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Continuing Kurdish Denial of Iraqi Assyrians and Their Plight

Posted GMT 5-18-2006 17:35:30

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(AINA) -- In the continuing genocide against the Assyrian nation, Kurdish author Diayako Xarib desires to silence the last remaining independent voice of the Assyrian people, shouting for justice from the West. The majority of Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) now reside in Western countries because living with their Muslim neighbors may have meant their total annihilation. They fled massacre after genocide, perpetrated by their neighbors, the Arabs, Turks, and Kurds¹. Assyrians, unlike many Western Muslims, tend to assimilate more quickly into their host Western countries because they don't harbor any ill will towards the West or carry with them any cultural traditions that clash with Western civilization and modern norms. Assyrians, on the contrary, have deep pride in and staunchly defend their host countries.



In his [article](#) published on Saturday, May 13, 2006 in Kurdishmedia.com, Mr. Xarib asks the question "Is there an Assyrian cause in Iraqi Kurdistan?" The reader quickly learns the author's intent and obvious answer to his own question. He writes "Since the collapse of Saddam, we are hearing more and more Assyrian claims of abuse, and other conducts done to them by Kurds. It is a small fanatic group that desperately fabricates all kinds of propaganda against Kurds and the recent inaugurated Kurdish government." It seems the author has been reading the releases published by the Assyrian International News Agency (www.aina.org) and other similar web outlets attempting to cover current issues concerning their brethren, by some miracle, still clinging to their homeland. This small group of activist Diaspora Assyrians serves an even more crucial role, which is to sound the alarm whenever their defenseless brethren are jailed unjustly, murdered or locked out of "free and fair" elections, to name just a few examples. Who else would fill their shoes in this role, Kurdish government officials who have yet to convict a single guilty Kurd for the murder of an Assyrian, Western politicians steered by lobby groups, or Western media run by corporations?

Mr. Xarib writes "The Question here is: Is there really an Assyrian problem in Kurdistan or it is again another minority that desperately wants to grab a piece of Iraqi power cake?" In the bizarre and twisted reality of Iraq, the indigenous people of Mesopotamia (including Iraq), driven to the brink of extinction by genocide, are today humiliatingly reduced to just "another minority" seeking power. This by the Kurds no less, who have been painted as the victims of the Middle East, instead of genocide deniers and occupiers, which in fact, they are. Thanks to the same Western lobby groups paid by the billions of dollars the Kurds have reaped from northern Iraq's natural resources and border tariffs which they've controlled since the Safe Haven was established. Also thanks to the U.S. Administration and its allies eager to topple Saddam and find in Iraq their "Northern Alliance".

Mr. Xarib introduces us to the Assyrians as follows: "There has been a nation living in Syria and Anatolia since thousands of years called The Arameans. These Arameans have many world heritages on their name, despite their anonymity in the west." Xarib conveniently ignores the fact that the ancient Aramaeans settled in Assyria (northern Iraq) during the neo-Assyrian Empire and became an integral part of that government and society. While Kurdish intellectuals trace the multi-linguistic Kurds to whichever ancient peoples (most notably the Medes) that will benefit their cause, Mr. Xarib insists that Assyrians are actually the remnants of only one ancient people, the Aramaeans, who are according to him, from Syria and Anatolia (not Iraq). Learned Assyrians do not deny that the Aramaeans of Assyria are a part of our genetic makeup and cultural history. The modern Syriac language in its two dialects (Eastern and Western) is rooted in Aramaic and is a distinct Aramaic dialect which developed in Assyria. The neo-Assyrian empire adopted the Aramaic language and with great success spread it to the entire Near East. No doubt it is in the interest of the Kurds to purge Assyrians from history so that their occupation of Assyria will be all the more digestible to the rest of the world.

