

ANCIENT ASSYRIA

Our story unfolds in ancient times when the mighty Assyrian Empire held sway over almost the entire Middle East. The ancient city of Assur (Ashur) had risen to power in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) and between the twentieth and fifteenth centuries B.C.E., established its sway over many of the surrounding lands. There ensued a period of decline lasting for five hundred years, after which Assur regained its strength and began a victorious period of expansion that culminated under King Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.E.). At that time Assyrian rule embraced the entire Fertile Crescent, a territory that includes modern Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian territories, as well as parts of Turkey, Iran, and Egypt.

Between 612 and 606 B.C.E., Nineveh, the empire's capital, fell to the Babylonians, as the empire crumbled under the combined attacks of the Babylonians and Median tribes from Persia. But the Assyrian people did not vanish, living on under the Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, Romans, and others and left a significant mark in the annals of ancient history. Their achievements in city building, the military arts, and especially writing, contributed to the development of Near Eastern civilization. Babylonian rule was not severely disruptive of Assyrian culture because the two groups shared common origins. The Assyrians provided many soldiers and officers for the great Persian Empire, fighting at the famous Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.E. (among others). By 323 B.C.E., the Persian Empire had fallen to Alexander the Great, and Assyrians came under Hellenistic rule. Their language, formerly the region's lingua franca, spoken by Jesus and used in the creation of the Babylonian Talmud, gave way to Greek and became marginalized. Imperial Rome was next to rule the Fertile Crescent and adjacent lands; located therein, the Assyrian lands were subject to frequent invasion by the Persians, Mongols and others. Gradually the Assyrians all but disappeared from the pages of history.



The Assyrian Empire at its peak
The Assyrian Empire began to rise in the 13th century B.C.E. and lasted until the beginning of the 7th century B.C.E. It included large parts of the Middle East and Egypt.



King Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.E.)
Ashurbanipal was the last great ruler of the Assyrian Empire. He is known for establishing the first systematically organized library in the Middle East, for his numerous military victories, and for his remarkable cruelty toward conquered kings and their subjects.



Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire (reconstruction)
The prosperous center of empire, the city of Nineveh appears many times in the Bible.



Royal inscription of Ashurbanipal, ca. 646 B.C.E.
In ancient times the Assyrians used the cuneiform script, which survived until the third century C.E.



King Ashurbanipal hunting



Ashurism

The Assyrian's early religion was called Ashurism. The feathered archer figure superimposed over a winged sun depicts the supreme god Ashur.



Ashurbanipal accepts conquered kings and loot



Landscape of Assyrian lands

ASSYRIANS: INTO MODERN TIMES

Along with Armenians and Ethiopians, the Assyrians were among the first people to accept Christianity. According to tradition, as early as 33 C.E., the Assyrian Church of the East was established in Mesopotamia by Saint Thomas the Apostle, Saint Mari, and Saint Addai. The Chaldean, Syriac-Orthodox, and Syriac-Catholic Churches were established in the following centuries. Following the split in the Christian Church in 1054, all followed the Eastern Orthodox tradition. With the Arab conquests following the death of the prophet Muhammad in the seventh century C.E., the Assyrians fell under Muslim domination.

The Assyrians nevertheless succeeded in preserving their language and many of their customs. They played a significant role in the agriculture, crafts, and trade of the region. A national identity in the modern sense began to develop with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire as a result of World War I and with the ensuing emergence of nation-states in the region, and also in part as a result of the Turkish genocide of the Armenians and their massacre of Assyrians, known to the latter as the *Seyfo*, in 1915 and the following years. The Assyrians were led by catholicoses from the Mar Shimun family who became their de facto political leaders. Hoping to earn support for eventual autonomy, Assyrian levies played a prominent role serving the British after Britain obtained the League of Nations' mandate over Iraq in 1920. While most Assyrians also known as Nestorians, Chaldeans, Jacobites, and Suryani lived in Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey and surrounding countries, out-migration during the rest of the twentieth century created a considerable Assyrian diaspora. By the end of the century there were Assyrian communities in the United States, Canada, Russia, Sweden, Germany, Brazil, Australia, and elsewhere. Despite their dispersion, the Assyrians maintained their identity, and many continued to hope for autonomy or even independence in their ancestral lands.



