled there via Khoi and Julfa, escorted by several Assyrian military leaders and an interpreter from the Russian Consulate of Urmia. After the usual demonstrations of honor, negotiations began about forming Assyrian auxiliary battalions. The Russians had already conducted similar talks with the Kurds in 1914. The Russians wanted to reinforce their troops in northwest Persia, particularly in Urmia and in Salamas. Mar Shimun had certain obligations to the Russians because of their generous support of the Assyrian refugees. But he wanted military equipment for his tribes to return to the tribal regions of Hakkari. During his ten-day visit, Mar Shimun also had an official reception with the Tsar.

The military task of the Assyrian auxiliary troops in Azerbaijan consisted of guaranteeing passage for the Russian army, who advanced from Caucasus over the railway line Tbilisi - Tabriz and towards the west in the direction of Van. Erzerum, Turkish general headquarters on the Caucasus front, fell quite early, on February 15, 1916. Up through July, the Russians had conquered larger areas of Armenia. However, they then came to an area which had been extensively “purged” of Christians. The German General Staff did not much concern

itself with this secondary theater of war. It meant little to them strategically at this time, as can be read in Ludendorff's war memoirs:

"The Russian advance into Armenia, which led to their capture of Trapezunt and Erzerum in the spring of 1916, need not be considered on a strategic basis. Russia did not need to provide special forces for this. The Russians were greatly superior in number and in a more favorable situation than the Turks." (*E. Ludendorff, op.cit. p. 163*)

The actual significance of the Russians' advance into the Armenian-Turkish area can be seen in the Entente powers' secret agreement on the partition of the Turkish empire during the war. The Russian part included most of the Armenian and all of the Assyrian areas of settlement. The favorable military situation which thus arose convinced the Assyrians that it was in their own interest to accept the Russian proposal. Mar Shimun received a telegram to this effect from General Chernozubov in May 1916.

Meanwhile, the Assyrian tribes were drawn up together under their own officers, and under Russian ones, using Russian equipment. They organized themselves into military units. After a tribal council consulted with the leaders and the patriarch, it was decided to accept the Russian offer made by the general: the Assyrian contingents should regain their former residences by means of a military expedition. It was the Russian aim to defend the conquered areas in the process. In the course of the summer, a series of Assyrian military expeditions took place, allowing smaller groups of refugees in Salamas to return to their mountain valleys and villages, particularly since the Russians set up military bases in Kochanes and Tiari offering safety to those returning. The military penetration of a Persian-Turkish border area and the creation of a buffer zone with the assistance of the Assyrians occurred even as the English army suffered a severe defeat in Mesopotamia and was surrounded by the German Asia Corps in Kut al-Amara.

The Russian advance through Persia also ended the adventure of the secret German military mission under the command of the German military attaché in Teheran, Baron Kanitz. Since June 1915, it had been trying to inspire the formation of a German-Persian force. The intention was to bring Persia to fight on the Axis side. The main object was the expulsion of the Russians and British from Persian territory. German agents propagated this plan among the Persian tribes in southern Persia. Baron Kanitz inspired a revolt against the shah, who was still under age. He took refuge in the Russian embassy in Teheran. For their part, the Turks sent Admiral Reuf Pasha on a military mission to Persia to frustrate the German activities under any and all circumstances. By orders of the German General Staff, thirty German officers were involved in this Persian enterprise, but the whole operation

ended in disaster. In May 1916, the military mission was terminated; Kanitz had committed suicide.

The military success of the Russians in Turkish Armenia and the setting up of the new northeast flank along the Lake of Urmia proved to be of great significance for the British advance to Baghdad and Mosul in 1917. It was in this military context that the Assyrian contingents played their role as the Russians' auxiliary army. In the fall of 1916, after further negotiations, 2,000 Assyrians were equipped and trained militarily. They were under the command of Mar Shimun Benjamin and his brother David Bet Mar Shimun, but Russian officers were their military advisors. They received pay and food as the Russian troops did. A total of fourteen military expeditions against hostile Kurdish regiments were undertaken between 1916 and 1918. They resulted in Assyrian victories. Three Assyrian battalions were formed from the auxiliary force. They were under the command of Polkovnik (Lieutenant) Kuzmin. Shlemon d-Malik Ismail's war diary described in detail the military actions of these years.

#### The Russian Revolution in 1917

In March 1917, the first Russian civilian revolution eliminated the monarchy. The Kerenski government came into power temporarily, with Guchkov as the new minister of war. Russia's domestic political situation was confused, with various forces battling for ultimate supremacy. A number of commanders from the Russian army were relieved of their duties, including in May 1917 the commander of the Caucasus Army, General N. N. Judenich, who was also military leader of the troops in Persia.

Lieutenant General Semyonov commanded over 36,000 soldiers. He directly supervised the newly organized Assyrian battalions and the Armenian contingents, which had also been reorganized. The mountain residents were under the command of their own Assyrian tribal leaders. Among them, Agha Petros played a significant role; they called him general, although it is doubtful that he actually held this rank. The Assyrians from Urmia and Salamas were under the command of their own military leaders. Between May and September 1917, various campaigns were conducted in the high mountain valleys against Kurds and against Turkish troops.

In the Van area there was a so-called defensive maneuver by the Turks against the Russians in September 1917. The Russian army was already in a phase of disorientation at this time due to the removal of important generals and the unclear political situation in Russia. The English army continued to advance inexorably in Mesopotamia and had already

taken Baghdad. In view of the political changes in Russia, England recognized very early the danger inherent in the Russian retreat from Persia and Turkish Armenia. English information officers had the task of filling the military vacuum which was soon to arise in this region by mobilizing Assyrians, Armenians and Kurds. In case of emergency, they wanted military replacements in this strategically important area in Mesopotamia. This emergency occurred when the Bolsheviks took power in Russia in the October (November) Revolution and the Russian armies were recalled from all fronts.