In that effort, Mr. Xarib continues, "It was that time [15th century] that many Arameans left their East-Nestorian church for the catholic stream. This happened under influence of money and support of the Vatican. Their church was named the Chaldean church (this name has nothing to do with the ancient Chaldeans)." Some of this is true but the most important part is not. The Chaldean church, a Uniate of the Roman Catholic Church, was born in the 16th century in 1553. The Roman Catholic Church took advantage of the weak state of and turmoil in the Church of the East at that time and invented a new church for a small group of the Assyrian people, naming it Chaldean, as distinct from Assyrian, as the Church of the East was called "the Church of Assyria (Athur)". Similarly, today, the Chaldean church is called by its own priests "the Church of Chaldea (Kaldu) and Assyria (Athur)". The Chaldean church did not come into its own until much later in the 18th century, with the help of Kurdish chieftains who saw the Church of the East as the biggest threat to their conquest of the Assyrian highlands in northern Iraq up to the Hakkari Mountains in southeastern Turkey. It was to the Church of the East that the semi-independent and fierce fighting

Assyrian tribes belonged. The Assyrian tribes and districts of Tyari, Jeelu, Baz, Tkhuma, and Diz, in Hakkari, were at least as powerful as the Kurdish tribes of the Hakkari region in the 18th century, according to British military personnel who first visited the area.

Recent history is replete with Kurdish brutality and treachery committed against their Assyrian neighbors. But a few relatively recent examples are the Bedr Khan Beg massacres of Assyrians in the mid-1840's, the Assyrian (and Armenian) genocide of 1915-1918, where the Ottoman Turks mostly delegated the extermination of all of the Ottoman Empire's Assyrians to their Kurdish allies, and the invitation and cold-blooded murder of the Patriarch of the Church of the East, HH Mar Benyamin Shimun in 1918, by the Kurdish Chieftain Ismael Agha (aka Simku), who is today considered a hero by Kurds.

Mr. Xarib's version of the Assyrian identity is also simplistic and misinformed. He writes "As a counter-attack, the protestant church started to send missionaries to the rest of the Jacobite and Nestroian (sic) Arameans. We can definitely confirm that A. Grant, who was a protestant missionary, introduced the concept of the left Arameans being the descendants of ancient Assyrians, as an answer to the newly converted Arameans to Catholicism and adopting the Chaldean name." How he can "definitely confirm" this remains a mystery to the reader. Why didn't the Protestant Church create a new Protestant Assyrian Church at that time then, to counter the recently created Chaldean Catholic Church? What of the fact that Assyrians speak a dialect of Aramaic rooted in the Imperial Aramaic of Assyria and richly developed in the major Syriac centers of Nisibis and Edessa, which are a stone's throw away from Harran, a major city of the neo-Assyrian Empire? What of the Christian traditions rooted in ancient Assyrian "pagan" rituals, such as Nusardil, or the commemoration of the Rogation of the Ninevites by all of the Syriac Churches? What of the Akkadian words found in the modern Assyrian language (both dialects)? The list goes on but this shows the simplicity and ignorance with which Mr. Xarib, and many others, have treated this issue, often to suit their own devious agendas.

Mr. Xarib continues, "We can conclude Grant's unprofessional and speculative theories, from his book "The Nestroians of lost tribes" (sic)... Grant refers to a group of Arameans as the descendants of ancient Assyrians and being one of the ten lost tribes of Israel." We agree with Xarib that Grant's theory to tie Assyrians with the lost tribes of Israel amounts to biblical wishful thinking, although his motive is more than likely related to the Kurds' status as Israel's latest favorite non-Arabs in the neighborhood. Mr. Xarib further writes "We all know the tribes of Israel suffered the most from Assyrian rule and they were fierce enemies of each other." Mr. Xarib is apparently trying to draw ire from the Jewish community against Assyrians. He reveals his own wishful thinking by adding, "Beside all the accounts that tell us the total destruction of Assyria by the Medes." A statement easily debunked by today's Assyriologists, who tell us that not all the cities were destroyed and that the royalty and military would have taken the brunt of the violence. They also tell us that eventually the descendents of the Assyrians converted to Christianity. It was also an alliance that defeated Assyria, not just the Medes. But for propaganda purposes, Mr. Xarib desperately wants the Jews to know that it was the Kurds' alleged ancestors who destroyed those ancient Assyrian brutes and saved the Jews. After the fall of Assyria the ancient Israelites continued to be conquered and the temple of Jerusalem destroyed. Babylon, Assyria's sister kingdom, was also conquered by the Persians shortly after the fall of Assyria.

