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## **The First Kurdish Periodical In Iran Dr. Eden Naby**

### Introduction

As the field of Kurdish studies moves beyond contemporary political analysis and opinion, greater attention, some scholarly and some speculative, has been focusing on Kurdish cultural history. This article deals with one aspect of that history: the genesis of the Kurdish periodical press. It grows out of several years of research on Assyrian periodicals with the goal of retrieving and preserving the four Assyrian language newspapers published in Urmia (Rizaiyeh), Iran.

This periodical press appeared in the Assyrian Neo-Aramaic language standardized to a great extent under American missionary tutelage. By 1918, when the Assyrians and Armenians (the smaller Christian group in what is now West Azarbaijan) had been forced to flee the region, or die, the newspapers had ended. Even the printing press had disappeared. Publication of Assyrian language periodicals did not resume in Iran until the 1950s in Teheran, but never again in Urmia. By that time, Assyrian villages had been largely emptied and most of the rich agricultural areas had come under Kurdish or Turkish occupation.

The presence of a relatively sophisticated Assyrian periodical press in Urmia was impressive enough to prompt a comparative look at other language periodicals in that locale: Turkish, Armenian, Persian and to my surprise--Kurdish. Thus began a journey on Internet catalogues, in secondary sources, and then at four U.S. research libraries for information about the Kurdish press in Iran. Thanks to correspondence with Lokman I. Meho, I have mined readily available public research sources in the U.S. The research does not plumb the origins of the Kurdish press in Iran. The task of locating all of the three periodicals to which reference is made in printed sources, perhaps reliably, is for the future. In this article I report on what is known about the first Kurdish periodicals in Iran and resolve the confusion that surrounds one periodical that lasted from 1910 to 1928.

First I trace the outlines of the cultural setting in Urmia and Soujbulak (the Turkish name, meaning "cold water spring," for the current Mahabad) with special attention to the introduction of literacy and the press. The political backdrop to the cultural situation must force enter into the picture, although my primary focus is neither to elucidate the relationship between Kurds and Assyrians, nor to examine Kurdish-Iranian political relations. While leaving aside such fiery political topics, I hope to bring to light useful information that allows the recovery of data related to both of these widely debated political topics.

Urmia at the start of the 20th century had become a hub of western-inspired development owing to a decision taken some seventy-five years earlier in Boston, Massachusetts. Following a journey to northwest Iran by representatives of the Boston-based American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in 1829, within a year of the subsiding of Russo-Persian wars over the Transcaucasus, the ABCFM took the fateful decision to establish a mission to the local Christians centered in and around Urmia. Already Salamas, the other urban center of Assyrian residence, had a solid Roman Catholic presence supported, as the Catholic presence in the Middle East had been, by French diplomatic interests.

### Protestant Missions In Iran

The ABCFM decision to minister to the indigenous Christians included two critical corollary decisions: to concentrate on the Assyrians--belonging to the Holy Apostolic and Catholic Church of the East (Nestorian)--and to make Assyrian neo-Aramaic the language of interchange with the local Christians. In hindsight, later Christian converts from Iran have faulted the ABCFM for focusing on this minority language. Indeed, by 1915, the Presbyterians who replaced the ABCFM in 1871 took the decision to switch the missionary work to Persian instead, particularly in light of the extension of their presence to Persian dominant places like Rasht, Tehran and Meshed and the small but growing band of multi-ethnic non-Assyrian converts. Nonetheless the first American missionary work in Iran began not only among one of the most persecuted minorities of the country, but also in a language that had declined to its lowest historic point. Aramaic, the oldest continuously spoken and written language of the Middle East, had atrophied under persistent political pressure that had driven its users into remote mountains or subjected them to lowly rayat status at the mercy of Muslim tribes, landowners and government officials. The decision by the ABCFM provided the impetus and circumstance for the revival of Aramaic for at least another century.

By 1835 the Reverend Justin Perkins (1805-1865) had established a school for boys, soon followed by a press establishment (1840), a girl's school (1843), and a newspaper (1849). Rays of Light (Zahrira d-bahra) was the first newspaper in Iran in any language. (1) It appeared monthly, and more often, until 1918, when the Christians had either died or had succeeded in fleeing the area. Perkins' interest in Iran, however, was not confined to Assyrians (or Nestorians, as he called them). As his twelve remaining watercolor drawings dramatically illustrate, he observed with similar interest Kurds, Turks, Persians and others who made up the spectrum of ethnic groups in Urmia and in the present-day West Azarbaijan region. (2)

Well established at the turn of the 20th century, the American presence in Urmia appeared solid. Over 150 satellite village schools functioned under the leadership of men and women graduates of Urmia boarding schools, and literacy among Assyrian men and women had reached perhaps as high as 40%. It is useful to recall that, at that time, in all of Iran, estimates of literacy among men ran to 20% and for women about 7%. In outlying tribal areas, literacy figures for both Assyrians and Kurds might

not have exceeded 5%, even for men, and would have been negligible for women.

Perhaps it was the success of the Presbyterian Mission together with the growing presence of immigrant and established Lutheran communities in the United States and Canada that prompted ventures into northern Iran by the Lutheran Orient Mission. Those who ventured forth were primarily from Germany, Sweden and Norway. Not only did these nationalities swell the ranks of Lutherans in North America, they dedicated themselves to the Kurds. (3)

Direct impetus to minister to the Kurds of Iran came in the aftermath of a decisive World Mission Conference convened in Edinburgh in 1910. With this widely attended and influential meeting, the Kurdish region opened to the Lutherans. And American missionaries jumped at the opening.

