

Assyrians of the Van District

**Assyrians Of The Van District
During The Rule Of Ottoman Turks**

M.Y.A . Lilian

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Introduction

This book presented to my beloved people includes information about the life and customs of the Assyrians in Van District, Turkey, before the First World War. The book describes in detail how our community, united under the supreme leadership, passed their days, protecting their freedom in a part of a fertile land of their ancestors, the mountains of Hakkari

This book is more valuable as it is printed by the Russian Royal Geographical Society written by a Russian scholar who visited the Assyrian villages in Hakkari in 1909.

But what happened when strangers from far away countries, dressed in the skins of sheep but inside were fierce wolves. They came to our villages to preach us about Christianity, we who had been Christians one thousand years before them. They caused religious dissension splitting our nation subsequently brought us to distressful conditions of today scattered all over the world.

We hope by reading this book our people will wake up and learn what happened to their parents that has brought them to the present distressful situation. They will struggle to take necessary steps toward a firm unity and will gather under one leadership. And we hope that one day our nation will have a suitable place in this world to live as equals to other nations.

Following is a list of the number of Assyrians as estimated by the author M. Lillian during his visit to Assyrians villages in 1909. The list does not include the Assyrians in Beth Nahrain (Iraq). In translating the article by M. Lillian we have tried to translate as it is in the Russian language but there are some words which have no similar words in our language and have mentioned them as they are in the original. The Assyrian Youth Cultural Society is grateful to Kashisha William Yonan for his assistance in translation and we hope in printing this book it will be an addition to the progress of our Assyrian language.

Rabi Franso Babilla

Forward

As there is no information in the Russian scientific literary works about the Assyrians living in Turkey, the branch of the Caucasian Geographical Society of Imperial Russia welcomed the proposal by Mr. Lillian to publish his research about the Assyrians in Van District of Turkey. For this research Mr. Lillian traveled to the Van District where the Assyrians live. It is the first time he gives information about the history of Assyrian Maliks of Van District and the reader learns about the ethnological, political and social conditions of the Assyrians who a valuable source that increases our knowledge about the tribes living in that part of Turkey, in the neighborhood of Caucasia.

Mr. Lillian's research was first published in AZGAGRAKAN HONDESS JOURNAL, Vol.24, pages 180-232. Translation to Russian was published by Mr. Lillian himself as a new issue in Volume 4, Number 28.

Editor, Geographical Society of Imperial Russia, Caucasian Branch.

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The Land

Majority of the Assyrians of Van District live in North-West of Sinjaq of Hakkari along the Greater Zab River.

Some of them live in Betilshabab Shamdinan, Gawar, Timar, Archiyawas. In more detail the Assyrians villages are listed in the topographical chapter of Van District. Here we will write about that area where the Assyrians are able to keep free by themselves which had great effect on their customs, way of life and activities. The lands of the Assyrians where the tribes live are the tribes of Tyari, Baznayi, Jilwayi, Diznayi. It is a very mountainous area. The mountains have various branches, and the range of the mountains is known as Jilu which meets at a certain point forming a small and narrow valley which is difficult to pass through.

The mountains here are bare and rocky. In many places they are very high. The highest peak DORICH is 1300 feet high. In one small area some mountains are covered by thorny bushes, have bitumen springs, running brooks gushing from the bottom of mountains emptying in Great Zab. Zab River flows among the chain of the mountains.

The land is very poor for planting as most of it is rocky. But the villages are very carefully cultivated. No spot of land is not planted.

The paths do not link directly the villages. The paths between villages pass along the base of the mountains. They have built terraces on the slopes of mountains about one metre wide. All the terraces are planted with wheat. The soil is not fertile and they think it is more productive to plant tobacco, rice, beans and cotton. They also plant fruit trees.

Houses are built on the slopes of the mountains one above the other. The roof of one house thus becomes the court yard to the upper house. Sometimes the valley is very narrow and houses are not built one upon the other but extend along each other on the river beach. For example, Ashita village has 500 houses extending about 10 kilometers along the river . In front of each house there is a vegetable garden.

Autumn is very pleasant here particularly mid-Autumn. Winter is very cold. Many times it snows about two metres high. In Tkhum, Tyari and Baz villages where the land slopes down by 35-40 degrees, for three to four months, travel between villages is blocked by snow. During the months of December to March, the roads are so blocked by snow that neighbors 100 to 150 feet apart cannot visit each other. Early April rains start and the weather becomes calmer during May. Summer starts from June. During this month insects and fever make life very difficult and uncomfortable. During this period the people move up the mountains to escape from the insects and live in log huts.

Roads

The Assyrians understand that the freedom they enjoy is to lack of proper roads to their villages. It is worth mentioning that the boulder that separates Tyari and Tkhum villages is called Boulder of Tax Collectors. They say only one Turkish tax collector can come to that rock. To pass the boulder the tax collector must go down through a one and a half metre deep and narrow path. As the tax collector cannot

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pass that boulder the inhabitants on the other side of the boulder are free are free from paying taxes. The Turkish government has no means to build roads in this mountainous area and the Assyrians have no desire to build roads as they believe the Turkish government would send troops and officers who would extort taxes and heavy tariff and would interfere with their self-rule.

The mountain ranges cross each other forming here and there many small valleys. In each valley there are one or two villages. To move from one village to another, one must climb up a mountain and go down the other side of the valley to visit a village. Most of the mountains are rocky and some with very large rocks. No one has ever tried to build roads in this mountainous terrain. The land that is cultivated is very rich. The narrow roads pass along the rocky base of the mountain close to the shore of the flowing rivers. In the valley of the Greater Zab River steep rocks rise sky high. If a man comes down on a narrow road he is in great danger and without extreme care, he would fall down in the bubbling river. The roads here are rocky and slippery. The Assyrians have made for themselves a kind of shoes which they call RASHICHCHI. In winter they make skis from leaves of certain trees and can walk over two metre thick snow.

Mules only can work in this mountainous terrain which the animal learns the paths early from his birth. Each year they bring mules from Mosul or Yerevan and train them to walk on the mountain roads. One cannot but marvel at the care and skill of these mules as they walk on these difficult roads. A person who rides a mule gets dizzy. One cannot ride a mule on these roads for more than two metres per hour. But when one reaches the top of the mountain before his eyes opens a very beautiful view of the mountains and he forgets the rough ride.

Number Of Assyrians

There is no official census record of the population in Turkey. It is therefore difficult to know exactly the number of Assyrians living in Van District. The inhabitants of Gulamarj district have prepared a statistic of the inhabitants by number of houses and not by individuals. I have also depended on the number of Assyrians on the reports of "Bekin" "Mayoski" but more on the report of "Shelkowaniko." (Russian writers). Majority of Assyrians live in Turkey, Iran, Russia and India, China and Armenia. Small numbers are found in other countries. Following are the number of the Assyrians counted:

1. Asiatic Turkey 863,000
2. Iran 76,000
3. Russia 2,000

By Churches

Nestorians	135,000
Catholics	23,000
Jacobites	15,000
Lebanese Catholics (Maronites)	525,000
Russian Catholics	100,000
Lutherans & Protestants	1,000
Orthodox	32,000

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Majority of the Assyrians in Van District are Nestorians.