All treaties concluded by the tsarist and civil governments during the war, including the secret treaties on the partition of the Turkish empire, were annulled. The Russian-Assyrian alliance was over. There was even an official farewell. On November 24, 1917, Lieutenant General Semyonov invited the Patriarch and several Assyrian military leaders to Urmia. The Patriarch was ceremoniously received by an honor guard and decorated with the Saint Annen Cross, a high military decoration. The military commanders also received decorations for excellent service in the Russian army.

These honors were conferred almost three weeks after the revolution. They could be considered an irony on the margin of world history, but perhaps also a friendly gesture from military leaders for whom, in their distance from St.Petersburg, the significance of the political events was not yet clear. On the next day, Semyonov paid a farewell visit to the Patriarch in the English mission house, assuring him that a Cossack regiment would remain behind in the Urmia garrison. A group of Russian officers also decided to stay. Military equipment, weapons and money were to enable the Assyrians to continue to defend themselves. The Assyrians and the Armenians organized a small army, together with the Russian Cossacks. The three Assyrian battalions made up the largest group, with 4,000 soldiers. The Cossack lieutenant Kondratov, Agha Petros, the Patriarch and his brother David, as well as several tribal leaders, made up the high command in Urmia, where the Russian consul was still the most important authority in the province. Soon after the Russians retreated from Azerbaijan, hostilities arose between the Muslim population and the Assyrians. As the majority of the Assyrian soldiers came from Turkey (Hakkari), they were considered something of an occupying force, though at the same time they were serving a protective function for the Christian civilian population of the region, which had hardly recovered from the past events.

There were negotiations between the Persian governor Eshrat Homayon and an Assyrian delegation. The Assyrians promised they would return to their mountain valleys after the war ended, but that in winter this was unthinkable. The governor did not want to accept the

proposed compromise. The Assyrians kept the upper hand in the military clashes which followed. The situation returned to normal once again and a treaty was concluded.

The conflict made clear that a solution had to be found as quickly as possible. The Persian territory between Kermanshah and the Caspian Sea had long been under Russian control. The English feared the loss of their control over the oilfields in Baku if the Turks or the Germans succeeded in getting a foothold in the Caucasus. A few months later, this became reality.

The American mission leader William A. Shedd, who had actively helped relieve the Christian refugees' misery in northern Persia during the war years, and who considered himself particularly responsible for the Assyrians, wrote a report to the American consul in Tbilisi about the dangerous situation in Persia after the Russians' retreat. The English, who had a military mission there, were informed about the situation. They sent information officer Captain Gracey to Urmia in late December 1917.

In the presence of Russian vice consul Basile Nikitine, a representative of the Medical Charity, and William A. Shedd, a discussion took place with the Assyrian leaders about organizing the replacement front. Captain Gracey had already taken up contact with the Shekkak Kurd leader Ismail Agha, called Simko, in his Van headquarters and suggested an alliance between the Kurds and the Assyrian troops.

The Russian consul also spoke in favor of this plan. This would then have fateful consequences for the Assyrians. Gracey acted on behalf of General Offley Shore, the military mission's commander, and thus also in England's name. As a result of the talks, the Assyrians were encouraged to keep the situation in Azerbaijan under control until the English had taken over the Russians' position in Persia. In exchange, they were to attain an independent status after the war was over—with England's help.

#### Alliance with the British in 1918

1918 was the last year of the war. The Russian troops had left the theaters of war in Turkey and Persia, right down to the small Cossack unit in Urmia. In February parts of the Turkish army advanced. At the negotiations in Brest Litovsk, they demanded back all the territories which the Russians had taken over, and also Kars and Batum. They did not intend, however, to stop there, but rather aimed to expand their influence in the Caucasus area. Things had changed for the Turks through the revolution in Russia, and for the moment they were convinced that their pan-Turanic goals were closer than ever before. The economic significance of the raw materials in the area and the railroad network were even more

important to them. This caused a serious conflict of interest with the Germans, who urgently needed the raw materials in the Caucasus for their destroyed war economy and who were also conducting talks with Georgia.

The German-Turkish plan to reconquer Mesopotamia, which was prepared starting in March 1917 and in the fall of the same year under the name of "Operation Yilderim (Blitz)" by the German Asia Corps (4,500 soldiers) and several Turkish divisions, was a failure even during the preparations due to differences of opinion about lines of authority between German and Turkish military leaders. The undertaking's commander, General von Falkenhayn (who had taken over the German Asia Corps after von der Goltz died of cholera in 1916), was dismissed and then took over the command post on the Palestine front.

A military expedition under General Major L. C. Dunsterville, named "Dunsterforce" after him, reached Hamadan in February, 1918. The task of this English military base was to build up flank protection for the war front in Mesopotamia. This was only possible with the support of people hostile to Turkey. Some time before, the information officers had taken up contact with Assyrians, Armenians and Kurds—these contacts were now intensified. The military expedition, however, was unable to act without military reinforcements, a fact which the English negotiators had failed to mention to the new allies.

At the same time, there was unrest in northwest Persia, caused by Turkish propaganda in the Muslim population. Nuri Pasha, Enver's brother, was the driving force behind this propaganda campaign, and the German agent Neumann was also involved. Leaflets reached thousands of fanaticized Muslims who took to the streets in Urmia; they yelled the Shiite war cry "Yah Hassan, yah Hussein" and the propaganda slogans "unity for all Muslims", and "death to the unbelievers." The Assyrian arsenals were attacked. There was bitter fighting, lasting several days. In the end, a portion of the Persian troops fled to Tabriz via Salamas, and the others—in Urmia—capitulated. An Assyrian police unit was organized to prevent anarchy. Plundering and mistreatment of the town's Muslim civil population by soldiers were thus prevented. Talks between the Patriarch and the Persian governors of Urmia, Khoi and Salamas followed. Finally, an agreement resolved the hostilities.

