

‘Without a Purpose, Misfortune Will Befall Our Land:’ Discourses of Nation  
in Late Ottoman Kurdistan

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A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2023

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Near and Middle Eastern Studies

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**Abstract**

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In the final decades of the Ottoman Empire, Kurdish and Assyrian nationalists sought to improve their communities’ situations. This dissertation demonstrates the historical factors that shaped the discourses of these nascent nationalist movements, situating them as localized developments rather than the importation of modular nationalisms from Europe. It also uncovers vital new insights into the social history of Kurds and Suryani in Southeast Anatolia in the Late Ottoman Empire. It thus contributes to Syriac Studies, Kurdish Studies, Ottoman Studies, and Nationalism Studies.

Drawing on multiple archives of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate totaling thousands of documents, on the full run of journals produced within these movements, and on published and unpublished memoirs, it presents these movements as responses to historical events in the regions of Diyarbakir, Harput, Mardin, and Tur Abdin. It uniquely utilizes Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Kurdish, Classical Syriac, and Turoyo source material to place the region’s voices in dialogue, enabling a deeper understanding of the processes underlying these discourses. It

analyzes these movements through an ethno-symbolist approach, focusing on the symbols drawn from the past and reconfigured by nationalist intellectuals to address contemporary concerns and to mobilize their audiences towards reform.

The dissertation's narrative centers mostly between 1880 and 1925. It argues that the Hamidian Massacres (1894-1896) served as the catalyst that set both movements in motion, forcing a politics of difference between the Suryani and Armenians, and a Kurdish ethno-religious discourse that emphasized Islamic identity and the existential threat posed by foreign invasion. It then demonstrates how, in the following years, nationalists and reformers identified education as the most meaningful route for change and that this focus deeply informed the subsequent two decades of nationalist thought. The dissertation continues by illuminating how nationalists employed a variety of symbols to argue on points of ethnicity, national history, language, religion, and gender. It then presents a detailed history of the Heverkan and Dekşurî confederations of Tur Abdin, presenting how these communities navigated the complexities of the politics of identity, obligation, and patronage in which they live. In doing so, this dissertation provides critical insights into the *Seyfo*, or Assyrian Genocide.

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## Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to the late Birûsk Tugan and Neşe Devrim. I will always be grateful to have called both of you friend and teacher.

I want to first thank my beloved wife, my “başbug” Gözde Burcu Ege, who has been my greatest supporter, advocate, and top-notch yoldaş throughout this PhD process. I thank her deeply for the help she has given me at every step of this dissertation, in brainstorming, grant applications, and chapter edits. Her intellect, kindness, resilience, and humor while pursuing her own PhD has been an inspiration to me and so many others.

To my father Michael, my mother Margaret, my brother Peter, and my sister Jessica, who have always supported me in my various pursuits and whimsies. To Michael L. Chyet, my mentor, teacher, and dear friend who opened so many doors for me and whose guidance equipped me with the skills and understanding needed for this project.

I wish to thank my committee members. Reşat Kasaba, Joel Walker, and Arbella Bet-Shlimon for their guidance and expertise throughout my PhD program. I must also thank, with deep gratitude, the Turkish Circle at the University of Washington, whose feedback and knowledge helped so much during all the stages of this process. Special thanks to Will Bamber, Akanksha Misra and the çocuks, Ayda Apa, Roman Pomeschikov, Jennifer Hunter, Maral Sahebame, Jeanene Mitchell, Corinna Nichols, Pınar Ulumaskan, Özgür and Merve Özkan, Onur Bakiner, Selim Kuru, Gürbey Hiz, Buşra Demirkol, Melinda Cohoon, Tuna Basibek, Esra Bakkalbaşıoğlu, Anat Goldman, Ayşe Nal, Pelin Tunaydın, and Joakim Parslow. Thanks as well to the many friends and faculty who made my time at UW so enriching.

I am deeply grateful to all who have helped me during this process. I thank Kutlu Akalın for opening the doors of Syriac Studies, and Alda Benjamen for the many opportunities she

provided me over the years. To Lee Beaudoen and Owen Miller, whose wisdom and insight has for so many years helped me better focus my research, and to Kearby Chess, Michael Degerald, and Chris Facer for adding so much humor and very quality conversation during my time at UW. To Charlie Barton for always helping me laugh at the absurd but hope for a more just future. I want to thank my dear friends Kerem, Ferhat, Roza, Rizgar, Bülây, Turan, Sebahattin, Ilyas, Ronî, M. Ronî, Mete, Mihayel, Mazhar, Eyüp, Renee Ho, Nicky Crane and so many others for making my years of research so enjoyable, and Yulia Furman, Nikita Kuzin, and Alexey Lyavdansky for adding many more layers to my fascination with Tur Abdin.