Qada Guljamar, Sinjak Hakkari	41,000
Gawar	15,000
Albak	12,000
Urmar	7,000
Shatakh	2,000
Khoshob	2,000
Total	79,000

I have counted the number of the Assyrians in Gulamarj Qada (district). There were 4,855 houses and 41,000 persons. This number is 59 per cent of all the inhabitants of Gulamarj district, 37 per cent of Hakkari district and 17 per cent of Van district. There are about 60,000 Jacobites in India.

Assyrian Language

The Assyrians speak neo-Assyrian language. It is a dialect of ancient Assyrian language. It has greatly changed grammatically and includes many Arabic and Persian words. This language is a member of the Aramaic family of languages. The Semitic branch has great similarity to ancient Hebrew language. The church rituals are all in ancient Assyrian language. All religious books are in ancient language. The people do not understand the ancient language and the priests are obliged to conduct the prayers in the spoken language or neo-Assyrian.

The Assyrians in Sinjak Hakkari speak their mother tongue and understand each other. Many also speak Kurdish but few know Turkish those who travel to Gulamarj, Bashqala.

In Tyari, Tkhumli and Baz few know neo-Assyrian and most of them do not know Kurdish or Turkish. The Assyrian alphabet is made up of 22 letters. Four of the letters are consonants and the Assyrians from early times use signs to change the sound of the letters. All the books are handwritten. Some books have been printed in New York and Urmi. In Van district there is no Assyrian printing press. Assyrians in Van are not familiar with lithography like the Armenians have in Van. They have a newspaper published in Urmi where with the help of Missionaries they have set up a printing press which also prints books One per cent only of the Assyrians can read and write. Among the women, Surma Khanum, Mar Shimon's sister, can read and write with the help of English missionaries. She has received good education and speaks English. She acts as secretary to Mar Shimon.

The Maliks are illiterate. Recently missionaries have begun to open schools for Assyrians. It is worth mentioning that those who can read are called Shamasha (deacons). Anyone who can read participates in church rituals and Shamash as are highly respected.

Malik of Jilu, who can read and write, participates in the evening and morning services as Shamasha. Shamasha Jibrael wrote to me the address of Malik of Jilu and when I read it without mentioning Shamasha he said that I should mention Shamasha as he is not like other Maliks as he can read.

Assyrian folklore has been much influenced by Kurds. They have few songs. They have a habit of singing Kurdish songs and telling Kurdish stories.

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Religion

Majority of the Assyrians of Van belong to the national church which they call Church of the East. A small number are Catholics and Protestants. Foreigners call the Church of the East, Nestorian. According to their tradition the Assyrians received Christianity from the disciples of Apostle Peter, Mar Addai and Mar Mari. Apostle Peter was Patriarch of Antioch who was preaching Christianity in Syria. He was so famous to Assyrians that until now and from the beginning their Patriarch is known as Mar Shimon meaning Saint Simon (or Peter). In the fifth century the Assyrians received Nestor's Patriarch of Constantinople and for this reason they are called Nestorian.

In this church also there was a split on theological grounds led by Yaku Barada in whose name the church is known as Jacobite or Yakubayi. He preached in Syria and Lebanon on monotheism. His followers are known as Maronites.

For four centuries the Catholic Church tried to convert the Assyrians to Catholicism. In 1445 the Maronites joined the Roman Catholic Church and accepted the main dogma of Catholicism but they keep their Assyrian language and their church rituals. In 1636 during the time of Pope Clement the 12th, they changed to Catholics of Lebanon. By this success the Catholics began to work among the Assyrians in Ottoman Turkey and during the 16th century a number of Nestorians formed the Chaldean Catholic Church. Until the 19th century Catholics could not split the Jacobite Church. In the 30th year of 19th century, the Catholic Church of Syria was established. In the 19th century Protestants began to spread among the Jacobites and Nestorians. Some Nestorians in Iran joined Orthodox Church. It must be mentioned that the Assyrians of different religious denominations, due to their lack of education, are not united as one nation but hate each other, thinking the others are foreigners!

Political And Social System

The Assyrians of Van District are divided into two major branches □tribes and Rayat. The tribes live in the mountainous region of Hakkari but Rayat in the same district but below in the plains. The tribal Assyrians have defended their freedom and have kept their ancient national customs and habits, but those of Rayat have lost their freedom and are oppressed by Kurdish Begg or chiefs and are controlled by Turkish government.

The Assyrians of mountain tribes are united politically and religiously under the administration of Mar Shimon who is under the authority of the Turkish government. This society is united under self-rule. The Assyrians of mountains are divided into tribes who are ruled by tribal leaders called Malik. The tribes are also divided into clans which are made up of some families. These clans have a chieftain who is usually more learned or elderly. The administration headquarters for all Assyrian tribes is in the town of Qochanis. It is the administration headquarters for the tribes of Upper and Lower Tyari Tkhumi, Baz, Jilu and Ishtaz. About five per cent of the population near Qochanis are Kurds. These Kurds speak Assyrian and are under the rule of the Assyrian tribal chieftains, Maliks.

These mountain Assyrians have not only defended their lands but also kept their language and traditions. The Patriarch, Mar Shimon, is known as their political and religious leader. Mar Shimon decides on all religious questions, administration of the church, solves problems, appoints and ordains bishops, gives

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ranks to men working in the church affairs and collects taxes for the Turkish government. The Patriarch also organizes national defense and leads fights for self-defense as during the time of Badr Khan Beg, the Kurdish tribal leader, he led the Assyrians, prepared for battle, spoke with the enemy and makes peace. The Patriarch approves the election of tribal chieftain, Malik, and can withdraw his approval. He also looks in cases of persons accused of murder.

The first Mar Shimon was Mar Mari. After him came Mar Abrakhis, Abraham, Yaku and others by election. Later the chair of Mar Shimon was from the family of Moma till 1889. Mar Shimon then was elected from Hormiz family who was from the family of Moma. After 1889 when the family of Moma ended, Mar Shimon was elected from the family of Shahmer. According to custom after the death of a Patriarch Mar Shimon was elected from the most qualified sons of the brothers of the late Mar Shimon.

The first chair of Mar Shimon was established in Tciphon, north of Baghdad on the shores of Tigris River. Later it was moved to Alqosh near Mosul. In mid of 17th century it was moved to Qochanis.

Next to Patriarch is the Metropolitan who lives in a monastery near Nochiya in the district of Gawar. Metropolitans are also elected from the family of Mar Khnanishu and from the sons of the brothers of the Metropolitan. The Metropolitan takes over the duties of the Patriarch when he is sick for a long time, or is away on a long trip far from the community.