#### The Lutheran Orient Mission And The Kurds

Inspired by the wave of mission work sweeping both Europe and English-speaking countries, German Lutheran missionaries had established a mission intended for the Kurds in 1895 but were diverted by the massacre of Christians that took place then under Sultan Abdul Hamid in Ottoman areas. Instead they turned their energies toward Christian relief work among Armenians and Assyrians. Begun in 1875, their small mission to Iran had trained ten pastors, all from among the Assyrians, and established two churches in the area by the early 20th century. Their missionary in Urmia was L.O. Fossum, PhD (1879-1920), a Norwegian-American recognized by Kurdish and Western historians as a leading contributor to the study of Kurdish. (4) Having lived in Urmia from 1904 to 1909, he knew Syriac and Turkish, but was to learn Kurdish in Soujbulak (the future Mahabad). Germans had preceded him in 1905, and he was soon followed or joined by other American, Swedish, French and other European Lutherans. The main sponsoring organization in the United States was the Lutheran Orient Mission based in the mid-west. The Mission laid out its operating principles very clearly, but two elements are critical to the structure of this first mission to the Kurds:

1. The members of this mission were multinational, unlike the American Presbyterian Mission, which included only persons of US citizenship
  2. The Lutheran Orient Mission concentrated on the Kurds, although some Assyrians were also drawn to this denomination.
- (5)

After a furlough in the US, where he traveled to many churches to raise funds, Rev. Fossum entered Soujbulak in 1911. The only name used by the missionaries, the town of Soujbulak lies south of Urmia, at the tip of the Lake, and some 300 km south of Tabriz. In times of trouble--as in 1916 and again in 1921--this proximity to Tabriz provided security for the Lutheran missionaries. In traveling to and from Europe, or in collecting shipments, they traveled through Tabriz. But for other needs, such as printing, or in case of serious illness, they used the Presbyterian facilities in Urmia, especially Westminster hospital, the first in Iran.

At the outset, among the principles laid down for the organizing of the Lutheran Orient Mission was the emphasis on language learning. Additionally, the missionaries were advised to devote their first year to Kurdish language acquisition, through instruction from a native speaker, rather than through an Assyrian (always called Syrian by the American Presbyterians and Lutherans) or an Armenian. The diverse national backgrounds of the missionaries frequently meant that their safety could not be assured as the uncertainties of WWI approached. Dr. Edman, the first medical person attached to the Mission, a Swede, left the area upon the declaration of war in 1914. For American nationals, the presence of a Russian Consul in Soujbulak, Col. Alexander I. Iyas (1869-1914), a Finnish Lutheran, offered some security, until he was killed at the battle of Miandoab soon after the declaration of World War I. (6)

#### Catholic Mission Focus In The Middle East

It is useful to note that all of the missions have taken some interest in the Kurds over the years. As early as 1787, the Vatican had seen to the publication of what may be the first Western study of the Kurdish language. (7) The author was a missionary for two decades in Amadia, north of Mosul. (8) In the next century Rev. Samuel A. Rhea, an American member of the ABCFM mission to Urmia, had made the second published study (1856) of Kurdish, (9) while Peter Lerch (1857-58) conducted a study of the language with glossaries and sample stories, collected among prisoners of war being held in Roslavl (in Smolensk region, SW of Moscow). (10) L.O. Fossum, the first evangelist representing the Lutheran Orient Mission in Soujbulak, made extensive translations into Kurdish, as well as the grammar. By the 1920s, interest in the Kurds had heightened, especially in Iraq and even an Assyrian leader, Agha Petros Eliya, had published a work on Kurdish. (11)

Despite its early 18th century contact with the Kurds, the Catholic missions in the Middle East appear not to have taken further interest in them either in terms of literacy or medicine and apparently not in evangelizing. Whether in Urmia or Salamas, their concentration remained on the existing eastern Christians, mainly the speakers of Aramaic and to some extent, Armenian. The creation of the Chaldean Catholic Church in the 16th century, an eastern rite but Rome-affiliated Syriac liturgy church, represents the easternmost reach of the Catholic Church in the Middle East.

As was the case for the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians and the Methodists that followed the Catholics, fear of apostasy laws in Islam barred direct ministry to Muslim groups or individuals. (12) In missionary correspondence, the fear of apostasy laws took two roads: 1) fear of the death penalty that would be imposed on a convert away from Islam; 2) the punishment, under Islamic blasphemy laws, for anyone who undertook to convert Muslims to another religion. This is part of the reason given for concentrating on the indigenous Christians such as the Assyrians or Armenians and the Jews. The Protestant missionaries at least hoped that these natives would become the agents for conversion of the Muslims around them. That any foreign missionaries might be prosecuted openly for that offense against Shari'a law may well have been too remote a

possibility to be taken into consideration since westerners remained untouched by local laws until the turn of the 20th century. (13) The missionaries who were killed by Kurds met their death through non-legal murder whether in Iran or later in Mesopotamia. (14) This is the same pattern seen in the Islamic Republic of Iran, since 1979. To the convert from Islam on the other hand, legal punishment frequently follows. The first Kurd hanged in Urmia for the crime of apostasy met his death in the late 19th century. The first recorded Kurdish convert to Christianity is widely believed to have been converted by an Assyrian in Sanandaj in 1894. (15)

What prompted the Europeans or Americans to focus on the Kurds? Of several factors that clearly grew out of sincere but limited knowledge, two reasons stand out. First, the belief that Kurds, as chiefly Sunni Muslims, fell less under the sway of the Shi'ite clerics who remained such a force in Urmia, Tabriz and other centers. In support of this motivation, the Lutherans also turned to the conversion of Kurdish speaking Ali Ilahis around Kerman-shah during the 1920s. Second, with nearly a century of knowledge about the persecution of indigenous Christians by Kurdish Muslims, especially after the 1895-96 use of Kurdish Hamidiya units to cause such death and destruction in the eastern parts of the Ottoman empire, the hope was that by directly ministering to the Kurds, they would improve their attitudes toward Christians and thus end the periodic looting and slaughter.