The English plan of an Assyrian-Kurdish alliance was to be realized. There were disagreements, and several Assyrian leaders warned against it. After an exchange of letters, a meeting took place between the Kurdish leader and the patriarch Mar Shimun in Kohin Shahir, Simko Agha's residence, on March 16, 1918. There were also several Russian officers among the Assyrian protective escort. After a friendly exploratory conversation, the Patriarch and his people took their leave. When leaving the Kurdish

residence, he was shot from behind. The Kurds were not disturbed by the presence of four Russian officers who had witnessed this cowardly deed. Later, documents fell into the hands of the Assyrians revealing that the plan to murder Mar Shimun originated with the Persians and that Simko Agha had declared himself willing to set up the ambush.

This event weakened the Assyrians, robbing them of their spiritual leader and highest political authority. A campaign of revenge against the Shekkak Kurds followed, during which many Kurdish villages surrounding Kohin Shahir were raided. This was the first tragic result of the relations between the English and the Assyrians.

In March 1918, the Turks led a successful offensive against Van. Their troops under Ali Ihsan Pasha were close to Urmia in April. Here, military control was in the hands of the Assyrian troops, who were now under Agha Petros' command. The Turks demanded his surrender. After several exchanges, there was a battle with the Turkish troops. Still well equipped and ready for war, the Assyrians were able to achieve victory. They even took over 500 Turkish prisoners. The Assyrian who reported on the event described that the living conditions of Turkish prisoners interned in the former Russian barracks were better than in their own army. During the whole month of April, the Turkish attacks on the Dunsterville line had to be defended by the Assyrian battalions and an Armenian regiment. The town of Urmia now found itself surrounded: Turkish troops pushed in from the south and the west; the Lake of Urmia was in the east. Meanwhile, the Turks had received reinforcements and were greatly superior in numbers, while the Assyrians lacked weapons and ammunition.

After Van was conquered in April 1918, 20,000 Armenians fled to Persia. In June 1918 the Turks attacked again. Ali Ihsan Pasha's 5th Division was provided with reinforcements by the 7th Division from Bashqala, and troops from the 6th and 12th Divisions attacked in the south. The Russian lieutenant Kuzmin gave the order to retreat to Urmia, as it was impossible for the Assyrians to conduct war on two fronts. The Christian population from Salamas also joined in the retreat. There were great losses. The Assyrians could not expect reinforcements. Missionary Shedd, who in the meantime had also become American vice consul in Urmia, tried to take up contact with the English, and reminded them of the promises made by their intelligence officer in December 1917. When no answer came and the situation in Urmia became increasingly desperate—50,000 Assyrians were surrounded in the town of Urmia—Shedd purchased weapons illegally, paying for them with the ACASR's charity monies. He hoped the English would pay him back the money, as he had carried out the purchase of weapons semi-officially in their stead. The American charity organization did

not approve of this behavior of their spokesman in Persia. However, Shedd died in 1918 and could not be called to account.

On July 18, 1918 an airplane circled over Urmia. The Assyrian soldiers fired at it, but it proceeded with its landing approach. The English air force officer K. M. Pennington came from Hamadan on behalf of General Dunsterville in order to set up the long-awaited military contact. The Assyrians and all the Christians of the region, surrounded in Urmia, were hoping to be saved. A discussion took place in the English mission house: Pennington promised the Assyrians more weapons and reinforcements within the following two weeks. Until then they were to defend the Persian-Turkish section of the front with their own forces. For this military service, the Assyrians received guarantees that they would be able to return to their living settlements after the war was ended and that their autonomy would be re-established under allied protection. The Assyrians were prepared to provide two thousand soldiers, who would await the English patrol in Sain Qalla.

Pennington left open the issue of how big the English reinforcement would be. Perhaps he himself did not know. The only purpose of his adventurous flight over enemy territory and landing in the encircled Urmia was to announce a small cavalry unit, situated 150 miles south in Miandob. This small unit, consisting of perhaps twenty to thirty men, demanded that the Assyrians send out an advance guard. Sain Qalla, the agreed meeting point, was about 100 miles south of Urmia.

The military problem was that Turkish troops blocked the way to the south. The Assyrian Urmia Division under Agha Petros was to attack these troops and tie them up in fighting until the unit which had broken through to Sain Qalla met up with the English to take over the supplies agreed on and bring them back to Urmia. It later became clear that the English reinforcement in Sain Qalla consisted of a squadron of cavalry (14th Hussar Regiment) and a machine gun company, and that they had received the order not to cross over the Sain Qalla line.

After the talks, for which Agha Petros on the Assyrian side was primarily responsible, Pennington flew back on July 9. The Assyrian advance unit was supposed to arrive in Sain Qalla on July 23.

#### Assyrian Exodus from Persia

In retrospect it is difficult to determine which was the decisive mistake when executing the plan. The Assyrians urgently needed weapons and money; they had no choice but to follow

up on this meeting. In fact, Agha Petros succeeded in beating the Turks in Sauchbulak, compelling their retreat. The way was paved for an advance unit. The major portion of the troops was to return again to Urmia, where only a weak defense had been left behind.

A seven-day delay arose because of the fighting with the Turks. Agha Petros decided to march with the entire Urmia Division to the place where this meeting was to take place—estimates vary between one and two thousand men—and present themselves to the English. The latter had retreated to the other side of the town, but were discovered by the Assyrian scouts. The meeting was friendly, but did not escape the Turks' notice. They understood that they had no time to lose in conquering Urmia.

In the town there was a Christian civilian population of between 70,000 and 80,000 people, gathered from all the villages of the province. The first Turkish attack came from the north, defended by the Assyrian Salamas Division. They were to hold the line along the Nazlu river, but were pushed back to the town border of Urmia. The rumor immediately spread that the Urmia Division had suffered great losses in the south and that Turkish troops were directly in front of the town. An inconceivable panic broke out among the Christians. It did not matter that Missionary Shedd denied the rumor. The entire Christian population, 70,000 Assyrians and 10,000 Armenians, decided to leave Urmia for the south, in order to seek protection with the English. They had a completely unrealistic picture of how strong the English troops were.