Mr. Xarib writes "But we know their language is Aramean (Suriyani) which is totally different than ancient Assyrian language, beside the recent history of this term. But unfortunately many Kurds and Arabs know so little about history let alone the capitalist and commercially minded westerners." It's hard to believe that anyone can make this argument when history tells us that the Aramaeans settled in Assyria proper and the neo-Assyrian Empire adopted Aramaic and diligently spread it throughout the Near East. The nomadic Aramaean tribes were persistent and their continued raids into wealthy Assyria eventually netted them a seat at the Assyrian banquet, including many government positions, especially as scribes. The influence of the Alphabetic Aramaic language upon Assyria and the rest of the Near East are undeniable and at the same time impossible without the effort of neo-Assyrian administration. Why doesn't Mr. Xarib explain how the Kurds, who speak multiple Iranian languages and dialects, can rightfully lay claim to areas outside of historically Iranian territory?

Mr. Xarib claims that Assyrians are named so merely because "people in middle East mostly refer to people to their region, like someone from Kirkuk, was named Kirkuki whether he was, Kurd, Turkmen or Aramean... The term [Athur/Assyria] has no any (sic) relation with the ancient Assyrians and the modern Assyrians." This statement is not only ludicrous at face value but also fails to explain why the name Assyrian, in several languages, has stuck to these people whether they be from Mosul, Hakkari, Tur-Abdin, Urmia, or any number of Assyrian towns and villages spread across hundreds of miles in the vast region known as Mesopotamia. Why weren't the Muslim inhabitants of Assyria labeled Assyrians? How can the name Assyrian be used for the people of Assyria and yet the two be unrelated?

Mr. Xarib writes, "This claim of an existing Assyrian nation that is supposed to be the real heritor (sic) of what is now Iraq is obviously void." The only thing that's clear is why this would be obvious to a nationalist Kurd wanting to finalize the occupation and conquest of Assyrian lands. Mr. Xarib continues, "But nevertheless that does not mean that the Arameans does not have any history and claim of Iraqi territory." Obviously, especially since the Aramaeans settled in the area millennia before the Kurds invaded it in the 16th century. Not to mention the indigenous people of Assyria whom Assyriologists say continued to live on their farms and in their towns and villages in Assyria and eventually converted to Christianity.

Mr. Xarib writes "The case of supposed-Assyrians is just a political manoeuvre, and one of the last pep drugs that this nation is using to survive being at the edge of extinction." Assyrians cherish their Assyrian identity not because of any political maneuvering but because every human being thirsts for the knowledge of his/her roots. Assyrians are no different and have put in more time studying their own language and history than anyone else. Xarib then accuses Assyrians/Chaldeans of massacring Kurds by being associated with the Baath party. No doubt some Assyrians/Chaldeans were in the Baath party since it was mandatory to get employment in Saddam's Iraq. Many Kurds were also members in the Baath Party, but somehow that fact escapes Mr. Xarib. Not to mention that Xarib would be hard-pressed to come up with any evidence whatsoever that Assyrians helped anyone in the massacre of Kurds.

Mr. Xarib claims that "by examining claims by western officials and human right watch committees, you can see there is no real basis for these claims." When in fact it's the opposite. Western sources have confirmed assassinations and murders of Assyrians by Kurds and deliberate voter lockout by Kurdish parties against the Assyrians of the Nineveh plain. In the latest effort to ensure future Assyrian votes for the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), a string of events have been occurring such as establishing a Christian-centric TV station by a soon-to-be Assyrian minister in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which has recently been trying to divide the Assyrian community along sectarian lines, and the rumored twenty million dollar donation by the KDP to facilitate the relocation of the Patriarchal seat of the Assyrian Church of the East, back to northern Iraq.