A special thanks to Josh Feola and Joe Olney, with whom I have gone through the best and worst of times, and whose friendship and encouragement has helped me realize what is important in life.

I am also thankful for the financial support and affiliations that enabled this project. Support from the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library enabled the initial work that largely determined the course of the dissertation research. Awards from the American Research Institute in Turkey, the Department of Education Fulbright-Hays Program, and the Social Science Research Council's International Dissertation Research Fellowship provided the much-needed funding to allow for multi-year fieldwork. Thank you as well to Bülent Bilmez and Istanbul Bilgi University for the support and affiliation during my fieldwork. I am profoundly honored to have also received one of the final Dissertation Writing Fellowship awards and am hopeful that such an opportunity might return for scholars in the future.

## **Note on Language and Transliteration**

This dissertation extensively cites sources in Arabic, Kurdish (Kurmanji and Sorani), Classical Syriac, Ottoman Turkish, and to a lesser extent Surayt/Turoyo. It follows the International Journal of Middle East Studies transliteration system for Arabic and Ottoman. For Syriac and Surayt it follows the Syriac romanization table developed by the Library of Congress, which transliterates the final vowel in accordance with East Syriac pronunciation. Kurdish transliteration likewise follows the Kurdish romanization table also developed by the Library of Congress. Some commonly discussed figures in the text have their names transliterated according to common use in other scholarly works. Dates are first written as they appear in the sources with their Gregorian calendar equivalent placed in brackets.

Names are applied to the communities discussed to reflect the views of the sources under discussion. For instance, the term Assyrian is used to refer to the nation as imagined by nationalist authors, Suryani used as the common endonym employed by members of the community as well as Ottoman officials, and Syriac Christian to refer more broadly to the various peoples of Syriac Christian heritage.

## Introduction

In 1909, amidst the wave of newfound means of expression facilitated by the end of the Abdülhamid regime, Syriac Orthodox teacher and intellectual Naum Faiq (1868-1930) penned what would become a rallying cry for the Assyrian nationalist movement, “Arise, Son of Assyria, Arise” [ܐܪܝܫܘܢ ܝܘܕܝܪ ܝܘ ܐܘܪܝܫܝܢ].<sup>1</sup> Written as part of a collection of Syriac poems, Faiq called for his fellow Assyrians to band together and remedy their nation’s troubles. During recent decades his community had experienced failed attempts at educational reform, continued political marginalization, and the widespread massacres of the 1890s, leading many to seek refuge abroad, with Faiq joining them some three years later. His message was urgent, that “the opportunity flees from our hands, and time is swiftly passing by.”<sup>2</sup> His movement, driven by both the turmoil and opportunity of the period, sought to bind together the various Christians of the Syriac tradition under an Assyrian identity, for them to mobilize as a community to return to the glory of their nation’s past through a spiritual and material renaissance. His poem ends with a warning, from which the title of this dissertation is drawn: “And if we do not arise, then we have lost our chance; without a purpose, misfortune will befall our land.”<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Kurdish nationalist intellectuals had, first from exile, called out for cohesion under the identity of a Kurdish nation, lest their community suffer under Russian or even Ottoman oppression. They called upon Kurdish leaders to unify, to cease violence amongst

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Isaf, "Awakening, or Watchfulness: Naum Faiq and Syriac Language Poetry at the Fall of the Ottoman Empire," *Arabic and its Alternatives* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2020). [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004423220\\_008](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004423220_008) Web.

<sup>2</sup> Naum Faiq, “Awaken Son of Assyria,” in *Beth Nahrin*, (Istanbul: Lîs, 2011), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., the Syriac text is: ܐܘܪܝܫܝܢ ܐܘܪܝܫܝܢ ܐܘܪܝܫܝܢ ܐܘܪܝܫܝܢ ܐܘܪܝܫܝܢ ܐܘܪܝܫܝܢ ܐܘܪܝܫܝܢ ܐܘܪܝܫܝܢ ܐܘܪܝܫܝܢ ܐܘܪܝܫܝܢ ܐܘܪܝܫܝܢ. The translation I provide of these lines matches how it is presented in Assyrian nationalist literature.

themselves and against their neighbors, and to promote educational advancement to avoid catastrophe, and “or else in a short time Kurdistan will be ruined.” These urgent cries for national unity were the result of the region’s decades-long transformation. During the 19th and early 20th century, the Kurdish and Syriac Christians communities of the Ottoman Empire witnessed tremendous changes from their prior social and legal status, as well as waves of widespread violence. As a result of Tanzimat Ottoman centralization reforms and missionary efforts, various Assyrian ecclesiastical and secular leaders sought to protect against communal fragmentation and political tension with the Ottoman state and neighboring communities. Among the Kurdish community, for example, state centralization created a shift in localized social authority, in which the power of the prior nobility was gradually replaced with contentious tribal rivalries and brutal, state-aligned tribal militias. As new contours of social and political representation developed amidst these changes, representatives of these communities engaged various discourses of ethnicity, religious heritage and denomination to define and unify them.