It was July 31 when this mass flight began. The only foreigner to accompany them was the loyal Rev. Dr. William A. Shedd. He decided to accompany the refugee trek with his wife and to act as a doctor for the sick and wounded.

This was an exodus with biblical overtones. Dr. Shedd rode at the back with the rearguard, a patrol on horseback, which attempted to protect the caravan. He worked day and night attending to the wounded, extracting bullets and dressing wounds. Turkish troops followed the fleeing people; entire groups were cut off from the main group; thousands fell victim to the Kurds, men were killed, women and children carried off.

The Urmia Assyrians suffered the most, as the tribes were better able to protect their people and their property. This trek must be imagined as consisting not only of people, but also cattle and movable property. The individual groups of the trek, organized according to villages, tribes, clans and families, often lost their connections with each other. There were often raids and massacres. A total of 20,000 people perished. Shedd himself died of

cholera fever en route, on the third day after leaving Urmia, when the advance troops could already see Sain Qalla in the twilight.

There was nothing the English wanted less than the abandonment of the town of Urmia. After meeting with Agha Petros, the English troop had headed south one day later. After they learned of the Christian flight from Urmia through an Assyrian courier from Agha Petros, the troops decided to turn around immediately and do everything in their power to protect the refugees.

On August 3 a major portion of the exodus—more than 50,000 refugees—reached Sain Qalla. The marauding Muslims under Madjid es-Sultaneh conducted several skirmishes against the English. Three days passed before all the refugees had made it to Sain Qalla. There's no question that the small, brave English force did its best to protect the refugees from the Turks and Kurds. But the question then arose: where should the rescued individuals go?

It was decided to direct the trek to Hamadan. They organized an armed escort to protect the refugees on their 19-day march. It can hardly be described how miserable the circumstances en route must have been. Only by stealing in the villages along their route were many able to save themselves from famine. Disease and epidemics broke out. An unknown number of dead people were left behind. The trek reached Hamadan on August 21, where those arriving were at least in physical safety and could receive minimal care. As famine was raging in Persia, the English military command decided to send the refugees on to Mesopotamia. Four voluntary battallions were formed, consisting of men still fit for action. They were actually supposed to return to Urmia, where 6,000 Assyrians left behind had met an unknown destiny, and prepare for the repatriation of the refugees. But when the Turkish capitulation became known in October 1918, the English decided to transport the refugees to Bakuba near Baghdad. Thus the best possibility to settle the Assyrians once again in their former homelands in Persia and Turkey even before the peace negotiations and border determinations of the following years did not come about.

Document No. 55

**An Appeal to the American People**

One year ago in compliance with resolutions passed by the Senate and by the House of Representatives, I appointed days upon which the people of the United States might make

such contributions as they felt disposed for the aid of the stricken Armenian and Syrian peoples.

American consuls and other American residents recently returned to Western Asia assure me that many thousands of lives were saved from starvation by the gifts of the American people last winter. They also bring full assurance of effective distribution of relief and report that the suffering and death from exposure and starvation will inevitably be very much greater this winter than last unless the survivors can be helped by further contributions from America.

Reports indicate that of orphans alone there are more than 400,000 besides women and other dependent children. The situation is so distressing as to make a special appeal to the sympathies of all.

Responding to an urgent request from the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, I am glad to call again upon the people of the United States to make such further contributions as they are disposed in their sympathy and generosity to make for the aid of these suffering peoples. Contributions may be made through the American Red Cross, Washington, D.C., or direct to the treasurer of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, Cleveland H. Dodge, One Madison Avenue, New York.

*Source: Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters, Ray Stannard Baker, ed., Vol. 5-7, New York 1927, p. 332*

Document No. 56

The murder of the Assyrian patriarch by the Kurd Simko Agha on March 16, 1918 in Kohin Shahir

*From Shlemon d-Malik Ismail's war diary*

Shortly thereafter, a tragic event occurred. Against the counsel of several Assyrian military leaders and close friends, the Patriarch decided to take up the invitation to negotiate about an alliance between Assyrians and Kurds. Russian and English interests also played a role in the decision. Beforehand, the Assyrian central council (Mutva) was called together and the meeting was agreed upon. The Assyrians' deliberations were justified, as only through an alliance with the tribal Kurds living in the Turkish-Persian area was there a possibility to successfully defend themselves against the Turks and Persians and return to the old living areas. It was March 16, 1918. Pre-Easter Lenten had begun for the Assyrians. The paths to Kohin Shahir, where the meeting was to take place, were covered with snow.

There were many who advised the Patriarch not to make this journey. If such a meeting were necessary, then Simko Agha himself should come and see the Patriarch. Two British military agents, Captain Gracey and Lieutenant McDowell, and the Russian colonel Kondratov and four other officers guaranteed the Patriarch's personal safety. In addition, 150 armed Assyrian horsemen led by General David escorted the delegation.

The Patriarch was politely received in Kohin Shahir by Simko Agha and his people. Kurd soldiers also stood in the residence courtyard, standing in two rows and armed as if for a military parade. When welcomed, the Patriarch said ironically: "I'm glad to see that your soldiers are so well ordered, the first row equipped with Russian weapons, the second with Turkish." He then entered the entrance hall, accompanied by General David, Shmuel Khan and the Russian Cossack officers, while his armed escort on horseback waited for him in the courtyard without dismounting.