Neither goal proved itself based on reality. In the one instance where missionaries appear to have effected mass conversions (among Yezidis of the Mosul area in 1888) Turkish/Kurdish troops arrived to force the converts not only to abandon Christianity, but also to embrace Islam. (16) Despite continued optimism, even within its short span of time in Soujbulak, the Lutheran Mission lost two male heads of mission to assassination, one in 1907 and another in 1921. They never believed that local Kurds committed these acts because they could not believe that their goodness to the local community would not be appreciated. Nowhere do they seem to consider these assassinations to rise from religious motive, even though the Lutherans lost more members to murder, proportionately, than the Presbyterians who lost two (1905, 1911), despite their far larger numbers in Urmia among Turks and Assyrians. It is not difficult to ascribe the Lutheran losses directly to their goal of evangelizing Kurdish Muslims. It is this antipathy toward Christians in general, and toward missionaries in particular, that may affect the understanding of the significant role that nearly three decades of missionary schools in Soujbulak played in the advancement of Kurdish culture (including the periodical press), education, and the prelude to forming the climate that supported the rise of the first actualization of Kurdish nationalism in the form of the Mahabad Republic (1944-46).

#### Missionary Goals And The Periodical Press

Integral to their evangelizing goal, the missionaries regarded the spreading of literacy necessary--not just the spoken word or the prayer recited by rote, but the written word as read by the convert himself. For this reason, whether among Assyrians or among Kurds, essential to their task was the commitment of the indigenous vernacular language to paper, the institution of schools, then printing and, if possible, a periodical press. Not just in Iran or the Middle East, but everywhere American, especially Protestant, missionaries ventured, they brought literacy, often the first application of any orthographic system to a vernacular language. Often in remote languages or dialects such as Kurmanji, and even Sorani, the first printing to be done was that of one or all the four gospels; i.e., the first four books of the New Testament of the Bible in which each of four disciples of Jesus provide a biography of his life and works. The American Bible Society had in fact specifically engaged an Assyrian professor at Columbia University, Abraham Yohannan (1853-1925), to help in the preparation of the first Syriac bible in 1893. Some of the earliest Kurdish Christian material grew out of the Lutheran presence in Soujbulak. Rev. Detwig von Oertzen published his translation of the second Gospel as Markus-evangelium mukri kurdische in 1909 (17), and Dr. Fossum published all four Gospels in 1919 as Injil Muqaddas, also in the Mukri dialect of Soujbulak.

In keeping with the goal of providing educational facilities, despite disruptions caused by insecurity for the members of the Lutheran Mission, they would establish schools, an orphanage, and engage in the equally desired medical work for which the Americans became so indispensable in Urmia and in all of Iran. (18) The Lutherans planned, and for some years succeeded in running medical services for the Kurds and other smaller ethnic groups in and around Soujbulak.

The composition of the Lutheran Mission in Soujbulak variously included physicians, at least one female nurse, and always, religious personnel. The longest serving of these pastors was Ludvig Olsen Fossum, who had come with his wife and infant daughter. Fossum's family went back to the United States, but his sister, a nurse, eventually joined the mission. All of the missionaries were subject to "fever," in all likelihood the malaria so prevalent in the region up to the 1950s. (19) In addition to the "Syriac," as the spoken Assyrian neo-Aramaic is called in the written documents, Fossum also learned local Kurdish well enough by 1912 to translate the Lord's Prayer as his first task. His translation of the Battle Hymn of the Reformation into Kurdish (3 verses), the first (and perhaps only) Kurdish translation of A Mighty Fortress is our God (Martin Luther), appeared on the occasion of the Quadricentennial of the Protestant Reformation. (20) Rev. Fossum fell ill and died while serving as a coordinator of Near East Relief in Yerevan, Armenia in 1920, all the while trying to return to Soujbulak after evacuating the town in February 1916.

During the War years, Fossum pleaded for relief aid for the Kurds and became very upset when his calls were ignored and American Christian publications solicited relief aid only for the Armenians and Assyrians. He wrote to the Lutheran Society in the United States, "The massacres and all the carnage of War that befell the Armenians, have also befallen the Kurds, only a little later." To reinforce his call for aid to Kurds, he quoted from a letter by Dr. Allen, a Presbyterian missionary from Urmia, who received permission from Russians holding military power in the area (from 1911 to 1917) to visit Soujbulak. Dr. Allen wrote, "I have been to Soujbulak, and seen the misery and distress of the Kurds.... Thousands are in rags and begging in the streets. All kinds of diseases are raging ..." Famine raged in part because of the fighting between Russian and Ottoman forces with Kurds allied mainly to the Ottomans. A drought had destroyed the wheat harvest, but other food supplies, though adequate, were subject to the disruption of village life and insecurity on the roads. Dr. Allen confirmed that of the 40,000 Kurds in town, 75 % were old women, young widows and orphans, and the other 25% old men and cripples. (21) The population of the town had been estimated at 10,000 to 15,000 in 1910 but had swelled with refugees from the countryside, including from the Armenian

villages.

The Near East Relief, originally aimed directly at Armenians and "Syrians," turned later to location relief; that is, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia. (22)

#### The Earliest Publishing In Kurdish In Iran

Publishing in any language requires two elements: a reading audience and a means of printing. This is particularly true of periodicals that, more than books, tended to carry news in the early 20th century. Whether periodicals or books, the literate would read aloud to the illiterate or semi-literate, as well as to those who did not own books or subscribe to periodicals. (23) The Assyrian press of the period brought news from around Iran, especially from Tabriz and Tehran, various parts of the world, and local information about the community. In the case of the Kurdish periodical press, it is important to keep in mind the historical setting in order to get a clear picture of how three Kurdish language publications are listed as having appeared, but only one can be found--as yet.

First however, it is necessary to unravel the confusion surrounding the Lutheran Orient Mission publication called The Kurdistan Missionary (TKM henceforth). This publication is not to be confused with Kurdish language publications from northwest Iran. TKM was a publication in the United States, emanating sequentially from Chicago, Detroit, Mansfield (Ohio), Minneapolis (MN), and Columbus (Ohio). It appeared monthly between 1910 and 1928, in English. This is the first periodical in any non-Middle Eastern language to carry the word "Kurdistan" in its title. For this reason alone, it merits attention. But additionally, TKM, like missionary travelogues, helped acquaint Europeans and Americans with who the Kurds were. (24) This, in the longer run, may well be its chief contribution to the start of Kurdish sympathy and knowledge in Europe and the United States.