Caravaggio, "The Incredible of St. Thomas"
Traditionally St Thomas is considered to be a founder of the Assyrian Church



Assyrian flag
Assyrian leaders created the Assyrian flag in 1918, which includes the ancient national symbol of the god Ashur.

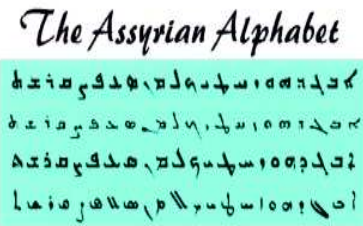
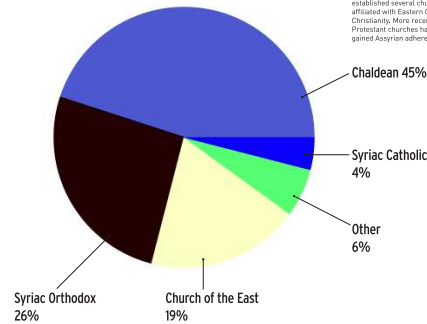


Assyrian levies
The British used Assyrian levies to carry out police duties while Iraq remained under their dominion. During World War II these levies played a role in preventing Iraq from falling to Nazi Germany.



Assyrian warriors
Assyrian warriors served many different rulers, and sometimes established militias to protect their own folk.

Assyrians by religious affiliation
After their conversion to Christianity, the Assyrians established several churches affiliated with Eastern Orthodox Christianity. More recently, Protestant churches have gained Assyrian adherents.



"The Assyrian alphabet originated in the Phoenician script, as did the Hebrew alphabet. The Assyrians spoke Assyrian Akkadian and Aramaic, Semitic languages related to Hebrew and Arabic. Today they speak Assyrian, the modern version of Assyrian Akkadian and Aramaic."



Assyrian Costume

SIMELE MASSACRE



Commemorative symbol of the massacre

The Assyrian text says "August," while the number seven holds a special philosophical significance in Assyrian religious practice

In 1932, Iraq received independence under King Feisal. Under their spiritual leader Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII, the Assyrians demanded autonomy, which in fact had been promised by the Allies after WWI, within the new state. Assyrian soldiers theretofore in British service began to form a militia. In June 1933, Mar Shimun arrived in Baghdad for negotiations, upon which he was detained and exiled to Cyprus. Many Assyrians wanted to leave Iraq, but there was no place to go. In early 1933, a group of Assyrian who had been denied asylum in Syria crossed the border back into Iraq. The vast majority were unarmed, but the Iraqi government sent troops to attack them, during which there were casualties on both sides. In partial consequence, troops were dispatched to the northern part of the country, where most of its Assyrians lived.

In early August 1933, Iraqi troops began an assault on Assyrian settlements in the area of Dohuk and Mosul. The soldiers committed terrible atrocities against unarmed men, women, and children. Sixty-three Assyrian villages were destroyed, at the cost of some three thousand lives. Thousands of refugees fled into neighboring countries.



The 1933 Simele Massacre

There are no photographs of the massacre, but this recent painting expresses the tragedy.



Area in Iraq affected by the massacre and destruction

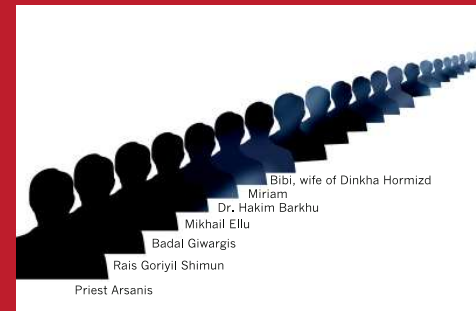
"I saw and heard many horrible things in the Great War, but what I saw in Simele is beyond human imagination."