The Metropolitan has a great responsibility during the election of the Patriarch especially during the ordination. He places the elected Patriarch on Mar Shimon's chair, he blesses him when he hands over to him the staff of Patriarch, he blesses on behalf of the church. In this way the Metropolitan acts like John the Baptist did to Jesus.

The Metropolitan has authority over Bishops, priests and deacons. These clergy are also elected from families and many times are inherited. In all Turkey there are four Assyrians Bishops only. The Bishop has authority over priests who can marry. The priests are elected by the community and ordained by the Bishop.

For the administration and support of priests and the church, the males donate one Kran (Persian coin) and the females half a Kran. They also give to the priests and the church produce from their harvests. Money is collected each year for the keep of the priests and the church administration.

The mountain Assyrians are self-governing and are divided into tribes known as Ashirate. They are Upper Tyari, Lower Tyari, Tkhumi, Tal, Baz, Jilu, Zaran, Zeire, and Desin. Each tribe has a certain place or land. The area is named after the name of the tribe and is composed of a number of villages. They all have a share in the fields. Each village has a place for winter dwelling. The forest and the fields are not held in common. Each person has a plot of farmland for himself for planting.

Each tribe is self administered on all local affairs. The official is Sarcharda, Malik (tribe's chief). Each tribe has its own church and priests. Each tribe knows the grave of the deceased chief and swears by it and considers the grave a holy place. The tribe has its own cemetery. Members of the tribe who die away from the village are brought back and buried in the village cemetery.

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The Malik of each tribe is elected from a leading family. But frankly these elections are a formality. At the death of a Malik the tribe meets and elects a Malik, usually the son or brother of the deceased Malik. When the Malik is elected he is taken with a gift to Mar Shimon who gives him a robe suitable for the chair of Malik. Malik defends the comfort and security of the tribe. He is the leading volunteer to defend his tribe against hostilities by Kurdish tribes. He leads his men to attack the Kurds. He collects annually contributions for Mar Shimon and also acts a judge of social problems but in the case of murder he take the case to Mar Shimon.

The tribes are divided into clans. The Upper Tyari is made up of five clans. They are Banimatu, Lakina, Romta, Kelaita and Byalta. The Lower Tyari is made up of six clans. They are Binyamata, Lizen, Ashita, Sulbag, Biraul, Mininish, Zawita. The villages are named after the name of the clan.

All Assyrians of Tyari consider themselves descendants from one father. He has ownership has ownership of part of the plots of land, participates from his grave in the affairs of the community, administered by social organizations or by the elders under the leadership of the Malik. According to custom, the chieftain of the clans is elected from a high and popular family. The chieftain is sent by the Malik of the tribe to collect revenue for Malik. The clan's chieftain elects volunteers to be sent to fight when attacked and informs the Malik. He also acts as judge in minor cases but major cases are referred to Malik.

Customs

The Assyrians have inherited the spirit of martial arts from their parents. The mountainous region on the one hand, and in their neighborhood of various hostile Kurdish tribes, enhances this martial spirit. The desire of every young Assyrian is that he be a good fighter. His best game is bow and arrows with which he hunts birds. Each young child has a curved dagger in his back stuck in his girdle. The latest models of rifles can be found in almost every house.

Almost all Assyrians are illiterate particularly the tribe of Tkhumi. They have no schools. English missionaries have recently opened some schools but so far these schools are not bearing fruit. Maliks also are illiterate. Other than their language they do not know other languages not even Turkish. There a few priests who understand the Bible they read.

The spirit of religion among the Assyrians is very lively. Due to the entry of missionaries, recently the value of religion has declined. Religion has become for some a thing for sale or purchase. Many men receive money as gifts and convert to Catholics. After the money stops they return back to their former church or joint another church. To explain this behavior I will tell you this story.

Malik of Jilu with his father-in-law, a priest, invited me to his house. The priest sadly told me that the Catholic Bishop in Van, when he came to the village of Jilu, he turned 40 young men to Catholics and ordained 40 men as priests. For each the Bishop had arranged a monthly allowance of ten Manati (money) to spread Catholicism. This created a great disturbance among the families. Many fathers expelled their sons from their sons who had turned to Catholics for money. After sometime, these priests did not receive the money promised to them they returned back to their former Nestorian church and some others became Protestants. Catholic Bishop, who appeared well educated and spoke fluent French, was very happy that

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Catholicism was spreading among the Assyrians. As an example he pointed to Malik Jilu and his father-in-law, two persons who were warm to Catholicism. I asked, with surprise, why they had become Catholics. They answered that they are lost. Late Malik and his father-in-law came to me and informed me that they were pretending to be Catholics and if they do not soon receive the money promised, they would return to their Nestorian church. They added that there were in need of money. The church cannot feed us bread they added.

Another story, popular in Jilu village is this religious behavior. A small number of clever Jilu Assyrians are wandering in Russia and some in European countries pretending to be members of Jerusalem Brothers or another brotherhood. They collect money for themselves. These Assyrians speak many languages. I had met one of them who spoke very well French, Italian and Spanish. They had spent a long time in these countries as members of the Brotherhood of Jerusalem Catholics. In Mar Sava village, the priest of the village to entertain me he blessed the meal in Russian language and told me he had traveled in Russia for a long time as member of Jerusalem Brotherhood.

Industry

The Assyrians of Gulamarj are mainly busy working in farms and orchards. They brew wine, collect honey, and raise cattle. From the trees the main tree is walnut. Other trees are apple, berries, prunes, peaches, pears and pomegranates. Wine brewing is not much. What is brewed is sent out. Some is used by them. The honey is very sweet and pure, especially the honey of Qochanis.

Breeding and keeping sheep is the main industry. They raise a few goats. You will see two or three bulls. There are no horses and few donkeys. Mules are many because these animals are suitable for the mountainous terrain. They don't keep chickens because hens destroy vegetable gardens planted near their houses. They mainly grow corn, tobacco, rice, hemp and some wheat, millet, potatoes. The soil is fertile and the produce is very high.

Before the winter starts and all the field work has been done, men go to Mosul, Halab or Russia to earn some money. In the begging of April they return to their homes to start work on their farms. In Mosul they make baskets from the willow tree that grows in their land. They also transport goods by horse driven carts. The main occupation of Assyrians of Gawar is growing wheat and hemp.

History Of Maliks

According to Assyrian legend, a man from the family of Nebuchadnezzar, his name Mandu, went out from the city of Assyria. It is not clear from what city. He travels accompanied with four brothers, Barut, Yosip, Bakus and Essi. Mandu has promised that he would settle in a place where they could feed him head and shanks of a sheep. After a long trip Mandu and his brothers arrived at a place named Pachu. A poor man fed them head and shanks of a sheep. Mandu saw that he had reached his destination and decided to stay there and become the head of the town. He chose a good place opposite to the town which now is known as Zaraish. He built a house for himself. One day as Mandu was walking in the forest, he saw four birds he did not know from where they had come. He also saw a black stone and nearby a church whose door was closed. In his dream same night he saw the key to the door of the church and a chandelier buried under the black stone. Next day morning he went and picked up the key from under the

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black stone. He opened the church and entered into it and prayed. From that day that church has been a place for worship for all the residents of the town.