These changes occurred within the ethnically and religiously diverse Syriac Orthodox homelands of Tur Abdin, Diyarbakir, and Mardin, in what is today Southeast Turkey. The region experienced dramatic transformations stemming from Ottoman centralization, with the fear of loss of traditional power status, along with perception of the Ottoman military’s weakness, leading to a rebellion led by Mîr Bedirxan of Botan. Following in the wake of newly granted access, American and British Protestant missionaries began working among the Assyrians of the Church of the East in Hakkârî, and those of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Mardin and Tur Abdin. The results were calamitous, intersecting with the destabilizing effects of centralization to undermine the centuries-old power parity between Kurdish and Assyrian leaders in Hakkârî, with violence then spreading west with the expansion of Botanî Kurdish tribes into the Syriac

Orthodox heartland. Some of the blame can be placed upon the meddling of missionary activity as the spark that ignited the powder-keg of tension created by Ottoman centralization in the late 1830s and early 1840s. The Ottoman military and government gained control over the city of Amadiya on the Hakkârî region's southern edge at some point in the early 1840s, prompting Hakkârî's Muslim Kurdish ruler Nurallah Beg to organize an offensive to retake the city. His Christian counterpart, Mar Shimun XVII Abraham, Patriarch of the Church of the East first pledged 3,000 fighters for this campaign but withdrew his support after the governor of Mosul informed him this would be interpreted as an act of war against the Ottoman government.<sup>4</sup> This resulted in an irreparable breach of trust between the two leaders and unfounded fears of Assyrian cooperation with the Ottoman government. The final push towards disaster was the ill-advised decision of ABCFM missionary Asahel Grant to build a fortress-like missionary compound on strategic high ground deep in Hakkârî. The building was described at the time as "loopholed as though for musketry," and precipitated an alliance "which sought to eliminate Assyrian influence in the region," with Nurallah Beg bringing in the forces of Bedirxan Beg, emir of Botan. What followed was wave of massacres that resulted in tens of thousands of Assyrian victims in Hakkârî, a protracted rebellion of Botanî tribes against centralization, and the rapid spread of violence and forced conversion throughout Tur Abdin and greater Southeast Anatolia.<sup>5</sup> The course of the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century led to a variety of power struggles, examined in greater detail in the first chapter of this dissertation, but part of which was an

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<sup>4</sup> For further information on this episode see my MA thesis: Michael B. Sims, *Congregationalist and Anglican missionaries in Ottoman Hakkari and Tur Abdin*, (MA Thesis, Georgetown University, 2013): 86.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 88. For a detailed biography of Asahel Grant see Gordon Taylor, *Fever and Thirst: An American Doctor in Iraq, 1835-1844* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2005).

expanding *millet* system which created more neatly-bound denominational communities, increased conversion, and greater inter-communal tension.

The ways in which divisions emerged between Assyrians, Kurds, and Ezidis and became fully reified by emergent Assyrian and Kurdish nationalism were not inevitable. In fact, such divisions obscure centuries-long practices of other forms of association, based on tribes and tribal networks, obligations, intermarriage, kinship practices, and cohabitation. Scholars have noted that many of the first westerners to travel to Northern Kurdistan, most of them missionaries, were confused by the lack of clear delineation between Christian and non-Christian societies. The region's distinctive social structure continued to confound outsiders into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Turkish journalist Muzaffer İlhan Erdost, for instance, wrote in 1987 on Hakkârî's social dynamics that for the Assyrians, their "daily life resembled that of the Kurmanj. Only their religion and language were different."<sup>6</sup>

Linguistic and folkloristic data from the nineteenth century offer a valuable yet overlooked source for an understanding of this phenomenon. Two such valuable collections are Eugene Prym and Albert Socin's collections of Turoyo and Kurdish sources, and Alexandre Jaba and Mahmoud Bayazidî's collections of Kurdish folktales, legends, and cultural observations. These texts provide multiple direct examples of blurred or irrelevant lines between communities, as well as the general stereotypes of certain subgroups held by neighboring communities. A detailed review of their data provides a valuable starting point for understanding the social milieu from which various distinct ethno-national identities emerged. Although collected by European

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Chyet, "Neo-Aramaic and Kurdish: an Interdisciplinary Consideration of Their Influence on Each Other," *Israel Oriental Studies XV: Language and Culture in the Near East*, ed. Izre'el, Shlomo and Rina Drory, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995): 225.

scholars and diplomats, this material provides highly valuable and unfortunately oft-overlooked data.