The discussion lasted unusually long, so that Daniel, one of Malek Ismael's sons, wanted to go into the house and see what was going on. But the reception hall was full of Kurds sitting on the floor, legs crossed, weapons in their arms. On the right he saw the Patriarch seated with the Russian officers, and on the left he saw Simko Agha and his people. A servant brought tea three times, but each time placed the glasses only in front of the Kurds, and not the Russians. Daniel d-Malek Ismael got angry about this breach of hospitality. He questioned the servant: "Why aren't you bringing any tea for the Russians?" Another Kurd sitting close by answered instead of the servant: "Let the Russians drink blindness," which was a bad insult. Another Kurd spoke harshly to him, saying: "Be quiet, you fool! That's an Assyrian."

The discussion between Simko Agha and the Patriarch went as follows: Schmucl Khan was to be interpreter between the two parties. Simko said to him: "Tell the Mar Shimun Effendi that I have heard that he speaks our Kurdish language very well. So we don't need any interpreter." To that Mar Shimun answered: "It is true, Agha, I did speak your language very well; however, since I've been away from this place (Kochanes), I have not kept it up. For that reason, it is a little difficult for me to speak Kurdish." Simko answered: "Inshallah, after our alliance you will speak this language as well as you did before."

The discussion lasted for more than an hour. Simko then accompanied the Patriarch to the door, bid him adieu, and returned to the house. Mar Shimun went with his companions to the mounted Assyrians and gave the sign for departure. When he was trying to climb into his wagon, a shot aimed from a window instantly killed the coachman. This was apparently an arranged sign for the Kurds in the courtyard and the gunners positioned on the roof: they

immediately began to shoot. To take cover, the Patriarch jumped to to the other side of the wagon. His bodyguard Daniel d-Malek Ismael fell from his horse, which was shot out from under him, and also lost his weapon. However, he quickly took hold of a fallen Assyrian rider's weapon, while the Patriarch tried to find protection on the other side of the stream with a few loyal followers from his group. Daniel hurried towards them. At this moment, the Patriarch was shot dead.

Daniel believed that the Patriarch was only wounded, and dragged him with great effort out of the battle zone through the Kurds' clattering hail of bullets. When he found that the Patriarch had been killed, he hid the corpse and fought his way through. Encountering a small troop of twenty Assyrian horsemen on his way to Khosrabad, he ordered them to collect the Patriarch's corpse, and returned with them himself to the site. They arrived in darkness, just as people were trying to steal the clothes from the dead body in the darkness. They shot at the people, driving them away. In the night they moved the corpse to Khosrabad, where they were already informed about what had happened in Kohin Shahir. The Russian colonel Kondratov, who had been shot at, had ridden very quickly to try to get military assistance, and had reached Khosrabad within a few hours.

The assassination of Patriarch Mar Shimun took place on March 16, 1918. With this, the Assyrians lost not only their spiritual leader, but their military commander in chief and the representative for their national and political claims.

On March 17, a Sunday, twelve riders took the letter of mourning from the Patriarch's sister, Surman Khanim, to the Assyrian maleks. A general meeting was called in which the high spiritual leaders also took part. The Metropolitan of Rustaqa and Jamsdinan and Bishop of Jilu, Mar Sargis, as well as Malek Ismael from Upper Tiari, the highest-ranking tribal leader of the mountain Assyrians, Khoshaba Yosip from Lower Tiari, and all the other tribal leaders, gathered in Urmia. It was decided to wage a campaign of retribution in order to revenge this unheard-of evil Kurd deed. Each malek then returned to his tribe to organize his warriors according to the joint plan. Until this point, General David, the Patriarch's brother, had not been seen, and was believed among the casualties. The news transmitted by a secret messenger, an Armenian, met with great relief: "I, David, am with five soldiers in the Armenian church of Salamas. Send me military assistance immediately."

Kondratov and two Assyrian officers, Malek Jamsdinan from Lower Tiari and Malek Oshana from Tkhuma then led a strong force to carry out the plan decided on in Urmia. Only one day had passed since Simko Agha's treacherous assault. As early as Sunday noon, the Assyrians shot at Kohin Shahir with cannons, attacking the town from two sides. In the

afternoon they took over two town districts and liberated General David and his people from their hiding place. Only then could the Assyrian victims of the attack be gathered and brought to safety.

What then took place between the Kurds and Assyrians was a local war. Simko Agha attacked the two Christian villages Patawor and Malham on March 18, but was fended off by an Armenian-Assyrian force under the leadership of the Armenian Gabriel. After a battle which lasted from 7 in the morning until noon, the Kurds fled, barricading themselves into the Chara fortress.

The burial of the murdered Patriarch took place on March 19, 1918 in Khosrabad. With great sorrow by the Christian population and with military honors, he was buried in the Armenian church of Saint George, in which a few days later, on March 24, his brother Polos was ordained the new patriarch by Bishof Mar Elia. After the ceremonies of burial and enthronement, the Assyrians took up their campaign of retribution against Simko Agha. There were intense battles, from which they emerged victorious; they were temporarily able to take the entire region. Simko rescued himself by fleeing.

*Source: Yaqob d-Malik Ismail (Ed.), Die Assyrer und die beiden Weltkriege 1914-1945. Kriegstagebuch seines Bruders Schlemon d-Malik Ismail [The Assyrians and the two World Wars 1914-1945: War Diary of His Brother Shlemon d-Malik Ismail]. Teheran 1964 (translated from the New Syrian); q.v. Rudolf Macuch, op.cit. 367 ff.*

Document No. 57

Notice from the 3rd office of the French army general staff in Urmia (secret)—Situation in Urmia

*Paris, April 2, 1918*

*(A.M.G., 4 N 62)*

After the 66th Russian division retreated, Armenian and Assyrians were sent to the most important points to protect the abandoned war apparatus.