One day as Mandu was walking according to his habit, he saw a large cave filled with bones of men. He inquired and was told that men had escaped from Persians and had hid themselves in this cave. The Persians found the cave and lit a fire before the entry into the cave and the men in it were killed.

Around the town used to live some pagans who Mandu converted to Christianity. He killed those who refused to accept Christianity. Mandu did not kill known families and ordered them to go and live in a nearby town. They went as ordered. Their descendants still remain but have not increased. Each has remained one family only. Descendants of Malik Mandu became Maliks who also took the name of Mandu.

During one of the Maliks, Mar Shimon fled from Assyria. The Persians came and captured the place. They took Mar Shimon to Persia and permitted him to live in the town of Shinu. When Mar Shimon settled there, he built a big church. After a long time Malik Mandu rescued Mar Shimon from Persians and took him to the town of Zarnish. From that time for 60 years Mar Shimon lived in Zarnish town. The grave of one of them is in the town's cemetery. It is not clear why Mar Shimon left Zarnish and settled in Tirgonia town and later in Qochanish which was given to him as a gift by Malik Mandu. Mar Shimon did not stay long in Qochanish because the town was near Gulamarj and was under the rule of a Kurdish Mira. Therefore he was obliged to move to Dizen town.

Malik Mando was not pleased that Mar Shimon had left Qochanish. He conferred with the Kurdish Mirs of Gulamarj on how he could return Mar Shimon to Qochanish. He went to Dizen and burned Mar Mar Shimon's house. Later they collected money and built a house for him and invited him to Qochanish. In this way Mar Shimon was made to accept the invitation to go and settle in Qochanish.

The chair of Malik Mando was inherited by Malik Aron. He attacked the Kurdish Khirwat castle, took it and destroyed it. It was a big victory. Malik Aron was followed by another who took the name Mando. He also like former Maliks was a man of war. When there was a friction Malik Khubyar of Baz tribe he attacked the town and killed its inhabitants.

Malik Mando was followed by Malik Suleiman and during his time the Ottoman government thought it was necessary to put government men in these places. The government appointed local Rayis (chief) in each of Gulamerj, Gawar, Shamdinin (Shamsdin). These Rayis were trying in every way to prevent fighting between the Assyrian tribes. Therefore Malik Suleiman and Malik Shlimon who followed him, both had kept peace among the tribes.

Malik Shlimon was followed by Malik Warda. They say that he was bribed by Urmar, chief of a Kurdish tribe not to help the Assyrian tribes when Kurdish tribes attacked them. The Kurds attacked, plundered and killed and stole cattle. Malik Warda did not interfere to defend the Assyrian tribes that were attacked by Kurds.

Malik Eshu who followed Malik Warda attacked Assyrian tribes of Tkhumi and took away 2000 heads of sheep. At this time the tribes of Diz attacked Tkhumi occupied Kirsu lands and put cattle in their planted

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fields. Malik Eshu attacked the tribes of Diznayi, and took their cattle. He controlled their fields and collected their farming produce for himself.

Malik Eshu was followed by Malik Mirza. Nothing is known about this Malik. During the time of Malik Khalil who followed Malik Mirza, Kurdish tribes attacked Jilu tribes and took 2000 heads of sheep. Malik Khalil complained to Turkish government. Later he took 400 strong men from his tribe and 40 Turkish soldiers and attacked the Kurdish Urmar and forced him to pay to Malik Khalil 400 Liras, 682 sheep, seven mules, four cows, some carpets and other things. In 1909 Malik Khalil traveled to Europe to collect money. He was dressed in his native cloths and was introduced into the presence of the Pope. He explained to Pope that he was Malik of Jilu and added that there was no education in his country and requested Pope's permission to collect money to open schools. The Pope gave his permission and in a short time he collected 18,000 Manati and returned home where he began to build a school building. He again went back to Europe to collect money. It appeared that he was impersonating a Catholic monk in his travels in Austria. As I learned from the Austrian Consul, the Austrian government had arrested Malik Khalil as they suspected that he was collecting money in the name of the church but for himself and had requested the Consul to introduce him personally to Austrian government.

Zara Maliks

Malik Zamu is considered as the chief of Zara tribes. He and his brother Birji and his men had come from Tone the town of Tirnakhia and had settled in Talani village and from there he was expelled. Several Maliks inherited his chair as Maliks. One of the Maliks made family relations with one of the known families of Talani village by giving his daughter to one of their sons. From this family came a strong man Aro. Later Aro took control of Talani village as Malik. Other Maliks that followed him were Malik Gewargis the nephew of Malik Hama. Nothing is known about them.

Upper Tyari Maliks

The first Malik of Upper Tyari tribe is known as Malik Hormis. During his time the Khan of Gulamarj, Karem Khan, became chief of the Sodan-Baba. Karem Khan attacked the Assyrians of Upper Tyari. Malik Hormis and his men fled from the enemy. He found a safe place atop a mountain. They defended themselves for 20 days fighting ceaselessly against the attacking Kurds. After Karem Khan destroyed the villages of Upper Tyari he returned to his village. Malik Hormis came down and gathered all Assyrian men who had escaped from the Kurds and settled in Chamba village where Malik Hormis took care of the village until his death. Every year now they worship him and on Christmas day all the men and women of Upper Tyari assemble at his grave which to them is a holy place where they conduct funeral services. Near his grave other Maliks that followed him and died are buried.

Little known about the three Maliks that followed Malik Hormis, Maliks Kanawa, Benyamin and Yona but about Malik Ismail there is good memory. All Assyrian villages were again attacked by Kurds this time under the leadership of the Kurdish chief BadrKhan. After a three-day battle Malik Ismail was wounded. He fled up a high mountain and he thought that the Kurds could not harm him. Malik Ismail later came down from the mountain near a spring and began talking with Badr Khan Beg. By the end of their talk Badr Khan Beg requested that Malik Ismail accept Islam and if he did he would give him anything he wanted. Malik Ismail angrily answered that he would give him anything he wanted if Badr

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Khan accepted Christianity. When Badr Khan heard this, he signaled his men to kill him. Malik Ismail was thus killed.

Following Malik Ismail were Maliks Benyamin, Pittu, Gindu, Yaku. About these Maliks nothing is remembered. The last Malik is now Ismail. He is well educated and can read and write. A photograph was taken as his men, all armed, came to meet him offering sacrifices of sheep.