The collections published by Alexandre Jaba were enabled by help from a local informant, Mullah Mehmûd Bazîdî. The text *Cami`eya Risaleyan û Hikayetan bi Zimanê Kurmancî* (*Collection of Tracts and Stories in the Kurdish Language*) provides unique sociological, folkloristic, and linguistic data through its Kurdish-language account of local society in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Polish diplomat and scholar Alexandre Jaba (1801-1894), who had studied Eastern Languages in Saint Petersburg, entered Russia’s foreign service in the 1830s, first working as an Ottoman-Russian translator in the Russian Consulate in Jaffa.<sup>7</sup> In 1848 he was transferred to the Russian Consulate in Erzurum, where he served until 1866. Stemming from his interest in documenting Kurdish society he published two collections of data in Kurmanji and French, and later published a Kurdish-French dictionary with the German orientalist Ferdinand Justi (1837-1907). The significance of Jaba’s contribution to Kurdish studies and collection of Kurdish manuscripts has recently been referred to by scholar Mikaîl Bûlbûl as a “Kurdish Geniza.” Although nowhere near the 400,000 documents of the Cairo Geniza, such a comparison evokes the largely unexplored nature of Jaba’s 106-manuscript collection’s data on pre-20<sup>th</sup> century Kurdish language and society.

Jaba and Bayazîdî’s collaboration offers folktales and legendary tales about Kurdish history and intercommunal relations, the latter of which presents highly valuable information for understanding the intricacies Kurds’ relations with their neighbors. Rather than data collected solely from the perspective of a foreign researcher, the collection is provided and curated by Mullah Mehmûd Bazîdî (1797-1870), who engaged in a multi-year long collaboration with Jaba.

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<sup>7</sup> Mustafa Öztürk, *Koleksiyona Aleksandre Jaba ya Destnivîsên Kurdî*, (Ankara: Lîs, 2017), 12.

Mehmûd Bayazîdî fled his native Bayazid with his family after its capture by the Russians, eventually settling in Erzurum.<sup>8</sup> Mehmet Gültekin has written a series of articles on Bayazîdî's life, much of the information on which comes from a letter by Russian scholar Peter Lerch to Saint Petersburg in 1857.<sup>9</sup> Bayazîdî met Jaba in 1856 through the Russian consulate and subsequently began providing Kurdish language lessons, and at Jaba's request started compiling folkloristic stories, although it is unclear what sort of compensation he received for this effort.<sup>10</sup> In addition to his collaborations with Jaba, Bayazîdî also produced a Kurdish translation of Şerefxan Bitlîsî's 16<sup>th</sup> century Persian-language *Şerefname*, with the translation entitled *Tewarîxê Qedîmê Kurdîstan (The History of Kurdistan's Past)*. In addition to the first Kurdish translation of the *Şerefname*, Bayazîdî also produced a dictionary of the dialect of his native Hakkarî and multiple Kurdish-language grammar books.<sup>11</sup> His status as a Kurdish scholar earlier in life is attested in an 1830 encounter with Polish-born missionary Felician Martin von Zarembo, who wrote of meeting Bayazîdî while conducting research in the region. According to von Zarembo, Bayazîdî was in possession of a copy of Kurdish poet Ehmedî Xanî's *Nûbiharê Biçûkan*, a rhyming Arabic-Kurdish dictionary for childhood education, and discussed translation of the Bible into Kurdish with the missionary.<sup>12</sup>

Bayazîdî's stories present a valuable understanding for both the overall image of Christians in Kurdish society, of Christian-Kurdish relations and also how different Kurdish

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<sup>8</sup> Mehmet Gültekin, "Di Arşîva Osmanî de Mela Mehmûd Bazîdî" *Nûbihar*, 22 vol. 130, (Winter, 2015): 9.

<sup>9</sup> Mehmet Gültekin, "Di Arşîvên Rojava û Osmanî de Derheqê Mela Mehmûdê Bazîdî de Agahiyên Nû," *Nûbihar*, 22 vol. 129, (Summer 2014): 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Öztürk, 21.