—From a secret report of a British eye witness in the service of the Iraqi government, 1933

List of targeted villages								
Ala Keena	Bameri	Beterashy	Darke	Gond Naze	Kaserezzen	Korekavana	Majel Makho	Sirchuri
Aloka	Barcawa	Betafroy	Dair' Kath'nik	Harkonda	Kerry	Kowashoy	Rabbylia	Shekhidra
Bada'liya	Barokhkey	Bidari	Derjendy	Idlib	Kitba	Laaga	Rokawa	Spendarook
Badenden	Basorik	Bowaya	Fishkhabour	Kaberto	Khalata	Mansourliya	Sar Shorey	Tal' Zet
Bageroy	Bastkey	Carbeli	Garvaly	Karpei	Kharab Koli	Mawani	Sezary	Tei Khish
Bakhimey	Bonarangoe	Chem Johaney	Gereban	Karshen	Kharsheniya	Qasar' Yazdin	Sidzari	Zeniyat

Assyrian villages devastated by the Iraqi army

Up to sixty-five Assyrian villages were assaulted, the majority reduced to rubble.



Bibi, wife of Dinkha Hormizd
Miriam
Dr. Hakim Barkhu
Mikhail Ellu
Badal Giwargis
Rais Goriyil Shimun
Priest Arsanis

Names of the victims

About 2,000 Assyrians were killed in the massacre. Some can be identified by name, others remain anonymous. No photographs survive.



A group of refugees, among them an elderly man blind to most of his family, near Baghdad, immediately after the massacre, August 1933.

Detail: Courtesy of Reuters Agency



Refugees standing in a line

Detail: Courtesy of Reuters Agency

"Men, women, and children were massacred wholesale most barbarously by rifle, pistol and machine gun fire. Groups of Assyrians were tied up with ropes and shot down by regular and irregular troops... Priests were killed and their bodies mutilated, Assyrian women were violated and killed. Holy books were destroyed and Assyrian villages set on fire. Assyrian children clinging to their parents who were being driven to slaughter were shot dead. Pregnant women had their wombs cut open and their babies destroyed..."

Eshai Shimun
Catholics of the Assyrians
Nicosia, Cyprus, September 20th, 1933



Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII in 1933

Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII (1904-1970) was the spiritual and political leader of the Assyrian exiles. He was deported to Cyprus for publicizing the exiles.

"Kurds and Arabs, on whom the government putting the blame for the killing of the Assyrians, have saved hundreds of women and children from the Iraqi Army"

—American resident of Mosul, 1933

WORLD REACTION

As the news spread, headlines proclaimed the tragedy. The League of Nations issued proclamations and appeals, but nothing was ever done to punish the perpetrators. The League had no power, and there was no international law to protect persecuted groups. Later the League discredited itself by failing to prevent World War II or the Holocaust, and eventually was replaced by the United Nations.

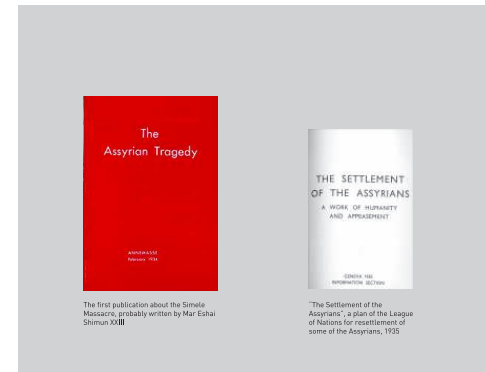
The British government, which maintained military bases and was the real power in Iraq, did nothing beyond helping to evacuate survivors.



Meeting in the League of Nations dedicated to the Assyrian issue. The Assyrian outcry reached the League of Nations, but the latter was powerless to do anything. There were no international laws regarding mass killings.



Newspaper headlines reporting on the Simele Massacre



The first publication about the Simele Massacre, probably written by Mar Eshai Shimun VIII.

'The Settlement of the Assyrians', a plan of the League of Nations for resettlement of some of the Assyrians, 1935



Assyrian village under construction. There was no place for most Assyrians to flee, and many did not want to abandon the places where they had lived for thousands of years. Most tried to rebuild their villages and lives after the massacre.