Mr. Xarib admits, "Still we have to acknowledge that there are some atrocities happening these days to Assyrians and happened in the last 15 years. But it never happened because they were Assyrian!" Why stop at the last 15 years? What about the Turkish-Kurdish perpetrated Genocide that annihilated the majority of the Assyrian nation and drove out the rest from their ancestral districts before that? Saddam also destroyed hundreds of Assyrian villages in northern Iraq. The Kurds continued his practice of intimidation and murder to forcibly take Assyrian land and property and claim it as their own. They continued the process of political marginalization to render Assyrians defenseless against all manner of thievery and injustice. These things just happened because Assyrians were fighting for their lives, their rights, their property, their language, and their culture. If Mr. Xarib wants to separate those from the Assyrian identity, good luck to him. Xarib claims that these acts are occurring because of "some Kurdish mobs and mafia tribal figures" or "criminal and blood thirsty Kurds" and that "it is not legitimate to claim it as a Christian or an Assyrian issue." When those mafia tribal figures go as high as the highest ministers in the KRG, then this becomes a moot point. When the issue becomes Assyrian land or Assyrian seats in the government, for example, then how can it not be an Assyrian issue?

After making the ridiculous accusation that Assyrians massacred Kurds during Saddam's reign, Mr. Xarib writes, "There were even [Kurdish] tribes that collaborated with Saddam to murder their fella Kurds and even helped in the infamous Anfal campaign." By this is he referring to the time when the KDP chief Masoud Barazani in 1996 invited Saddam to murder his fellow Kurds in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan? With such glaring examples pointing at the highest levels of Kurdish government, then the excuse that it was just some tribes becomes meaningless and surreal.

Mr. Xarib writes "There are Christians in Kurdistan that are wealthier and powerful than many Kurds. And Christians who are high officials and very respected politicians in Kurdistan. And for the average and normal Kurdish citizens, there have never been any hatred and discrimination against Christian (Assyrian or Chaldeans)." A few token Assyrian politicians doing the KDP's bidding and unable to defend Assyrian rights doesn't excuse expropriation of historically Assyrian lands and their incorporation into a "Kurdistan" which by all accounts is diligently planning for its complete independence from Iraq as soon as plausible. In light of such plans, the reasons for the ravenous land grab become all too clear.

Mr. Xarib claims that "Many Kurds in Diaspora are just shocked by the hatred of Some Assyrians towards them." Perhaps it's because as Xarib admits, that the Kurds don't know their own history and are shocked to hear it for the first time. Perhaps it's that the most blood-thirsty Kurdish Chieftains (e.g. Bedr Khan Beg and Ismael Agha "Simku") are polished into heroic historical Kurdish figures. Perhaps it's because of leading Kurdish authors who sweep history under the rug and continue to deny Kurdish atrocities upon their Assyrian neighbors. Such authors are hoping for their victims to finally disappear so no one will be left to challenge their version of history. The Kurds are gambling that their luck will be better than that of the Germans or the Turks.

Mr. Xarib mocks the children of Assyrians in the West and claims they know not where they came from and hopes "this desperate group of Diaspora Christians return back." Xarib knows a million Diaspora Assyrians would not suddenly return to corrupt and backwards Islamic-run lands after knowing the freedom the West has to offer a hard-working and humble people. Mr. Xarib ends his ill-willed piece with "They are not aware from the repercussion and the alienation that it will eventually affect their community in Kurdistan." This has become the usual not-so-veiled threat from Kurds of harm befalling the defenseless Assyrians in their unfortunate homeland, if they continue to speak out.

¹ See here for Kurdish violence against Assyrians: [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#).