<sup>12</sup> Gültekin "Di Arşîvên Rojava û Osmanî de", 7.

folklore presented subdivisions within the Assyrian community. Story 8 from the collection is a tragic love story centered around a poor youth named Polo, and Barnik, the daughter of a wealthy neighboring family. The story's first line includes the statement, "Close to Xoşab Castle, there were two villages belonging to the *Mexîn* [*Nezukê kala Xûşâbê du gûndêd mexînân hebûn*], one named Qesr, and the other named Pâgân."<sup>13</sup> The choice of this word, *mexîn*, is significant, albeit the precise meaning of the word is difficult to ascertain. Michael Chyet's work on the relationship between Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic folklore offers the best explanation of this word. It is a particular term used to indicate Assyrians as distinct from other Christians, and thus reflects the particularly close relationship and cultural proximity between Assyrians and Kurds where the term is used.<sup>14</sup> Edward Noel, in his information-gathering research on the tribes of Kurdistan, recorded the word's use in the following proverb in Hakkari: *Me`na sergînan diçine gundê mexînan* (With the purpose of [gathering] dung-cakes, they [Kurdish youths] go to the villages of the *Mexîn* [Assyrians]). To this statement Noel added, regarding general prohibition of Muslim-Christian marriage, "Kurds and Nestorians are racially and in general characteristics so much akin, love affairs are frequent."<sup>15</sup> This affinity is attested by the following proverb: "Between us [Kurds and Assyrians of Hakkari] there is a hair; between us the fellâh [non-Assyrian Christians] is a mountain."<sup>16</sup> This distinction is not clearly based on ethnic or racial categorizations, but rather cultural proximity between the tribal Assyrians of Hakkari, and by

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<sup>13</sup> Mela Mehmûdê Bazîdî, ed. Zîya Avcî, *Cami`eya Risaleyan û Hikayetan bi Zimanê Kurmancî: 3 Meqalê û 40 Hikayet*, (Istanbul: Lîs, 2010), 32. The use of the -êd plural indicator reflects the author's native Hakkari dialect.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Chyet, "Neo-Aramaic and Kurdish": an Interdisciplinary Consideration of Their Influence on Each Other," *Israel Oriental Studies XV: Language and Culture in the Near East*, ed. Izre'el, Shlomo and Rina Drory, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995): 219-252.

<sup>15</sup> Chyet, 1995, 224.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Noel, "The Character of the Kurds as Illustrated by Their Proverbs and Popular Sayings," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1 no. 4, (1920), 90.

extension Tur Abdin, and tribal Kurdish society, with the tribal/agrarian dynamic the central characteristic.

The story's details are not of great importance, except that nothing in it aside from names and the description of *mexîn* identifies it as Christian. Rather, it is a story about competition between a poor boy, loved by his neighbor but unable to get her father's permission, and a rich man from the neighboring village, whose wealth convinces the father to offer his daughter's hand. The feud between the two men ends in them stabbing one another to death, and the daughter of the rich man killing herself. Another curious appearance of *mexîn* is in a lengthy story of inter-tribal fighting, in which Assyrian assassins are hired to carry out a murder against a ruler's rival. All of these stories make a clear distinction between Assyrians and Armenians. Many of these present Armenians as more urbanite or involved in trade, such as one story where an Armenian merchant tricks a Kurdish bandit leader into selling plundered cloth for cheap. Elsewhere the stories include them as wealthy targets of Kurdish bandits, which victimhood is at times mentioned alongside discussions of their trustworthy nature. An interesting example of such characterization is a story in which an Armenian peasant aids a dervish who repays his hospitality through magically revealing hidden treasure, which the Armenian then uses to aid his community. During later raids on the Armenian's village his house is spared due to his well-known honest character.<sup>17</sup>

These stories also present the Ezidis as a separate community from the Kurds, with whom they hold antagonistic relations. In one such tale a young Kurdish emir rides ahead of his entourage during travel and is ambushed by a group of Ezidis while crossing a bridge. The Ezidis, mocking the Muslim Kurd, tell him to call out for his "Muhammad," which,

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<sup>17</sup> Bazîdî (2010), 121.

coincidentally, is also the name of the emir's trusted bodyguard. Hearing his call, Muhammad rescues his lord, fighting off his Ezidi captors.<sup>18</sup> The story itself is introduced with the note that “long ago between the sects of the Ezîdîs of Kurdistan and those of the mullahs and *fuqaha* there was animosity.”<sup>19</sup>

A second valuable source of social information is Eugen Prym (1843-1913) and Albert Socin's (1844-1899) *Der neu-aramäische Dialekt des Tur Abdin*, published in 1881. This linguistic text, documenting Surayt, the Neo-Aramaic/Modern Assyrian dialect of Tur Abdin, offers similar inter-communal depictions from a Christian perspective in the form of a collection of folktales offered by a native Turoyo speaker named Jano (transliterated as “Dschano”) from Tur Abdin who was living in Aleppo. Background information about their informant states Jano had arrived three months prior, coming from Midyat, and although an illiterate handyman, he was a wealth of both Turoyo and Kurdish folktales. The first story recorded is a Turoyo version of the Kurdish romance Mem û Zîn, making it, in 1869, the first written edition of any oral version of the story.<sup>20</sup> Jano presents the story as legendary, rather than as a folktale, changing some details including some character and place names, but still setting it in Cizre. Many of Jano's stories follow a similar format: of an anthropomorphic animal embedding himself into a foreign community, often through some sort of ruse such as pretending to be a religious figure, and often for the purposes of seducing a woman from that community.<sup>21</sup> This no doubt reflects