STOPPING GENOCIDE

One of the people horrified by the slaughter of the Assyrians was the young Jewish jurist Raphael Lemkin (1900–1959), who lived in Warsaw and dreamed of an international law forbidding what Winston Churchill had termed “a crime without a name.” Lemkin’s ideas were based largely on the still earlier Armenian experience at the hands of the Ottoman Turks during the World War I, but also on the early reports of German mass atrocities in the Second World War. As early as December 1933, Lemkin had prepared an essay entitled “Crime of Barbarity” for a conference of the Legal Council of the League of Nations in Madrid, Spain. In it Lemkin argued in favor of an international law punishing mass murder, but the world was not yet ready for the idea.

From that time Raphael Lemkin dedicated his life to advocating his idea. In 1944, he published an article in which he used the word “genocide” for the first time. The Nazis were still engaged in their annihilation of the Jews and bloody repressions and persecutions of other groups. The matter of how to punish the perpetrators was acute. The word “genocide” soon entered many languages and quickly became an international term. The punishment of some of the worst criminals of the Nazi regime had been underway for three years when in 1948, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Raphael Lemkin (1900–1959)

Raphael Lemkin, a Jewish jurist from Warsaw, was stunned by Armenian and Assyrian massacres when he learned about them. He managed to flee Poland after the Nazi occupation in 1939, went to Sweden, and then made his way to the United States, where he worked in international law.



Lemkin's ID

Raphael Lemkin worked as a legal advisor in the U.S. War Department



Telegram from Mikrod Burgess

PROSECUTE AS A CRIME UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW
by Raphael Lemkin

The resolution of the General Assembly of the U. S. of December 11, 1948 on the crime of genocide brought about a significant innovation in international law. As President Truman pointed out in his report to Congress of the 5, February 1949, it was then unanimously resolved that genocide, meaning the destruction of racial, national, religious, linguistic and political groups, is a crime under international law. Therefore follows the most important consequence: the destruction of such groups is no mere internal affair of the country involved but a matter of international concern. A principle, the right of mankind to secure human groups, has been put under international protection by this resolution. The U. S. went beside in accord with these intentions to put an end to this crime which repeats itself throughout history about with the regularity of a biological law.

As the most known cases of genocide are cited: the destruction of Carthage, the destruction of the Albigenses and Waldenses, the crusades, the wars of the Huns and Magyars, the destruction of the Christians under the Ottoman Empire, the massacre of the Herero in Africa, the extermination of the Armenians, the slaughter of the Christian Syrians in 1920, the destruction of the Masovians, the pogrom of the Jews in Tsarist Russia and Russia and many others. By destroying six million Jews, seven million Gypsies and almost all the Gypsies of "Europe," the Nazis have focused our attention on this phenomenon, which was the one in history.

The determination to stop this crime which finds its expression in the resolution of the General Assembly of December 11, 1948, entails on the one hand the historical statement by President Truman that "these crimes will come a benefit for mankind," on the other hand the demand, we hereby to stop this resolution and to call for an international convention on genocide, because there can be no general agreement for the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide. The necessary judgment did not and could not establish genocide as an international crime, applicable to several collective groups of nations. The necessary law applies only to crimes committed being in its connection with aggression war. In accord with the relationship between a conquered and a conquering country, international law is strictly divided in two bodies. The law of war and the law applicable in time of peace.

Crimes under international law include here questions with a quite different nature than crimes connected with war. Within the first category one may count the piracy, trade in slaves, and children, trade in slaves, drug traffic, trading in obscene publications, forging of currency. These crimes are punishable according to the principle of universal jurisdiction, meaning that a criminal can be validly punished by the court of the country where he is apprehended, irrespective of the place where the crime was committed.

geno·cide \ 'jen-e-'sid\ n (1944) :
[*gēno(s) race* + *-cide*] a learned borrowing from Latin meaning “killer,” “act of killing,” used in the formation of compound words: The deliberate & systematic extermination of a national, racial, political, or cultural group.

June 26, 1947
United Nations, New York

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which was signed on December 9, 1948.