Lower Tyari

The first Malik of Lower Tyari tribe is considered to have been Odishu who together with Patriarch Mar Avraham Khan had raided Iranian border plundering and destroying. After one of his victories Mar Avraham Khan went to Constantinople and gets from the Turkish Sultan permission to mint money on the condition that he would build roads in Gulamarj district. Mar Avraham Khan carried out partially this condition.

The grave of Malik Odishu is in Salabagh village. Every year on the second day of Christmas religious services are held by the family of the Malik and by other families of the village. They come to his grave bringing various kinds of food and place them on Malik Odishu's grave. The priests would first pray and after the prayers they would sit around the grave and partake of the food. Up to the present day the tribe of Upper Tyari swears by the grave of Malik Odishu.

Malik Barkhu followed Malik Odishu. During his time the Kurds of Jezira Botan attacked Gulamarj and occupied it. Malik Barkhu joined with the leader of Kurdish tribe of Artush district of Betleshbab, Shakir, who helped the commander of Gulamarj. They attacked the Kurds of Jezira Botan and expelled them from the borders of Gulamarj.

Malik Barkhu was followed by Malik Odishu II who administered his lands peacefully. Even today his tribe point out to his grave in Salabag. Malik Odishu II was followed by Malik Daniel. He had planned to attack others. He attacked the leader of Barwar, destroyed the Qumri castle and returned with much booty. Pleased with the booty from Barwar, the villagers lived well and in peace for some time Malik Daniel built some roads.

Malik Daniel was followed by Malik Barkhu. During his time the Kurds of Chal raided his villages and looted Assyrian sheep. Malik Barkhu chased them and recovered the sheep. As he was under the influence of Catholic missionaries Malik Barkhu became Catholic. For this reason Mar Shimon removed him from the chair of Malik and replaced instead Malik Kashun. Malik Kashun up to the present time (1909) rules Lower Tyari tribes.

Maliks Of Tkhumi

The chief of Tkhumi tribe is known as Malik Shirinshah who had come from Assyria to Tkhumi together with other Assyrians. He saw a church in a forest which still stands and decided to settle near the church and live there. When he was settled he began to fight against the Yezidis who were in that area.

After Shirinshah came Malik Manu. During the time of Malik Manu, Kurds of Artush tribe attacked the

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village of Khan and Yezidis who lived there and killed many of them. The Yezidis were expelled and their lands were confiscated. Later the Artush Kurds began to kill Assyrians who had recently come and settled there. Malik Manu fought against them and protected his people.

Malik Manu was followed by Malik Oraham who joined with the leader of Gulamarj, Mir Matan, and attacked the Kurds of Badin near Mosul crushing and dispersing them. Later the leader of Gulamarj attacked the Kurds of Bardasori of Iran, crushed and looted them.

Malik Oraha was followed by Malik Lachin who returned his big attack on the Kurds of Chalm that is Mirza Agha and beat them on the Zab River. He was followed by Malik Dinkha who organized a force of three thousand men and attacked the Kurds of Artush crushed them and took rich booty.

Malik Dinkha was followed by Malik Gewargis who followed the example of Mali Dinkha and attacked the tribes of Artush. Malik Gewargis is still alive. (1909). He attacked several times the tribes of Artush and captured a large number of cattle. As he became emboldened by his victories against the Artush tribes he attacked the head of Urmar, Satu Agha who had robbed two thousand sheep from Assyrians and recovered them all.

The clans of Maliks here are divided into five families which are about seventy clans. It was therefore decided that the chair of Malik should be inherited but every three years the Malik must be elected from a person from one of the families most qualified to be Malik.

Maliks of Baz

It is said that the tribe of Baznayi had fled from the Assyrian cities and settled in Shiwala town in Artush district. They lived there a number of centuries and were constantly attacked by Kurds who wanted to come and settle in the district of Baz named after the name of the Assyrian tribe.

The earliest Malik of Baznayi whose memory is mentioned was Malik Yonan who repulsed the attacks by the leader of Pizan Kurds, Mustafa Beg.

After Yonan, came Malik Daryawush who was nicknamed, Darwish. He fought against the Kurds near the city of Mosul who had tried to attack and capture the Baz district. After repulsing the Kurds Malik Daryawush ruled freely over Baz district.

Malik Daryawush was followed by Malik Ayub who built the churches of Baz. After Malik Ayub came Malik Kanun. He attacked the leader of Gulamarj, Rashid Pasha and was killed in the battle field. Later, the new leader of Gulamarj, Abdullah Beg, agreed with Malik Solomon, and together attacked jointly the Kurdish tribes of Jezira Botan and inflicted on them heavy destruction but Malik Solomon was killed in the battle.

Malik Solomon was followed by Malik Shakha. Though he was from the family of Malik Yonan but he was from Shaota village. He did a great work by repulsing the attacks by the Kurds of Pinyanis.

Following Malik Shakha was Malik Yonan II. It should be remembered that Assyrian Maliks as Turkish

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subjects used to pay a sum of money as taxes to the leader of Gulamarj. Malik Yonan had however, not paid taxes for eight years and freely ruled his tribe. After meeting the leader of Gulamarj, Nuri Beg, in Khoi village, Yonan agreed to pay taxes to avoid bloodshed.

Malik Yonan was followed by Khoshaba who was Malik for nine years and was toppled by the leader of Gulamarj for not paying taxes and was fined nine mules.

Malik Khoshaba was followed by Malik Shakha II. During winter season, as it was a custom, men of the tribe were away from Baz working near Mosul. At this time Kurdish tribes of Pinyanis, Urmar and others raided Baz and looted its villages. In April when men returned home Malik Shakha gathered a strong army and attacked the Kurds killing 80 Kurds, looted them and returned home.

Malik Shakha II was followed by Odishu. The good thing this Malik did must be mentioned. He applied to the Turkish government and reduced the taxes from 60 Liras to 30.

After Malik Odishu other Maliks followed one after the other; Maliks Zatu, Shimon, Yaku, Yonan III and Eshai. These Maliks have not done anything worth mentioning. Today's (1909) is Malik Hormis who several times repulsed raids by Kurds of Urmar. This Malik, when it was necessary, could raise 900 volunteer fighters.

Maliks Of Tal

The tribe of Talyani explains the creation of the tribe's name in this way. Malik Aziz had a son whose name was Tal who used to study with the village's priest. One night when Tal was young the moonlight shined on him and he thought that it was daytime. He put on his new cloths ornamented with precious stones and went to the priest's house to study. The priest coveted the precious cloths of the boy and his daughter took them for herself. The priest killed the boy undressed him and buried him in his courtyard.

Tal's father searched for his son but could not find him. One day Malik Aziz was praying in the church, he saw a vision like a bird that flew into the church. The bird looked like his son. The bird was crying in human tongue saying that the priest had killed Tal and was buried in his courtyard. Malik Aziz requested that Tal's body be removed from the priest's courtyard. He did not kill the priest because he believed that Tal, as a martyr, had entered paradise and buried him in a field and on his grave he built a church which is called Mar Tal, the Martyr Church.