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>19</sup> “Qedîm di nêva tayfeyêd Êzîdiyêd Kurdistanê û qisim mela û feqehan dijminahî hebû.” Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> This fact was identified by Michael L. Chyet, whose dissertation on Mem û Zîn is the most important study of the subject, and provides examples in the various languages of Kurdistan. Michael L. Chyet, ‘*And a Thornbush Sprang Up Between Them: Studies on Mem û Zîn, a Kurdish Romance*, Unpublished dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 1991), Vol. 2, 9.

<sup>21</sup> I thank Yulia Furman and Nikita Kuzin for making this theme clear.

Jano's personality, but builds on a framework in which Christians, Muslims, and Ezîdîs live together or in neighboring villages and reflects a certain humor at the complexities of intercommunal relations.

These stories, aside from their fantastical elements, provide valuable ethnographic information on the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Christian community of Tur Abdin. For example, this source also demonstrates the use at the time of localized ethnonyms such as *Çalkoyo/Çalkoye*, the still-used singular/plural term used to refer to Ezîdîs, a reference to the Ezîdî Çalkoye tribe of Tur Abdin. In one story, a mullah encounters a man while traveling, and based on his robe determines him to be an Ezîdî. Asking if he can accompany the Ezîdî and his companion, the mullah is brought along to the Ezîdî's vineyard home, but is told he cannot stay the night, "because there is a beautiful woman who resides there."<sup>22</sup> Perhaps not as insightful as Bayazîdî's collection on this particular topic, this text does offer valuable indications of the intricacies of the region's social world.

Another intriguing 19<sup>th</sup> century text, similarly overlooked as a source for social history, is a treatise on the Ezîdîs attributed to Işâq of Bartella, a Syriac Catholic monk who lived among the Ezîdîs in Bashiqa, a village roughly ten miles northeast of Mosul. This manuscript, written in 1881, exists in two copies, one held in the Vatican Library, and another held at the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin.<sup>23</sup> It forms the basis of purported Ezidi holy texts published in the following decades, with that of Isya Joseph drawing large portions verbatim

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<sup>22</sup> Eugen Prym, *Der neu-aramaische dialekt des Tûr Âbdîn* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1881), 27-28.

<sup>23</sup> The only notable difference, aside from an introductory note on the Mardin copy, is difference in the use of the term for Muslim in the final pages of the document, with the Vatican copy using "Ismailites" (إسماعيلية) and the Mardin copy using "Hagarites" (حاجرية). The introductory note on the Mardin copy claims that a foreigner offered to pay the document's weight in gold if an Ezîdî could produce a written copy of the *Mishefa Reş*. A similar document, DFM 00204, is a Neo-Aramaic commentary on the Ezidis from the Dominican Friars of Mosul in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That manuscript awaits detailed translation and research.

from the document. The presence of the manuscript in both Alqosh and Mardin indicates the transmission of knowledge between these communities. It also suggests that Ishaq of Bartella's account became an authoritative source for Christians from various communities to understand their neighboring Ezîdîs. The first half of the text, entitled "Instruction Regarding Sheikh Adi Received from the Yezidis," is a collection of religious stories about the foundation and cultural practices of the religious community, and the second half, entitled "The Beliefs of the *Dasnoyo* in the Form of Questions and Answers," is a discussion between a sheikh and his disciple.<sup>24</sup> Although the bulk of the material concerns religious beliefs and ritual practices, the manuscript also offers useful insights into how ideas of communal history and ethno-religious category were understood within the Assyrian ecclesiastical community.