From 1917 the publication was edited by Mons Olson Wee (1871-1942). Wee, a Norwegian professor at one of the St. Paul Lutheran Colleges, was a strong advocate of Haugeanism, the socio-political revival movement that took root in 18<sup>th</sup> century Norway. He and N. H. Lohre, the president of the Lutheran Orient Mission, became strong advocates for Kurdish relief in the face of continued American reluctance to recognize a Muslim humanitarian need, especially when the Kurds were associated with a substantial portion of the attacks on local Christians. (25)

TKM helped to drum up support for the work of the mission to the Kurds, largely by urging sponsorship of a particular missionary by a congregation that would raise the money to cover his or her expenses. For example, Miss Augusta Gudhart, a registered nurse of German descent from Poland, was consecrated at the Philadelphia church that sponsored her travel and upkeep. At the same time, the congregation took up an offering to help the Kurds in Soujbulak. (26) Similarly, the Lutheran Orient Mission agreed to make a loan to the church sponsors of Rev & Mrs. George Bachimont (from Alcase), located in Hermannsburg (Germany). This active Lutheran community supported both Kurdish and Assyrian missions but could not meet expenses in 1920 "due to what war did to the mark." Through this first American publication dedicated to Kurds, missionaries in the field could disseminate their information about progress in their evangelizing efforts to the Kurds, in the manner of missionaries of the day to various parts of the world. Missionaries of that era acted much like a combination of current non-governmental agencies and journalists. Often theirs were the only eyes and ears in remote parts of the Middle East, China, India and Africa informing the American middle and upper class of events in far off places. Since general Christian periodicals, the Christian Herald for example, enjoyed wide distribution in the United States during the first half of the 20th century, rivaling secular publications, attention to Kurds in this sector of the press helped to make them favorably known. Moreover, national leaders such as John Raleigh Mott (1865-1955), winner of the Nobel Peace Prize (1946), played a key role in the interface between Western governments and missionary endeavors, including those in the Near East. For this reason, he was featured prominently in TKM. In fact he may well have made popular the estimated number of Kurds worldwide, 3,500,000.

TKM circulation included colleges, churches and individuals. It supported itself through subscriptions. The monthly issues kept to a regular schedule and, when news of Kurdistan grew thin, the editor supplemented contents with articles on Islam, the Koran and aspects of Muslim life, as well as reprints of articles from other Christian (Protestant) publications, not from Iran or the Near East, but from Africa, India or China. The exclusive attention in the Near East to things Kurdish is striking, even after 1916, when members of the Kurdish Lutheran Mission were unable to return to Soujbulak. Stranded, they had to work for Near East Relief throughout the Middle East among Armenians in Yerevan, Assyrians in Tabriz or Hamadan, and even Baghdad.

The Kurdistan Missionary is a very useful source of information about events in Soujbulak and in neighboring towns. During WWI, access to their base, and all of what has become West Azerbaijan, was barred owing to fighting between Cossacks and gendarmerie in the aftermath of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the breakdown of order in Iran. The pre-World War I pictures published in TKM, whenever Fossum was able to make a trip to Tabriz for more photographic plates, may be among the best and oldest from Soujbulak. The maps that he attempted to draw of Kurdish regions are also useful. The American periodical continued to carry what information it could while insisting that "the Lutheran Church of America comes as a whole to realize our vision: Kurdistan for Christ." (27)

Although highly useful, especially since much of the periodical is available, The Kurdistan Missionary has only rare samples of Kurdish writing. The paucity of Kurdish names and references is especially striking. Fossum had packed a camera and made many pictures of Kurdish children and groups of men, many of which appear in TKM. Relations with individual Kurds, however, appeared to have been intermittent. The main person mentioned regularly was Isma'il Agha Simko (k. 1929), who, for nearly two decades roamed in and out of western Azarbaijan with his tribal militia, pillaging and attacking fellow Kurds, Turks, and especially Assyrian villages. Various other Kurds mentioned are local notables, their wives, and Mustafa Kasi, a Kurdish medical student in Istanbul's Haydar Pasha [Hospital] University and the son of a Soujbulak notable. All other local persons noted are Jews, Armenians or diplomatic personnel, mainly Russian. One poorly identified group in Soujbulak are people referred to as "Mosulis," who appear to be merchants, possibly Chaldean Catholics and therefore not part of the Protestant

group at services.

Particularly helpful to the Lutherans was the Mirza Schmuel family, Christian Jews (Aramaic speakers) who traveled with the missionaries when they fled Soujbulak, mainly to avoid starvation, not attack, they insisted. When Mirza Schmuel, Rev. von Oertzen's Kurdish teacher and Fossum's translator, was shot (1915), the mission promised to look after his widow, Javahere, and their four children. (28) Mirza Schmuel may well have been Fossum's Kurdish instructor, just as the Assyrian scholar Mirza Masruf Khan Karam (1862-1943) served as the Kurdish instructor in Tabriz for other Lutherans headed for Soujbulak. (29)

Limited reference to Kurdish individuals does not imply prejudice. Even after the murders of Rev. Immanuel Dammann (1907), (30) an aspiring Kurdologist, and Rev. George Bachimont (1921), the editors resist blaming Kurds, and instead ask, "Can we let 3.5 million Kurds be accused of this murder?" (31) Although they conjecture that the second murder occurred because the French victim "looked like an Armenian," they excuse even such a religiously motivated crime by blaming non-local Kurdish elements like Simko of the Shakak tribe. (32)

That Kurds are good candidates for conversion to Christianity is a conviction that drives American and German evangelists to support Kurdish efforts today, as currently in Iraq for example, and to send evangelists among them. This same conviction drove members of the Lutheran Orient Mission nearly one hundred years earlier to persist in their apparently fruitless task of conversions in Soujbulak. Current interest in converting Kurds is also fed by materials on Kurdish websites touting the existence of "Christian Kurds." (33)

This brief overview of the widely available The Kurdistan Missionary and the circumstances of its publication serves as both an explanation of this very informative periodical and establishes it as a source of information about the Kurdish language periodicals published in northwest Iran around World War I. Let us turn now to what has thus far been established in sources about the earliest Kurdish periodical press in Iran.