The Assyrian National Committee in the Caucasus has, as per the agreement, provided a complete division, consisting of four regiments of three battalions: three Assyrian and one Armenian regiment. The commander in chief is General Poltavtsev, commander of the 66th Division. At the present time there are only four battalions (three Assyrian and an Armenian) under Lieutenant Gasfield, who was temporarily given this position. The most feared enemies of both the Assyrians and the Armenians in the Caucasus are the Kurds. In Urmia,

they form two main groups: one between Van and the Lake of Urmia, the other south of the Lake of Urmia.

An alliance between the two peoples would actually be a great help to both, but there is an insuperable enmity between them which the Russian command never attempted to appease. Expecting the arrival of the English officers, the French and American missions have done everything possible to prepare at least an agreement, if not a reconciliation. On Lieutenant Chardigny's initiative, a meeting took place between the Kurd leader Kamil and the president of the Armenian Committee, Aharaonian, from January 15 to 28, in which an agreement was reached on the concerns of the two groups and an alliance concluded between the Kurd and Armenian peoples.

With this agreement, the Armenians' and Kurds confirmed their common interest in challenging the dominance of the Young Turks. Their place would be alongside the Allies. Aharonian did not demand that the Kurds fight against the Turks, but only that they not disturb the Armenians' military organization.

Kamil Bey declared that the Kurds must come to an agreement with their Armenian neighbors as soon as possible and support them in their fight on the Russian front. This agreement complete, both leaders decided that the news should immediately be spread among their people. Kamil Bey proposed to begin his propaganda in the Kurd region of Dersim, bordering on Erzindjan, the most endangered area. Then the area south of the Ararat (Bajazit) should follow.

*Source: Arthur Beylerian (Ed.), Les Grands Puissances L'Empire Ottoman et les Arméniens dans les Archives Françaises (1914-1918), pp. 538-539, Document No. 571*

Document No. 58

Maurice Saugon, French consul in Tabriz, to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Stephan Pichon  
*Tabriz, May 14, 1918 (telegram)*

The situation here continues to be uncertain, about 1,000 Turks in the Tabriz region; some troops in Sauchbulak, Ushnu and Solduz; individual officers visiting important centers. Claiming only to want to fight the Chaldeans [Assyrians, *Editor's Note*] from the Urmia region. In reality they seem to be pursuing a double objective, first occupying the region north and east of the Lake of Urmia, then, together with a democratic faction, wanting to create an independent Muslim state under Turkish suzerainty, covering the Azerbaijan part of the South Caucasus and a portion of Armenia. The Persian government and the

population fear this possibility, but the government is powerless against the democratic terrorists. Total anarchy rules: the English consul (Mr. Bristow) and the Russian consul (Mr. Stolitsa) evacuated parts of their colonies. I myself sent nine nuns and one priest to Teheran.

Only an English advance on Ravanduz could avert the Turkish menace and save the 50,000 indigenous Christians. The Caucasus road is blocked; our ambulance left Tabriz on Thursday for Qazvin, Hamadan, Baghdan after many conflicts with the democrats.

The Azerbaijan government has decided to conclude peace with the Chaldeans (= Assyrians, *Editor's Note*) in Urmia in order not to give the Turks any pretense to intervene. (*A.M.A.E., E-Asie 1918-1929, Persien, Vol. 23, p. 56*)

*Source: A. Beylerian, op.cit., No. 615, p. 590*

#### Document No. 59

His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury

(...) It is sometimes said that it was not this country but Russia that invited the Assyrians to throw in their lot with the allied cause. That may be true, but what we have to remember is that it was because they had taken this risk, because they made themselves our comrades in the common cause, that they have suffered most of their recent calamities.

*Source: Parliamentary Debates. House of Lords. November 28th, 1933, Vol. 90, No. 4, pp. 127-128*

The Earl of Listowel

(...) I should like to stress even more strongly than the most Rev. Primate the moral responsibility of the British Government for the welfare of the Assyrian people now scattered about Iraq. Both the preceding speakers have mentioned that the Assyrians fought on our side during the war, but I think neither of them have pointed out the enormous sacrifice that this small and great people made at that time ... [T]hey lost altogether by the end of the War about two-thirds of their total number.

*Source: Parliamentary Debates. House of Lords. November 28th, 1933, Vol. 90, No. 4, p. 142*

Sir Percy Cox, High Commissioner for Iraq until 1924

The Assyrians, who numbered about 35,000, were the more important element for they had been recognised as Allies by Great Britain in the War. (...) A definite promise of settlement under a benevolent, if not a British government, had been made to them, and their land, if not within our administered area, was at least on the immediate frontier.

*Source: Official report on Iraq Administration, October, 1920 - March, 1922, p. 102*

Colonel J. J. McCarthy, head of the British Military Mission in Persia

I have sent a copy of a memorandum I have written on the Assyrian question from the time your people joined forces with us against the Turks in 1918 up till six months after the Armistice was signed. I have made a strong point of the fact that your people were definitely promised by me (acting under orders from headquarters, of course) that they would have their country restored to them, and that my orders and only reason for raising the Assyrian contingent in Hamadan in 1918 was to drive the Turk out and reoccupy the country.

I do hope the Foreign Office will do something and do it now and before it is too late. No good can come out of delaying matters and the British government should face the position and do the right thing. It is all very difficult I know, but surely not impossible. After all, England is a big nation and we did, I suppose, win the war? However, we did not lose it, and if we had, there would have been a different story to tell.

It is clearly our duty to fulfil promises made to people who stood by us when we were in urgent need of all the help forthcoming.

We did not have too many staunch and loyal friends in the East in 1918. Few people realise what your unfortunate people suffered and are still suffering in return for their loyalty to England. I will do my best to make known the terrible hardships they suffered under my own eyes. Never shall I forget that retreat from Urmia when I met the panic stricken people on Bidjar Road and never do I want to see anything like it again.