First, and perhaps most interesting, the text states that the Ezidi community of Sinjar were originally Assyrian Christians. In a story explaining their origin, the author reports that in the year 1971 in the Syriac/Seleucid calendar (1659/1660 CE) Sinjar's metropolitan died, and the community petitioned Patriarch Eliyas to send a replacement, a request which the Patriarch dismissed. After a year the community gathered "four hundred strong men and forty deacons" to pressure the Patriarch, but they were ambushed and killed en route by "a band of raiders from the `Uribe."<sup>25</sup> Thus, the author states, without clerical guidance the Christians of Sinjar "entered unto the path of error, and forgot the Christian faith." They were eventually converted by a group of Ezidi religious qawwals who "taught them their sinful faith," but maintain some semblance of their pre-Ezidism identity through referring to God as *Aloho*, and by still referring to a building as *Malê Matran* (house of the Metropolitan). Ishaq of Bartella also writes that some of the

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<sup>24</sup> *Dasnoyo* is an ethnonym for the Ezidis based on the dominance of the Dasînî tribe of Sheikhan. For further information see Sims, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Vat.sir.584, 62v.

religious caste dress “in the manner of Rabban Hormizd Monastery,” mentioned to indicate some similarity between communities and may be understood to imply that this caste originated from or drew practices from monastic clergy. For more common vestiges of Christianity, Iṣḥāq refers to what he sees as Ezîdî wedding rituals originally drawn from Christian communities’ practices.<sup>26</sup>

Iṣḥāq of Bartella’s text seeks to show that the histories of the Christians and Ezîdîs are deeply connected; the Ezîdîs grew in number from Christian conversion, and these converts have left their mark on Ezîdîsm. It is important to note regarding the presentation of historical conversion that this counters the modern internal Ezidi practice of endogamous marriage and prohibition of conversion, indicating a sense of historical memory that communities converted between Christianity and Ezidism through the early modern period. However, the questions-and-answers portion, and thus written from the perspective of an Ezidi religious figure, asserts the separate creation story, in which Christians, Muslims, and Jews are descended from Adam and Eve, but Ezidis purely from Adam.<sup>27</sup>

The manuscript’s purported representation of a sheikh’s words to his disciple also offer potentially contradictory information regarding conversion, but in a context weaves Ezîdîsm into the fabric of Mesopotamian history. Asserting that their faith is the world’s oldest, the sheikh states that “three nations have worked to cease our faith,” Christians, Jews, and Muslims/Persians.<sup>28</sup> The sheikh then specifies King Ahab, Nebuchadnezzar, and Xerxes as having been Ezîdîs, in addition to “kings among the ancient rulers of Assyria.” It is difficult to

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<sup>26</sup> Vat.sir.584, 79r, 82r.

<sup>27</sup> Vat.sir.584, 67r.

<sup>28</sup> Vat.sir.584, 94v.

ascertain the extent to which this is an authentic representation of Ishaq's Ezîdî interlocutors' words, but current Ezîdî oral tradition does preserve the region's historical figures within the community's lineage.<sup>29</sup> This assertion of Ezîdîsm's ancient presence presents a strong sense of indigeneity in the region, and that other communities have branched off either in terms of race and ethnicity or religion.

Despite perception of a racial difference between Ezîdîs and their neighbors, the text's sheikh states at multiple points how important it is to maintain close relations with other religious communities. At various points explaining the Temple of Sheikh Adi at Lalesh, and its social and religious customs, such as how "Christians, Muslims, and Jews come there, not because of their sins, as the Dasnoye are cleansed of them [there], but rather for trade," but are expected to follow certain local practices, first of which is not wearing footwear inside of the temple grounds.<sup>30</sup> To protect the security of their non-Ezîdî visitors, the mîr of Sheikhan maintained an entourage of guards "who carry weapons and strike any who make conflict or aggression, and any who act evil towards Christians, Muslims, or Jews who come there."<sup>31</sup>

The manuscript also demonstrates that the Ezîdîs and Kurds are considered two separate communities despite their shared language. Often characters in stories are identified as Kurdish in a sense to indicate they are not part of the Ezidi community. In one such example, a shepherd from the community at the time of Sheikh Adi traveled to have a billhook [ܠܘܚܘܢ] made by a Kurdish blacksmith, with the Ezîdî and Kurd communicating in Kurdish.<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere, a Kurdish

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<sup>29</sup> For more on this see Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Khalil J. Rashnow, *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect: Sacred Poems and Religious Narratives from the Yezidi Tradition* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrasowitz, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Vat.sir.584, 88v-88r, 93r.

<sup>31</sup> Vat.sir.584, 88r.

<sup>32</sup> Vat.sir.584, 61r.