#### Kurdish Language Periodicals From West Azarbaijan

The Kurdish periodical press celebrated its international 100th anniversary in 1998 but the Kurdish periodical, Kurdistan, that began the now accelerated production of Kurdish periodical titles, originated in British Egypt. In Iran and the Ottoman Empire, where Kurds actually lived, Kurdish periodicals arrived some dozen years later. The first Kurdish periodical published in the Ottoman Empire appeared in Istanbul after the liberalization that followed the adoption of the 1908 constitution. When did the Kurdish language press appear in Iran?

In Iran, a spurt of Kurdish language publishing accompanied the formation of the Mahabad Republic (1945-46) when the Soviets supplied their Kurdish allies with a printing press. A printing press must have been available also in Tabriz. (34) This phase, relatively well-known from Soviet and Western sources, ended as Tehran's political crackdown on irredentist movements among Azari Turks and Kurds commenced with the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1946. All these publications, like those preceding them in Iran, appeared in the modified Arabic alphabet. By 1941 the level of literacy in Persian had increased dramatically among all urban residents of northwest Iran with the establishment of public schools in major towns and exclusive instruction in Persian, even for those whose native language was not Persian. Despite the hardship this imposed, urban children began reading Persian. The transition to Kurdish from Persian would not have been difficult for those students who in Mahabad gained the opportunity to study in Kurdish with the declaration of the Republic. Kurds and Persians use the same alphabet.

Thus far, however, sources have been unclear as to where, when, and under what auspices the first Kurdish periodicals in Iran made their appearance. Edward G. Browne, the primary survey source for the periodical press in Iran up to the post WWI period, makes no reference to a Kurdish press. Even a researcher as careful as David McDowall, the most reliable source on modern Kurds, confuses the issue of early Kurdish publications from Iran. He refers to Ruji Kurdistan as coming from Soujbulak (p. 221) and footnotes a publication that makes no reference to such a title. (35)

Yet a Persian language publication that attempts to present a thorough history of Urmia charts at least three Kurdish newspapers appearing around WWI. This is the period of both heightened American missionary presence, rising or competing Kurdish tribal ascendancy, and an increase in nationalist sentiments among all ethnic groups in Ottoman and Iranian areas. Therefore, information and actual analysis of any Kurdish periodicals from this period would be useful.

Below is a chart of the Kurdish publications that appear in the Persian source: (36)

Periodical	Editor	Publisher	Language	Location	Dates
Kurd	Mohd. Qarihi	none	Kurdish	Urmia	1330 HQ/1911
Kurdistan	Abdul Razzaq Kak Badr Khan	Simku	Kurdish	Urmia	1331 HQ/1912
Kurdah	Mohd. Tarjani	none	Kurdish	Urmia	1340 HQ/1921

From an analysis of Assyrian publications on the chart, from which the above Kurdish information is extracted, it is clear that the compiler has not seen or been able to read all of the titles or samples of the publications. He confuses Chaldean with Assyrian as languages (both were the same on the Urmia plain) and confuses dates. But he does not confuse the titles. (37) Clearly his credibility is not likely to be in question with regard to Kurdish publications because the alphabet used would have been the same as Persian or Iranian Azari Turkish. On the other hand, in the case of the Assyrian publications, apparently he could neither read Aramaic nor decipher the alphabet and errors crept in.

This most thorough history of Urmia, however, may be flawed with respect to Kurdish language publications. First, Simko exerted influence throughout this period in Azarbaijan but there is little evidence that he operated within Urmia itself until 1920-21. Second, the publication *Kurdistan* might have reached Urmia from its foreign location in Egypt, but it would have come from Istanbul during 1911-12, where the Beder Khan family published it. It is doubtful that Simko was the publisher.

We are left to ponder these questions: How inaccurate is this survey of Urmia Kurdish periodicals? Could the periodical *Kurdistan* in fact be from Urmia but with a different publisher? Could there be a publication named *Roji Kurdistan*, as McDowall states, coming from Soujbulak?

Moreover, what was the background of the editors and where and how were they educated? Which printing press was being used? What in the content of these periodicals would identify them as being representative of Kurdish sentiments whether of the embryonic intellectual classes, the notables (aghass), or others? Without actual samples or even runs of the papers, the last question cannot be answered. But we can identify some of those who participated in producing these early Kurdish periodicals.

There is some evidence that one of the three titles was published. The masthead for one issue of *Kurd* appears in Amir Hassanpour's published dissertation. (38) Appearing in 1340Q/1921 in Urmia, *Kurd* planned on becoming the weekly organ of the Simko run government. It appeared in a combination of Turkish, Persian and Kurdish, as far as one can ascertain from the masthead. An Arabic phrase at the top is Koranic and translates as "And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves." It comes from the 103rd Sura (The Family of 'Imran). *Kurd* was printed at Chapkhaneh-ye Ghayrat. The Persian source gives the editor as Mohammad Tarjani and this is confirmed by the masthead photo. Hassanpour identifies the publication as "Masthead of (*Roji*) *Kurd*, organ of the rebellious administration of "Smail" Agha Simko in Iran." (39) Thus far, no record of the 1330Q/1911 periodical *Kurd* has been confirmed by any other source. Nor is the editor Mohammad Qarihi identifiable.

The problem of the authenticity of the third publication, *Kurdistan*, may be closer to solution. The Persian source dates it to 1331 HQ/1912. But there is serious doubt as to the reliability of the Persian source. The editor is listed as a member of the Beder Khan family, the publishers of *Kurdistan*, but the sponsor is listed as Simko. While Simko roamed in and out of Persian territory and in eastern Turkey, it is highly unlikely that he had much to do with the Beder Khans. The mystery is whether a periodical by the name of *Kurdistan* existed at all.