The Assyrian Family

The Assyrian houses one room and a larger one on top of it. The first floor is used for living in winter and the upper one for summer. The lower parts of the walls are plastered with mud. They are strong and can be kept clean. In one of the walls they have built an earthen stove and in the middle of the wall a fire place.

The door of the upper room is closed in winter by weaved branches of trees. In front of the room or in a corner is a small earthen oven (tanura) which looks like Armenian ovens but the difference is that the oven is not buried in the ground but stands on the ground about a half metre from the opening of the oven. The oven is about ten centimetres open. In this oven they bake bread from corn or wheat flour. They also

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cook their meals on this oven.

The houses of Maliks are not different except that one the first floor they have built in some houses another floor from which they can fire their guns against enemies from a higher ground. These houses have some small windows and openings from which the Malik can defend himself from the enemy. The Maliks have other houses besides their main house or opposite the house.

The house of Mar Shimon in Qochanis is similar to other houses. It is simple in beauty and architecturally. It has a room and before this room there is a large saloon and six smaller rooms. The first room is decorated by the horns of mountain deer which Mar Shimon himself hunted. Hunting for Assyrians here is a sport. The saloon is divided into two parts. In one part there is a settee in the middle of the saloon. The settee is covered with rugs. Mar Shimon, as did other previous Patriarchs sits on the settee. The men he receives kneel before him.

In the village houses there are no chairs and tables. All sit on their knees before a fire. When a guest arrives they place a carpet under him. Dinner is served to the guest in a copper plate or in other earthen plate and sometimes on the skin of a goat. It is worth mentioning the Assyrians do not throw the crumbs of bread like the Armenians so that the blessing on the house may not depart. Food is brought in a big earthenware plate. There are no spoons and all eat with their hands.

There are no photographs in any house. There is a wooden cross on a pillar of the first room. In the morning and evening the elderly members of the family stand before the cross and pray.

There is no house in which you will not find a latest rifle, daggers and bandoliers hanging from the wooden pillars or walls. In summer they build cabins from branches of trees. These cabins are placed or held up on trunks of trees. In summer to escape from insects they sleep in these cabins. These cabins are built near the village or near brooks.

The apse or chancel of the Assyrian churches has a courtyard and a door to the church. Inside, facing East is the temple which is separated by a curtain. On the right of the apse is a big tub for baptism. There are no pictures or statues. In the courtyard of the church are buried famous Assyrians of the village. The church has one door which opens in the courtyard and always facing north. The door is small. The church has no windows. The church is narrow and small and dark inside. The roof of the church, as the houses, is flat and plastered with mud. It has no sign of cross. The reason the door of the church is small and narrow so that the Turks and Kurds may not be able to pass cattle into it. Many times you will see small churches beside the main church. During summer they pray morning and evening in these small churches and no religious services are held. They have bells every where. The bell is hanged on the trunk of a tree attached to the wall of the church. No church has a tower for the bell.

It is worth mentioning that all the walls of a church are filled with cloths of men and women. If a person is sick he or she goes to the church, they pray and leave their cloths in the church. They believe by shedding their cloths the sickness will leave them. It may be that this custom recently has begun which is also practiced by Armenians. The Armenians however cut a piece of their cloth, tie it to a holy tree or on a cross made from rock in places of worship with the hope they will be cured from any disease.

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You will be surprised to see a small bell in front of the church. Those who come to the church ring the bell and enter the church. The Buddhists also do this so that they may draw the attention of God.

Clothes

The styles of Assyrian dresses are different from that of the Armenians and Kurds. Their cloths include a shirt embroidered, and a robe worn over the shirt, and a vest. Only vests are different from Armenian vests. The Assyrian vests are very similar to that of Kazakhs but have no sleeves and are made from wool felt. On the back and front of the vest wealthy men have them embroidered with golden thread. The vest covers the back and the sides but is open in the front to show the shirt. The vest is also worn by Armenians and Kurds in Hakkari region only. The outer robe is made from cloth and covers the sides and has long sleeves. The breast is buttoned by strings or buttons. Sometimes the front covering the breast is made open about three inches so that the embroidered shirt could be seen.

The hats of the Assyrians of Hakkari are white, conical, made from felt. They look similar to the hats on statues of men engraved on high mountains of ancient Assyrians and are considered to be the likeness of original Assyrians.

Majority of the Assyrians, young and old, have a curved dagger stuck behind them in their girdle. All Assyrians living in the mountainous regions wear some kind of shoes over their stockings. These shoes are made from wool and are soft, do not hurt the feet and not slippery when climbing mountains.

The men do not cut their hair and divide it into two or three braids which hang behind them. The priests and elderly men do not shave their beard. During holidays they decorate their hair with colored feathers and flowers. The women do the same and stick feathers and roses on their head kerchiefs. Women wear shirts which are similar to the shirts worn by Armenian women. On the shirt they wear a robe embroidered with golden thread at the hem. The shirt is underwear which is like a robe of honor or as a gift. It firmly covers the sides and is split from back downwards. The hem of the shirt is embroidered with red and green thread. The robe reaches and covers the feet. Its sleeves are also long and cover the arms. The sleeves near the hands are split and are embroidered with red and green thread. The robe is not buttoned. The sides of the robe are pulled together by string but the breast remains open. They make pockets on the sides of the robe. The robe is made of cotton cloth or silk.

The embroidered shirts are worn two or three on each other and on holy days four or five. In this way the embroidered hems can be seen as each shirt is shorter than the other. The shirts are multi-colored. The preferred color is red. The poor women wear vests similar to the vests worn by men. Women wear on their heads Fez, the Turkish style cap and the cap is wrapped by a thin cloth which is looks like muslin. The slip of cloth or ribbon is colored and embroidered. Their forehead is decorated by gold coins. Educated girls who have studied in Qochanis wear the Fez only. The girls and women braid their hair which is hanged behind their head. The women and girls of Qochanis do not wear their native style dresses but a style called Dera, a dress worn in monasteries. They put on their head the Turkish style Fez.

Mar Shimon, priests and other clerics wear the same style of cloth like ordinary men. Sometimes the Bishops and Mar Shimon wear a long robe in the church. This robe is only worn during religious services. The priests and deacons who conduct religious service wear this robe which reaches their feet. The

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deacons wear white robe which reaches their feet and is tied around them with a strip of red cloth like a belt.

During the last days of my stay here I presented a robe to Mar Shimon which was embroidered with golden threads and reached his feet. When I was in the monastery the Metropolitan complained to me against the new robe and he was of the opinion that the Patriarch Mar Shimon and all priests should wear same style of cloths.