*Source: [Yusuf Malek] The Assyrian Tragedy. Annemasse 1934*

Rev. Dr. W. A. Wigram, former head of the Assyrian Mission of the Archbishop of Canterbury in Persia

The difference between the Armenian and the Assyrian massacres lies in the fact that in the case of the first every possible step was taken to denounce it, whilst in the second every imaginable precaution has and is being taken to confine, in vain, its sad news to the areas still stained with Assyrian blood.

History is unbiased and it devolves upon it to record this unparalleled tragedy which has resulted in the destruction of the majority of one of the oldest Christian peoples.

*Source: W. A. Wigram, Royal Central Asian Journal. Vol. XXI, January 1934, Part I, p. 41*

Sir Henry Dobbs, High Commissioner in Iraq 1924

No nationals of any of the belligerent countries escaped the horrors of the world conflict of 1914-1918, but no nation lost exactly two thirds of its numbers as did the Assyrian nation. And while admittedly the 11th of November 1918 was celebrated to mark the end of human troubles and open a new page in the history of civilization, the Assyrian horizon was permitted to remain cloudy.

*Source: Letters of Gertrude Bell, Vol. II, London 1927 p. 551*

Document No. 60

Paul Caujole, former head doctor of the French Ambulance of the Caucasus 1917-1918  
Boulogne-sur-Seine, January 19, 1934

The Conference was held in Urmia in December 1917 or early in January 1918.

I was invited to the Conference in question and took part in it as did Mr. Nikitine, the Russian Vice-Consul in Urmia.

Captain Gracey, who was acting under the orders of the Intelligence Service, came specially for the purpose from Van, his headquarters, to encourage the Assyrians to organize their resistance to the Turks.

In the name of England, he undertook to furnish immediately funds necessary for the payment of the troops and non-commissioned officers. For the future he promised the proclamation of the Independence of the Assyrian people.

Basil Nikitine, former Consul of Russia at Urmia, Persia  
Paris, March 15, 1922

At the request of General Agha Petros, President of the Executive Committee of the Assyro-Chaldean National Council, I certify that Captain Gracey, committed for Armenia and Kurdistan, attached to the Military British Mission of the General Staff of the army of the Caucasus, came from Van at the end of the year 1917 to Urmia, assembled a special meeting there of the Assyrian and foreign representatives and invited the Assyrian people to

take up arms, solemnly promising them the financial and political assistance of his Government during the war as well as at the final settlement of peace.

Requested by Captain Gracey, I supported him in my quality of Consul of Russia and with the foreign representatives I declared that if the Assyrians took up arms against the Turks it would be taken into consideration after the war in order to procure for them the independence which they so rightly deserved.

Brig. General H. H. Austin, C.M.G., C.B. - Commander of the Assyrian Refugee Camp Baquba, Mesopotamia 1918-1919

I feel that but few in England realise to what extent the small and obscure "Our smallest ally"—the Assyrian Nation—helped to shoulder our burdens in the Middle East, by resisting the Turko-German aggression along the Turko-Persian frontier, in fourteen distinct engagements. From March to July 1918, they defeated every Moslem force that was brought against them. I think that all unbiased readers will admit that "Our smallest ally" deserves well of the Entente Nations for throwing in her lot with them, and thus sacrificing her little all in the cause of freedom.

*Source: Malek Yusuf, The British Betrayal of the Assyrians, Chicago 1935 s.a. The Assyrian Tragedy, Annemasse 1934, pp. 14-16*

### **The League of Nations, a Society of “Honorable”?**

When the victorious powers met in Paris in 1919 to divide anew those empires and states which were broken apart during the World War, the most important issue was the interests of the great powers England and France. Russia was no longer among them due to the Revolution, but America stepped onto the scene, particularly as a human rights defender and spokesman for all peoples' right to self-determination. American president Woodrow Wilson's proclamation allowed the small stateless ethnic groups to hope that their national dreams and desires would be fulfilled.

Among the millions of refugees made homeless by this war, there were hundreds of thousands of Assyrians expelled from the former Ottoman empire areas of Taurus, Tur Abdin, the Bohtan and Hakkari regions, as well as villages from the northwest Persian high plateau near the Lake of Urmia. Living in miserable conditions under which many met their deaths, they experienced in Russia the confusions of the revolution and the subsequent terrible years of hunger housed in gigantic refugee tent camps on the edge of the Mesopotamian desert and settled in the desolate steppes of the Jazire of Syria. The Assyrians hoped even more intensely that their wishes would be fulfilled to return to their home areas, as they had fought actively on the Russian and British side as their “smallest ally” and had shed streams of blood.

In exile and in the refugee camps they discussed their demands, worked on petitions and memorandas to be presented in Paris, and prepared documentation on their suffering during the war. These were published in Europe and America. Their demands were far-ranging: an autonomous region and reparation from the Turks were the maximal claims. Other groups demanded a return to their homelands and guarantees of religious, cultural, even national freedom.

The Assyrian delegations from America, Russia, Persia and Mesopotamia were not admitted to participate directly in the talks. England and France promised to speak for Assyrian interests. During the peace negotiations, the Assyrian question became an issue in the international press, but the Treaty of Sèvres which finally ensued (though never ratified) did not include a single Assyrian demand. They were merely granted the status of a religious group, a relic from the caliph times.

After 1920 there were a number of conferences to revise the peace treaty in Paris (1921), London (1922), Lausanne (1923), Constantinople (1924). In the end, nothing came of the Assyrian question, despite meetings and special meetings of the League of Nations and

Border Investigation Committees. Earlier, the issue had been placed on political agendas by eminent English politicians like Lord Curzon, Sir Rumbold, Percy Cox and others. But in the course of these talks in European cities, the Turkish officer and later founder of the state Kemal Atatürk established a new situation, using a strong hand and a powerful army. The loser dictated the treaty conditions to the winners, and the Assyrian question was no longer mentioned.