There is good reason to expect that either the Presbyterian missionaries in Urmia or the Lutherans in Soujbulak would have been interested in starting a Kurdish periodical. The Presbyterians, on and off, expressed a wish to work among the Kurds, as late as 1913. Fossum in Soujbulak and Edman expected the Americans to set up a hospital in their midst but leave the educational work to the Lutherans.

Could there have been a newspaper from Soujbulak in Kurdish published by the Lutherans? Probably not, although McDowall alludes to someone publishing a periodical for Simko from that location. The reasons have to do with access to a printing press. Throughout 1913 and 1915 Fossum writes in his letters and reports of the need for a printing press. He was in the process of preparing hymnals and school textbooks that he could not print for lack of a press. To have the Presbyterians in Urmia publishing materials for him was tedious and costly. Instead, he was forced to make hand copies.

Fossum did contract with the Presbyterian Press in Urmia for the publication of his translation of the four Gospels in Kurdish, a project on which he had labored for about two years. In 1912 the Presbyterians offered him their old hand-cranked press for \$100 plus \$150 for all the additional parts needed to print in Kurdish. But the money was never forthcoming from the Lutheran Orient Mission Society in the United States. There was no other press in Soujbulak. Yet in several issues of *TKM* and in the title page of his well-known *Grammar of Kurdish* (1919), he states unequivocally that he was producing a Kurdish language periodical following the format of *The Kurdistan Missionary*.

Hassanpour casts doubt on the existence of a periodical from 1914. (40) He cites a letter from Fossum's daughter saying that her father never produced a periodical. (This is his infant daughter who left Soujbulak at the age of two and only saw her father between the ages of four and six before he returned to the Near East. He died without seeing her again.) She can hardly provide witness for the non-existence of a short run (no more than a year) periodical in a language she did not know and produced by a father she knew briefly from letters.

Hoshyar Karim Qaradaghi, a historian of the Kurdish periodical press throughout the Middle East, identifies *Kurdistan* as a "magazine published in Ormia--Eastern Kurdistan by the German Protestant missionaries ... first issue ... April 1914." Like others attempting to navigate the field of minority studies, Qaradaghi frequently confuses dates (asserting that the first American missionaries had arrived in 1824). But he does identify the publication as having a literary political focus. He also confirms that the Germans "translated the bible into Kurdish.... With the aim" of distributing their religious beliefs. (41)

If he did produce a periodical by the name of *Kurdistan*, as he asserts in multiple written sources, then Fossum could well have been the first to publish a Kurdish language periodical in Iran. This is a significant milestone in Kurdish cultural history. The problem is no sample has been unearthed to date. There is no masthead of it in *TKM*, but there are no title pages of his other works either. When the Lutheran missionaries returned to Soujbulak in 1920, everything was destroyed. The roofs had caved in on their buildings and contents thoroughly pillaged. The mission needed to raise funds for the purchase of food and clothing, medical relief, job creation for the locals, and for the construction of a chapel, orphanage, hospital, schools and missionary houses, all of which had been destroyed in the fighting.

Throughout northwest Iran the same story of wanton looting and destruction was repeated at every missionary location and Christian home. The only reason samples of the four Assyrian periodicals of Urmia have survived is because they had long runs

(seventy-nine years for one of them) and they had many subscribers outside the region, particularly in Tabriz, Tiflis, St Petersburg, and the United States. Some have been located at missionary archives. (42) In all likelihood Fossum's periodical circulated only within a very small regional circle. However, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that it has survived in Tabriz.

#### Did The Lutheran Missionaries Produce The First Kurdish Periodical In Iran?

Doubts cast upon the veracity of Ludvig Olsen Fossum, a missionary so dedicated to the advancement of Kurds and Kurdish, seem ill placed. Fossum worked hard to learn Kurdish--he preached his first Kurdish sermon in the little chapel in Soujbulak on May 5, 1912--produced many translations of hymns, school books translated from Persian, Syriac and Turkish, the four Gospels, and the well-known grammar. He worked with other missionaries from Ottoman areas interested in Kurdish literacy toward a common Kurdish written language. (43) He defended Kurds in print to his American audiences when Kurds were desperate for relief aid and defended them physically when, like the Armenians, they were attacked by Turko-Kurdish forces in Soujbulak, and needed to take refuge in the American mission compound when Russians entered the town. There is little reason to doubt his dedication or his veracity. His claims to having produced a periodical cannot be rejected simply because he was a Christian missionary and not a Kurd. After all, it was Christian missionaries who produced the longest running periodical in Iran until World War I, i.e., the Assyrian *Zahrira d-bahra* mentioned earlier in this article.

Like the Jadidists of Central Asia, who pressed for reforms in the Transcaucasus and Tatar areas--casting aside the rote memorization of the religious schools for western style subjects and teaching styles--European missionaries sought to introduce that same spirit and content into northwest Iran. And like the Jadidists, the European missionaries supplemented literacy with a periodical press. This is what Fossum was trying to do for the Kurds in Soujbulak.

The schools Fossum and his colleagues tried to establish were opposed by the religious class, as they watched paying pupils disappear into schools teaching Kurdish and English languages free of charge. They also opposed these schools because they included Christian teachings. But when the Lutheran missionaries returned to Soujbulak for the fourth time in 1922, Kurds beseeched them on every side, to restart schools for boys and girls. Therefore, it is highly likely that the biographies of at least some of the initiators of the *Komala-I Jiyani* Kurdistan (Committee for the Revival of Kurdistan) in 1942 received some of their education in a missionary classroom. This might not be the case for the clerical and Sufi classes (Qazi Muhammad and Shaykh Gilani).