Marriage

Assyrian young men marry between the age of fifteen and twenty and the girls at the age of twelve and 14 According to church law the marriage between two must be from four families apart and from relatives seven families. Assyrians marry from other nationalities who are Christian but not Muslims. They do not oblige a girl who marries an Assyrian to become Nestorian as they believe the Armenian Church is nearest to their own church. But if they marry a Protestant or Catholic girl, the church demands from her to promise to become Nestorian.

The wedding ring is blessed by a priest from the cradle just like the Armenian custom. The children when born are promised to each other and given a ring blessed by the priest with the promise that they will marry when they grow up. Rarely this promise is broken.

Divorce

Divorce is rare and only when the wife has been proved to have been unfaithful. Mar Shimon has the authority to grant divorce. If a wife is barren and the man keeps another woman, the community does not consider this act should be judged. However, the church objects to this behavior and does not give communion to the man and the woman and when they die they are not given a religious burial service. Children born out of wedlock are baptized.

The Bride

The boy or the girl is not asked if they are willing to get married. The parents decide. If a girl refuses, she elopes with her lover and flees away. The parents go after the couple and if they find them they are killed. If they are not found they are considered deserters and severe all relations with them. However, after a while they return to their village and reconcile with their families but the girl is not allowed a part of inheritance from her parents.

Meeting the Bride

The Assyrian girls enjoy full freedom; they meet boys and their families, when working in the fields or at the mountains. But if a boy wants to see for himself a bride, a woman, matchmaker, goes to the house of the girl and looks up and down at her in front of her family. The family knows why she has come and pretends not to know. If the matchmaker is pleased with the girl she adopts her informally as her daughter-in-law. If not, she just leaves. On the other hand if the family agrees to give their daughter to the boy for whom she is asking they treat her with respect but if not, they look coldly at her.

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Blessing The Ring

After the bride agrees to marry the boy, the family of the boy sends a man to formally ask if they agree to give their daughter in marriage to their son. If the answer is yes, then they invite a priest, a best man, and some close relatives and go to the house of the girl's family and ask formally for their daughter for their son.

The priest has asked the boy if he is willing that they ask for the hand of the girl to be his wife. If he indicates his willingness, the father and relatives, but not the lad, go to the house of the girl. Most of the time the family of the boy sends in advance wine, meat, and other kinds of food to the girl's family to be prepared for the dinner of the expected guests. After they had eaten the priest turns toward the father of the girl thanks him for the pleasant evening and asks, "Why you are not asking us why we have come?" The father answers saying that they are all welcome. "We are neighbors and friends. We should visit each other always." he said pretending that he knew nothing about the purpose of their visit.

The priest then says that they have come to ask for the hand of his daughter for their son. The father answers that the girl is not his but belongs to her mother. "She has raised her. Ask her," he says. When they ask the mother she says, "The girl is not mine but of her brother-in-law." He also passes her to the care of another and another of the relatives who finally return to the father. They say that her father knows to give her or not. "We have come here to eat and drink and have a good time. He knows to whom he wishes to give his daughter," the relatives say.

The father expresses his willingness to the priest. According to church law the priest then calls the girl and asks her if she agrees to marry the lad. If she says yes, the priest blesses the ring or gives her another gift.

Dowry

A few days or weeks later after the ring was blessed, the father of the bridegroom together with some relatives go to the house of the bride where some of her relatives have already gathered. After lunch the father of the lad and of the girl begin talking about the dowry. This talk lasts a long time in which relatives of both sides participate. Finally it is decided that the father of the boy should give as dowry three sheep, one ox, one gold lira and other things, and 250 piasters to the mother as payment for the milk she had fed her daughter.

The Wedding

From the day the hand of the girl was asked till the wedding day, the groom has no right to visit the bride. He can only see her secretly. During holy days the family of the lad send various gifts, mostly food, ornaments and dresses for the bride. A few days before the wedding the family of the bridegroom take the agreed dowry to the bride's family.

The bridegroom and the bride are taken by their friends to the bathroom led by musicians, zurna, dawula, pipe music and drum. Before the bridegroom enters the bathroom the barber gives him a haircut and shaves his beard. The barber is not paid as the Armenians do. Then they choose who will lead the wedding dances. Each man invited to the wedding has brought a gift. The one whose gift is the biggest is

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given the right to lead the dancing party. The gifts brought by the guests are given to the dance leader who in turn, from time to time, as they dance, gives a gift to a person who has brought a gift to the bride and the bridegroom. The gifts usually are chickens, sheep, wheat, etc.

Just like the Armenians and Kurds, the Assyrians give gifts on other occasions such as when one of them travels away from the village. The gifts usually are wheat, sheep, oxen and they expect to be paid back

Next day the bride's relatives and friends assemble in her father's house. The bridegroom's family and friends accompanied by music, zurna and dawula, carry the dresses prepared by the bridegroom's family for marriage ceremony. The bride's friends dress her to the music and songs. One of the relatives of the bridegroom gives a present to the bride wraps it on her back. Then the face of the bride is uncovered and she is taken to the church. The priest blesses the kerchief and replaces it on her head covering her face.

The bridegroom's friends accompanied by music and firing of guns, take him to the church. They leave him with the best man and follow the bride's group. The wife of the best man takes the right hand of the bride and the sisters of the bridegroom her left hand. They walk her three times around a fire and take her to stand on the right of the groom. The best man stands on his left side. After the end of dancing the bride stands on the left of the bridegroom because God made a woman from left rib of Adam to be his wife. The priest blesses the coronet (clela) and places it on the bride's head. He ties them together in the shape of a cross meaning that the bridegroom and his bride are firmly tied together. The priest again takes the ribbon which tied them together and the cross, dips them in bowl filled with wine and offers them to the groom and the bride. He takes the cross out of the bowl and gives it to the groom and puts the ring on the small finger of his right hand.

The best man holds high a *jumlana*. This is two sticks on a frame in the shape of a cross. On it are fruits and apples.

After the marriage ceremony, the married couple leaves the church. They are showered with raisins, small coins, rifle fire, singing and dancing. They proceed to the house of the groom. As the couple passes the house of one of the relatives, they are showered from the roof with raisins and nuts. As they enter the house they are given coffee or fruit juice.

When they reach the door of the house, the groom dances. He and the best man climb on the roof followed by friends. The groom is armed. The bride as she arrives at the door she stops as if she does not want to enter the house, the groom takes from the *jumlanaa* an apple and throws it from the roof at the bride. At this time the mother of the groom comes out of the house and gives a gift to the bride. She kisses her and leads her into the house. As the groom throws apples young men try to catch them as the apples have been blessed and considered holy.

They bring out a plate filled with oil. The bride dips her finger in the oil and brushes the oil on the door of the house. This is an indication that the entry into the house may bring blessing.

As they enter the house the bride sits on a chair and a child is brought and put on her lap. This has a meaning that the first child be a boy.

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Singing and dancing last three days. Almost all guests bring food in the morning and evening and all eat together.