December 16, 1948
United Nations, New York

(From left to right) Mr. K.V. Kistler, Bolivian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Alexander Panichukin, USSR Ambassador to the United States, Mr. Jean Ferris, Assistant Secretary-General for the Department of Legal Affairs of the U.N., and Mr. Alexis D. Voino, Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister, signing the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Representatives of four states who ratified the Genocide Convention on October 14, 1950

(Seated, left to right) Dr. John P. Chang (Korea), Dr. Jean Procaccia (Italy), Assembly President Amis, Nasrallah Estamir (Lebanon), Jean Chauvel (France), Mr. Ruben Esquivel de la Guardia (Costa Rica) standing, left to right) Dr. Isak Kermi Jassi, Secretary General for Legal Affairs, Mr. Trygve Lie (Secretary-General of U.N.), Mr. Manuel A. Fournier Acuña (Costa Rica), and Dr. Raphael Lemkin (Counselor for the Genocide Convention), Lake Success, New York, October 14, 1950.



United Nations, New York

Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly in 1948

MODERN ASSYRIANS

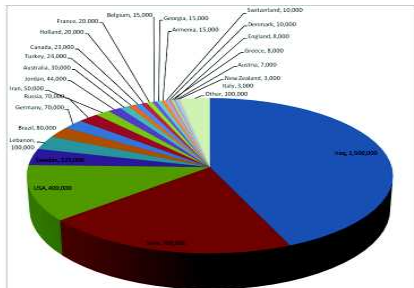
The story of the Assyrians continues today. A small people scattered around the globe, they continue to preserve their unique culture. Though most of them dream of having their own autonomous territory in Iraq, their ambitions do not take violent forms and they rarely claim the headlines. Many Assyrians fled the war and the subsequent terrorism in for new homes in Europe and the Americas. Peace and tolerance in Iraq may one day permit their reunification in their ancient homeland.

Did the world learn from the massacres in Simele? Did it indeed learn from the Holocaust or other "lesser" genocides? Opinions may differ, but it is certain that genocides continue. Cambodia, Bosnia and Rwanda became killing fields, their very names synonymous with late twentieth-century genocide, just as Darfur has become synonymous with twenty-first-century genocide. There are forces in the world who dream of, who organize for, new mass murders. The best answer to this challenge remains to promote tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful compromise.

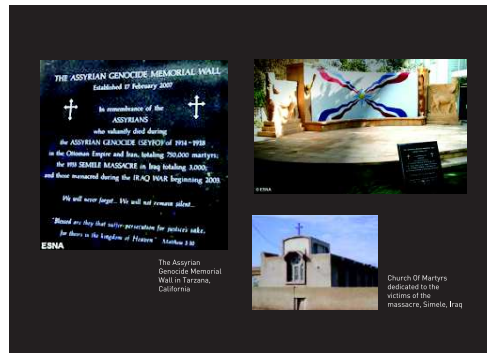
The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide is valid and vivid today. It is used against those who committed the crime of genocide, but it cannot stop it. Only the collective effort of humanity is able to cope with this task.



An Assyrian celebration



Total Assyrian population worldwide: 3,447,000



GENOCIDES IN OUR TIME

CAMBODIA:

1975-1979
1,500,000 - 2,500,000 deaths



Between 1975 and 1979, the communist regime of the Khmer Rouge carried out repressions which included the mass murder of an estimated 1.5 million to 2.5 million people. Many were shot, beaten, or tortured to death; more died from starvation or exhaustion from force labor.

BOSNIA:

1992-1995
200,000 Deaths



Conflict between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims in Bosnia after the collapse of Yugoslavia preceded genocidal crimes by Serbian troops against the Muslims in Bosnia. The Serbian troops employed mass shootings, the shelling of cities, the forced depopulation of entire communities, and the confinement of men and boys in concentration camps. They also utilized widespread rape of women and girls to terrorized Muslim families into fleeing their villages.

RWANDA:

1994
800,000 Deaths



Following decades of animosity as well as co-existence between Hutus and Tutsis, radical Hutu militia, supported by forces inside the government, carried out systematic massacres of Tutsis and Hutu moderates with machetes, clubs, guns, and grenades.

DARFUR:

2003-Present
450,000 deaths



This genocide originated in conflict in the Darfur region of western Sudan that culminated in widespread attacks by the Sudanese military and the Janjaweed, a Sudanese militia group recruited mostly from the Arab tribes, against the non-Arab Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit ethnic groups. Widespread death has resulted from ethnic cleansing and the destruction of homes and farms. Systematic rapes and abduction for sexual slavery form an important aspect of the Darfur tragedy.