In the current period of heightened Kurdish nationalism, it might appear unseemly to thank an American for starting the first Kurdish periodical in a Kurdish majority area. It is not unlikely that as Simku combed through the countryside from Soujbulak to Salamas, he did collect educated men from Soujbulak who could produce a periodical for him, much as he collected skilled construction workers. (44)

Rather than its existence, the question Fossum's periodical raises has to do with its physical production. Was it, like the Gospels, produced in Urmia at the Presbyterian Press? He would have had trouble doing so in 1914 due to the fact that at the start of that year there was an attack on Urmia and its villages by Kurds of the region. In that year, Golpashan, the wealthiest of the ring of satellite towns, when it finally ran out of money to pay the bribes to keep out Kurdish para-military units, was robbed and destroyed. Assyrians took refuge in the French and American missionary compounds where many died of disease in this foretaste of the devastation that was to culminate in the ethnic cleansing of 1918. It is possible that Fossum had to wait until the summer of 1914 to continue the printing work, just as he had done with the Gospels he translated into Kurdish.

#### Summary

The quest for finding issues of these early periodicals, whether two or three titles, rests with the researcher and Kurdish cultural historians with a genuine interest in early 20th century history. Learning more about the accomplishments of the Lutheran Orient Mission, especially in Soujbulak where they did so much to advance education in Kurdish, and medical work among the local people, could serve to explain how this town became the center of Kurdish nationalism in the 1940s. In so many early 20th century ethnic communities, the introduction of indigenous language education, coupled with local production of periodicals, fanned the kindling of nationalism. The debt that the Mahabad Republic owes to the multi-national Lutheran missionaries might well be a segment of Kurdish history to be appreciated, and not hidden or denied.

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#### Endnotes

(1) The Persian language Iranian press began in 1851 in Tehran with the publication of *Ruznameh-ye vaqaya-ye itifaqiyya* (Newspaper of Current Events). The circulation of a two-page court newsheet briefly in 1839, sometimes advanced as the start of Iranian periodicals, is regarded as an internal court document rather than a periodical. See Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht-Holland, 1968, p.338. *Zahrira d-bahra* ran to eight pages per issue and circulated widely within the Urmia region and abroad. See Edward G. Browne's index for the four Assyrian periodicals from Urmia in his *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia: Partly Based on the Manuscript Work of Mirza Mohammad Ali Khan "Tarbiyat" of Tabriz* (Cambridge, 1914). See also Eden Naby, "The Assyrians of Iran: Re-Unification of a Millet: 1906-1914," *IJMES* 8 (1977), 237-249.

(2) A biography of Justin Perkins was published c1887 by his son, Henry Martyn Perkins, *Life of Rev. Justin Perkins, D.D.*

Pioneer Missionary to Persia (Chicago: Woman's Presbyterian Board of Missions of the Northwest, 1887)

(3) See in particular a survey (without author or date but available on the internet) called *Das Evagelium Und die Kurden: Protestantische Mission unter Kurden im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert* from the Kurdish Outreach Missionaries--P.O. Box 1128, DE 35602 Hohenahr. Although this survey contains a number of errors since it relied on secondary sources apparently, nonetheless it covers all Protestant efforts throughout Kurdish regions.

(4) *A Practical Kurdish Grammar* (Minneapolis: Inter-Synodal Evangelical Lutheran Orient-Mission Society, 1919).

(5) In Germany between 1905 and 1917, three periodicals appeared that were dedicated to the German mission among the "Nestorians" or in "Koordistan." The *Hermannsburg Circulare* (1907-1917) discusses the Lutheran Mission to the Kurds as well as the Assyrians since a church in Hermannsburg supported at least one pastor in Soujbulak. See Gabriele Yonan, *Journalismus bei den Assyriern: Ein Überblick von seinen Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1985), pp. 27-28.

(6) Colonel Iyas, a man of long experience in eastern Iran, and an avid observer of Iran's political turmoil, advised the Lutheran missionaries to leave Soujbulak. He was killed and beheaded in 1914. *The Kurdistan Missionary*, Vol. 12, no. 4 (March 1920) p. 3. An exhibit of his photographs and a book about his interest in Iran are forthcoming in 2006 through the Iran Heritage Foundation (London).

(7) Maurizio Garzoni, *Grammatica e vocabolario della lingua kurdo*, (Rome, Stamperia della S. Congregazione di Propaganda Fide. 1787).

(8) *A Practical Kurdish Grammar*, p. 3.

(9) Samuel Audley Rhea, "Brief grammar and vocabulary of the Kurdish language of the Hakari District". (rpt. from *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol 10, no. 1, 1872), pp. 118-155.

(10) Peter Lerch, *Forschungen über die Kurden und die iranischen Nordchaldaer* (St. Petersburg: Eggers, 1857-1858).

(11) Petros Ellow, "Assyrian, Kurdish and Yizidis": indexed grammar and vocabulary with a few grammatical notes (Baghdad, 1920).

(12) Other known direct missions to Muslims are the Peshawar based "Central Asian Pioneer Mission" engaged in work among the other significant tribal group in the non-Arab Muslim part of the world--the Pushtuns/Pathans, a Lutheran mission to Yemen, and an American mission to the Hue in China.

(13) The Lootie/luti were another matter. These equivalents of Iranian gang members menaced foreigners and locals alike and were also available as killers for hire. For attack on Justin Perkins, see his *Missionary life in Persia: being glimpses at a quarter of a century of labors among the Nestorian Christians* (Boston: American Tract Society, c1868), p. 50-54

(14) For an account of the murder of Rev. Roger Cumberland in Dohuk, see *Das Evagelium Und die Kurden: Protestantische Mission unter Kurden im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 5.

(15) The story of the conversion of Said Khan Kordestani (1876-1927?) by the Assyrian, Qasha Yokhana, appears in the biography of the former published in Persian, *Tabib-e Mahbub: Sharh-e zendagi-ye Doktor Said Khan-e Kordestani* (Beloved physician: the biography of Doctor Said Khan of Kurdistan), <http://www.farsinet.com/drsaedkhan/toc.html>

(16) *Das Evagelium Und die Kurden: Protestantische Mission unter Kurden im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 4.