The groom and his friends start making jokes to entertain the guests. A man takes a lad to the king (groom) and is accused of theft. The king fines the thief and the fine is placed on the table before the groom. The fine may be wine or a chicken or food.

On the last day of the wedding, which sometimes is on the fourth day or even seventh day, guests bring to the house of the groom some kind of bread called chadi especially made by Assyrians. The chadi are placed on top of each other on a large plate and around them they lit candles. A young man takes the plate and goes to the father of the bridegroom and presents the chadi to him. On this last day a very good lunch is given and the chadi are divided among the guests.

After they have eaten *jumlana* is auctioned. The best man or another man announces that the king has been toppled from his throne therefore his garden (jumlana) is being sold. Whoever wants to buy it can do so. Bidding begins. One man bids one Majid (Iranian money), another two. Bidding continues and finally it is sold to the highest bidder. The money and gifts are presented to the bridegroom. The man who gets the jumлана picks all the apples on it and gives them to the guests. The sell of the jumлана and the gifts sometimes covers all the expenses of the wedding.

On the day the jumлана is sold the bridegroom and the bride enter their bedroom. Some women sit in the sitting room eating and drinking, waiting to find out if the bride was virgin.

Family Life

A family in Tyari and Tkhumi is composed about forty members: fathers, mothers, sons and their wives, children and grandchildren. The organization of such a large family appears to be similar to that of the Armenians. The head of the family is the elder father. He decides the distribution of the gifts a bride received when she comes into the family house. When the father dies his younger brother or his eldest son take over his place as head of the family.

The administration of the life at home is the responsibility of the wife of the head of the family. She is responsible for everything at the home. She gives work to the daughters and her daughters-in-law. The daughters-in-law, just like the Armenians, have no right to speak to their father-in-law, mother-in-law and brother-in-law. The women do not eat together with men but separately when the men have finished their meal.

The Assyrian woman has very high morals and has worked to keep her family admirably. When the husband is away from the village the wife does all the work at home and in the field. She brings on her back grass from the field, firewood and water from the spring. She does the cooking and bakes the bread. The wives of the Maliks do the same.

The education of the children is fighting only when they are nine or ten years old. They are given bows and arrows and send out to hunt birds. When the boy has grown up he is given a dagger which he always keeps with him.

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No Assyrian is without a gun. When they grow and become lads they go to the church with their rifle on their shoulder where they show their skill in rifle shooting. There is no horse riding in Gulamarj district because, first, there are no horses and secondly, there are no roads. Mules are the only animals used for carrying loads.

Birth And Baptism

Pregnant women promise that if they have a son they will offer him to serve the church. But if they have a daughter a sum of money or in kind they will give to the church as a gift. When the child is born it is immediately bathed in cold water and sprinkled with salt and wrapped in cloths. They have learned from what Prophet Khezkiel wrote: □On the day you were born your biblical cord was not cut, you were not washed in water and you were not wrapped in cloths.□

A son brings more happiness to a family than a daughter. Just like Armenians when a boy is born all boys quickly go to the relatives of the newly born boy, bless him and receive gifts.

Baptism

According to custom the child is baptized on the seventh day of its birth. One day before baptism, the godfather is informed and in the morning he goes to the mother of the child and takes with him a sheep if he is wealthy. He takes the child and gives it to his wife and together they go to the church. If the godfather is well to do he requests a priest to conduct religious service and another priest to baptize the child. After baptism, the godfather and godmother, without the priest take the child with lit candles and deliver it to the mother. She takes the child and puts it her side or in the cradle. Later, dinner is served to all members of the family.

The child is kept at daytime in the cloths it was baptized. On the eight day of the birth, the godmother comes and smears the child with the oil the priest had blessed the child. The water in which the child was bathed is thrown in the river or at a clean place. After this, the child is bathed again and dressed in new cloths. The mother who has given birth to a son she remains in bed for 40 days and if to a daughter, 60 days. All this time she is separated from her husband. She does not leave the house and she takes her meals alone, does no work because she is considered as unclean. After 40 or 60 days she takes a bath, baths her child and goes to the church and takes a gift for the priest. The gift may be a piece of cloth, incense, oil, or money. The priest prays on her and on her child.

When the son takes his first step the family showers on him raisins, roasted pistachios and the children gathered on the occasion pick them.

Burial Of The Dead

When a man dies, some men come, close his eyes, put his hands on his breast and straiten his feet. If the eyes of the dead person keep open they say that he is waiting the return of a relative. They put the body of the dead person facing East and under his feet they burn incense in an earthen plate. The relatives come and bring a priest. The priest after reading from the Bible makes a cross of wood and puts it in a pot filled

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with clean water and orders the water be warmed.

The Saaura (sextan) of the church or some other man, if the deceased is a male, bathes him. If it is a female, a woman bathes her. First they wash the index finger of the right hand with blessed water and mark his head with the sign of cross. Then they wash his right side with water and soap. After that the left side and arm are washed with water blessed by the priest. The remaining water is put in a tub and the rest is thrown. The cross is then taken out of the pot and placed in the tub. At the side of the pot a candle is lit and a pot is placed over it so that it would remain for three days burning. They dress the deceased in a shirt and trousers made from felt. His feet, back and arms are tied with felt but his face is left open but covered with a handkerchief. They tie two long sticks like a stretcher and put on it the body of the deceased and are covered with a shroud. Rich men sometimes have coffins made for members of the families who died. Then the priest, male and female members of the family assemble. The stretcher is taken up and down three times and is then taken to the cemetery. The priest and the deacon lead the procession and after them follow the stretcher on the shoulders of four men. Rich men ahead of the stretcher have a horse on which the saddle is put straight not like the Armenians who put the saddle in the reverse.

The Assyrians put on the back of the horse a colored piece of cloth, some, who lead the stretcher to the cemetery are armed with a sword or other weapon but held in reverse. When they reach a certain point the stretcher is put on the ground. Women gather around the stretcher and weep. They allow the women to cry as they say their tears would wet the earth where the deceased is buried and he will be uncomfortable in his new place. Half way to the cemetery the women return to the house of the deceased. The men raise and lower the stretcher three times and proceed to the cemetery. When the corpse is lowered into the grave the priest takes a handful of earth, and all the men do the same. The corpse is lowered into the grave and the priest blesses the earth in his hand and throws it into the grave. The corpse is then taken out of the shroud and is lowered into the grave. The shroud is taken back, washed and made ready for re-use.

After the deceased is buried men express their condolences to the relatives of the departed person and return to a river or spring if here is nearby a river. The priest reads from the Bible on the waters of the river or spring. But if there is no river or spring, the priest requests waters are brought from home. After religious services men wash their hands and face and go to the church.

If the deceased was rich the priest performs full religious service. If not, he proceeds to the family house where lunch is served to all who attended the burial ceremony prepared by the relatives of the deceased. After lunch condolences are expressed to members of the family and they return to their homes.