The Turks once again expelled all the Assyrians who had returned to their villages in 1922-23. The British, whose area of mandate bordered this area and who had previously bid the Assyrians to return, did not move a finger. The investigation committee sent out thereafter came to the conclusion that the Assyrians had no right of settlement north of the English border of mandate in Iraq. At the end of 1925 this border was laid down in a treaty by the League of Nations. The Assyrians forever lost part of their homelands. The charade of conferences and treaties ended by Turkey concluding a treaty with England in which both parties recognized this border. As a "reward," the Turks received 10 % of their oil revenues for the next 25 years in the area of the former Ottoman Empire, then under English mandate, later Iraq.

The Assyrians were not told about this final result of the English mandate policy. The Assyrians from Persia were allowed to return after 1923; another portion lived in the French areas of mandate in Syria and Lebanon, and many emigrated to America. The refugees from Hakkari remained in Iraq to be used by the British as auxiliary troops against rebelling Arabs and Kurds. The settlement attempts by the British, however, were not successful.

Everything which happened between 1920 and 1930 in Mesopotamia, later the state of Iraq, can be considered England's political responsibility. They relegated the "dirty work" of keeping the Arabs and Kurds under military control to the Assyrians as long as this seemed useful to them. In return, they promised to expend "untiring effort" on finding a solution for the Assyrians at the League of Nations.

When England decided to end its mandate in 1930, the Assyrians knew that the bell was ringing. They protested and refused military obedience, but it was already too late. Their petitions to the League of Nations (1930-1932) were not discussed. Iraq was given its independence and in 1932 it became a new member of the League. In August 1933, the new Arab state sealed its inclusion in the "Society of Honorables" with a cruel massacre of the Assyrian civilian population in Dohuk and Semele. While the Iraqi (Kurdish) general Bekr Sidqi was being celebrated by the population in the streets of Baghdad, a diplomatic postlude was taking place before the League. England and France each blamed the other

for the massacre. Finally, the English representative Sir Humphrey declared the Assyrians themselves responsible for it. All that remained for them was once again a refugee camp and finally exodus. Tens of thousands of Assyrians left Iraq in 1937 to settle in Syria under french protection.

The well-known Spanish historian, diplomat and politician Salvador de Madariaga wrote one generation later:

*“After months and years of efforts based on a strange mixture of good will, wisdom, clever combinations, of charity and national development and who knows what else, the Assyrian question got lost in the desert—in part in Iraq, in part in Syria and in part in the League of Nations files.” (Salvador de Madariaga (1886-1978); Morgen ohne Mittag [Morning without Noon], Berlin 1972)*

## **HISTORIA EST MAGISTRA VITAE (Cicero)**

EPILOGUE by Rudolf Macuch

Gabriele Yonan has long been known to the Assyrians and to those interested in this Christian nation's survival, decimated as it has been by cruel bloodletting and now scattered throughout the world.

Her first book "Assyrer heute - Kultur, Sprache, Nationalbewegung der aramäisch sprechenden Christen im Nahen Osten" Hamburg - Wien 1978 [The Assyrians today - Culture, Language and National Movement of Aramaic-speaking Christians in the Near East], is a comprehensive introduction to this people's problems, past and present. Although persecuted and forced to leave their homes, they struggled for their existence and their national-religious identity with all their might.

Yonan's second work is equally valuable: "Journalismus bei den Assyryern - Ein Überblick von seinen Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart" [Journalism among the Assyrians - A Survey from the Beginnings to the Present] (Gilgamesh Series, Berlin 1985). With its well-documented description of 135 Assyrian periodicals, it supplements my "Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur" [History of Late and New Syriac Literature, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 1976) in an important way.

In the present volume, the author documents indigenous and western eyewitness reports about the systematic attempts by the Assyrians' Muslim (Turkish and Kurdish) neighbors to exterminate this valiant people. They fought heroically but in vain for freedom and autonomy. One seldom hears about this sad chapter of the First World War, known as the "Assyrian tragedy." Even at the time the German public was misinformed by diplomats, military advisers and even specialists on the Middle East and Islamic studies, who silently

approved of or glossed over this genocide. When the author writes of the shared responsibility of the Germans, she does not mean the entire German people, but rather its representatives at the time, for whom it was easier to leave their countrymen in the dark than to take action against serious violations of human rights.

The term “genocide” has become part of our modern-day vocabulary. And some readers may ask why we are looking into a “forgotten” genocide when today we are confronted with human rights abuses on a similar scale. However, if we forget the unforgettable, we will be facing similar or worse evils in the future. Cicero's statement “*historia est magistra vitae*” (history teaches about life) may well be correct in principle, but humanity has only rarely learned from history. As Yonan's book demonstrates, history is often falsified or all too quickly forgotten.

There were times in which religions, both Christianity and Islam, were disseminated and defended by force of arms. Today however, such behaviour is anachronistic, even for Islam. The Koran itself shows an admirable respect for Christianity. After the Islamic conquest it was the duty of Muslims to protect the Christians, and Islam's Golden Epoch, the Abbasid era, renders medieval Christian intolerance of the same time quite embarrassing in some respects. Jewish and Christian scholars enjoyed a great reputation as with the Nestorian Hunain ibn Ishaq (809-876), the greatest translator of Greek scientific literature into Syriac and Arabic. This period of cultural co-existence came to an end after the Mongols.

The Turkish Ottoman government's attempt to exterminate the Christians in their empire was a crime against humanity which can not be justified by Islamic principle.

Yonan's “The Forgotten Holocaust,” in addition to its documentary value provides a timely warning about consequences growing out of false religious or fascist ideologies. The lack of concern by German diplomats, military advisers, and Middle Eastern specialists contributed to the murder of millions of Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Later, Hitler's fascism met with similar disinterest; the annihilation of millions of people could then no longer be effectively countered.

History itself, has been manipulated far too often. This can be concluded from Yonan's documentation. May this book open the readers' eyes and keep them from silently accepting similar catastrophes in the future.

Rudolf Macuch (1989)



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