(17) This appeared in Philippopol (now Plovdiv, Bulgaria) from the Druckerei Awetarianian. In 1857 a Kurdish language translation of the Gospels was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society but in the Armenian alphabet. (Copies at Boston University Libraries and the Library of Congress)

(18) American medical missionaries established the first medical school in Iran in Urmia in 1879. See <http://www.ams.ac.ir/AIM/0252/0252127.htm>

(19) The first systematic village census of Iran lists malaria as the main disease in almost all the villages on the Urmia plain. *Farhang-i jughrafiya-i-i Iran* (Tehran: Dayirah-i Jughrafiya-i-i Sitad-i Artish, 1328-1332 [1949-1954]).

(20) This 1529 hymn, with words and music by Martin Luther, holds a special place for Lutherans and even in the United States was still sung in the original German though it had been translated into English in 1853. Fossum's translation may have been from German since he knew the language well. For his translation, written in the modified Arabic alphabet in his own hand, see *The Kurdistan Missionary*, Vol. 9, no. 12 (Dec. 1917), p. 5-6.

(21) *The Kurdistan Missionary*, Vol. 9, no. 12 (Dec. 1917), p. 4-5.

(22) See the collection of posters at the Library of Congress created for fund-raising purposes.

(23) Even among Assyrians who had immigrated to the US as temporary laborers, the practice of reading aloud in the evenings at the rooming houses where they lived was well known. Many times the papers being read in English by one person would be translated into Assyrian for the others. In other cases, it would be one of the several Assyrian periodicals that were read aloud when they arrived from Kharput, Diyarbeker or Urmia, the three sites of Assyrian periodical press publishing.

(24) Although they knew Kurds on the ground, knowledge of their origins remained uncertain, divided then as it is now, between tracing it to either the Medes, or to the bandits who besieged Xenophon's retreating soldiers, the Carduci. See the introduction to Fossum's grammar and many other western and Kurdish writing. The confusion on the level of language--whether Kurdish is an Iranian language or a mixture of "Chaldean," Turkish and Persian--also beset earlier works leading Peter Lerch to combine Kurds with "northChaldeans." *Forschungen über die Kurden und die iranischen Nordchaldaer* (St. Petersburg, Eggers, 1857-58).

(25) *The Kurdistan Missionary* Vol. 12, No. 4 (April 1920) pp. 10-12

(26) *The Kurdistan Missionary* Vol. 13, no 2 (February 1921), p. 7

(27) So writes Rev. Lohre, the President of the Lutheran Orient Mission Society in *The Kurdistan Missionary*, Vol. 11, no. 4 (January 1921)

(28) *The Kurdistan Missionary*, Vol. 5, no. 2 (November 1915). The report says he was shot by Kurds but does not spell out the circumstances.

(29) *The Kurdistan Missionary*, Vol. 12, no. 10 (August, 1922).

(30) David McDowall argues (*The Modern History of the Kurds*) that the 1907 murder of the German missionary occurred in order for one Kurdish faction to embarrass another that was held responsible by the Iranians for the missionary's safety, p. 75. As a precaution, when Rev. von Oertzen first arrived in Soujbulak, he settled in the Jewish quarter for reasons of safety. Ghoulishly, nurse Gudhart, a very detailed correspondent, wrote that upon their return to Soujbulak in 1920, the mission property had been so destroyed that even the wall where young Dammann's blood had been visible for years, was destroyed.

- (31) The Kurdistan Missionary, Vol. 12, no. 3 (December 1921)
- (32) Simko, a notorious brigand who parlayed the chaotic political situation to work with Russians, Turks, and the Tabriz government, murdered the Assyrian Nestorian Patriarch (February 1918) and participated in the pillaging of Assyrian and Azari Turkish villages. His attacks on Kurds belonging to other tribes is attested by the Lutheran missionaries in TKM. His end came at the hands of the Iranian government that either had him ambushed and hanged in Urmia, according to Hasan Anzali, or had him killed during the ambush, according to McDowall.
- (33) In his Encyclopedia of Kurdistan, Mehrdad Izady, a passionate (and not always logical) Kurdish nationalist, claims all those living from the Pontus to the shores of Lake Urmia who are/were Christians to be remnants of Kurds who converted to Christianity and somehow changed their languages to Greek, Armenian and Assyrian neo-Aramaic. This thesis not only denies the ethnicity of historically recognized groups, but also opens the door for the claim of <http://www.kurdistanica.com/english/religion/religion-frame.html>
- (34) McDowall, on p. 242, says that the printing press in Mahabad was provided by the Soviets. It was in Mahabad that several Kurdish periodicals appeared (Hiwa-I Nishtiman, Giru Gali, and Mindilan-I Kurd as well as the newspaper and magazine Kurdistan). Another serial, Nishtiman lasted for five issues in Tabriz in 1943. p. 238.
- (35) McDowall, ft. 16.
- (36) Hasan Anzali, Urmiyah dar guar-i zaman (Urmiyah: Anzali, 1378 [1999 or 2000]) p. 480
- (37) Anzali misspells Kokhva and writes it as "Akakhu" having placed the 'alif' in the beginning of the word instead of at the end.
- (38) Nationalism and language in Kurdistan, 1918-1985 (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, c 1992) p. 260  
masthead of KURD--1340/1921 Urmiyah. Turkish/Persian/Kurdish masthead. 12 Shawal 1340--distributed (jari) weekly
- (39) Hassanpour, p. 260. The rendering of Simko's first name as "Smail" rather than Ismail relates to Kurdish claims that this common Semitic name has a peculiarly Kurdish form.
- (40) Hassanpour, p. 263, ft. 4 on p. 279.
- (41) See his article, "Newspapers and magazines published after 'Kurdistan' until <http://www.cogsci.ed.ac.uk/~siamakr/Kurdish/KURDICA/1999/MAY/qaradaghi.html>
- (42) Two full years of Zahrira d-bahra (1895, 1897) are held at the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia and available on microfilm elsewhere.
- (43) The Kurdistan Missionary, (1913) Vol. 3, no. 11, p. 86
- (44) Anzali, p. 228.

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