shepherd youth becomes a follower of Sheikh Adi, with the two conversing in Kurdish, and the shepherd youth converting into the faith and marrying his own mother and establishing the Ezîdî Qîranî tribe [ܩܝܪܢܝ].<sup>33</sup> However, a central claim of Işhaq of Bartella's presentation of Ezîdî society is the uniquely sacred role of Kurdish as their daily and religious language which demonstrates that religious divides were far more meaningful than ethno-linguistic identities. Işhaq writes that according to Ezîdî tradition, Kurdish has always been a central identifying characteristic of the community, and that Sheikh Adi himself spoke Kurdish at the time of his arrival from "the West" (the west of Marga).<sup>34</sup> Işhaq transliterates Kurdish phrases into Garshuni, including carefully transliterating the community's name, when used in reported speech, in Kurdish as *Êzîdî* [ܐܙܝܕܝ] or Syriac as *Ezîdāye* [ܐܙܝܕܝܐ], rather than the potentially pejorative "Yezidi."<sup>35</sup> In reference to its role as a sacred language, aside from its use in Ezîdî oral religious tradition, Işhaq writes an exchange between the sheikh and student in which the latter asks "in which language did God converse with our father Adam? Because the Christians say that... it was Syriac, and the Jews... in Hebrew."<sup>36</sup> The sheikh responds that "they spoke together in the esteemed Kurdish language." This point indicates the way that, even though language served a central role in identity, its importance was overshadowed by religious boundary and point which can be further understood through looking at Kurdish-monolingual Christian communities of Tur Abdin.

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<sup>33</sup> This entry is written in the manuscript's first portion which relates various stories supposedly told by Ezîdîs, in which the author's critical tone often emerges, and is not necessarily a reflection of Ezîdî folklore. Vat.sir.584, 63r.

<sup>34</sup> Sheikh Adi (1073-1162) was a Sufi sheikh originally from Lebanon who played the most important historical role of organizing what developed into contemporary Ezîdîsm. Reference to him as originating from "West of Marga" is used in a narrative in which he situates himself among the Christian monastic community of Marga. Vat.sir.584, 63r.

<sup>35</sup> Garshuni refers to the use of the Syriac alphabet to write other languages such as Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, or Kurdish.

<sup>36</sup> Vat.sir.584, 67v.

Some Christians throughout the Ottoman period composed in Kurdish for religious instruction, in writing homilies, and even in creating religious poetry. The most famous of these compositions is perhaps the *Lawîj* (hymn) written by Basileios Shem'un II (1670-1740), who served as Maphrian of Tur Abdin from 1710-1740.<sup>37</sup> The hymn, dedicated to the Kurdish Emir of Cizre as a means to restore favor addresses religious themes in an ecumenical fashion, balancing Muslim and Christian imagery but avoiding exclusionary language. Ironically, and showing the dangers faced by Christian religious officials, Basileios Shem'un was tortured and killed in 1740 by another Kurdish agha for refusing to allow the agha's Syriac Orthodox servant to marry his first cousin. As is discussed in this dissertation's first chapter, some clergy continued to compose original albeit brief works in Kurmanji into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, Garshuni Kurdish material exists in the forms of prepared books for religious instruction, a practice still in use in Cizre and other primarily Kurdish-speaking regions in which Syriac Orthodox Christians reside.

These examples of shared language or overlapping culture do not intend to support a claim that Muslims, Christians, and Ezîdîs operated within a social system in which religious differences were meaningless: in nearly all cases in the modern period tribally-affiliated Kurdish Muslims possessed greater status than both their non-tribal or agrarian counterparts, and were part of a broader social world which placed greater restriction on non-Muslim communities. Adding to this, tribally affiliated Christians also enjoyed a greater social status and less vulnerable condition than their non tribally-affiliated coreligionists. In many areas such as in Tur Abdin and Hakkari these three communities reached a greater parity between them, with

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<sup>37</sup> George A. Kiraz, "Shem'un II, Basileios," in *Shem'un II, Basileios*, edited by Sebastian P. Brock, Aaron M. Butts, George A. Kiraz and Lucas Van Rompay (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011; online ed. Beth Mardutho, 2018), <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Shemun-II-Basileios>.

important Christian families in Tur Abdin reaching high status in tribal confederations. These power arrangements would fluctuate over time, but as state centralization of the mid and late 19<sup>th</sup> century directly and indirectly applied new categories, many of these old structures were undermined. This dissertation explores the ways these communal boundaries were reified, not through the socio-legal categories of the Ottoman administration, but by viewing the local histories to demonstrate the historical factors that guided leaders and intellectuals towards answering the questions of “who are we,” “who are we not,” and “what must we do.”

### **Syriac and Assyrian Studies Contributions**

This dissertation seeks to contribute to Syriac Studies, or more appropriately Assyrian Studies, through focusing on social and temporal aspects of late Ottoman-era history often overlooked or underemphasized. The study of the modern Syriac Orthodox Church, and to a lesser extent other Syriac Christian communities, has often focused on a top-down reading of Ottoman Christian society, a result stemming in part from the perceived scarcity of source material, or the linguistic challenges they present. Recent works, such as William Taylor’s *Narratives of Identity*, utilize Ottoman and missionary records to address the process of a modernizing Syriac Orthodox Church which, reemerging into a global network facilitated by the missionary encounter, increasingly saw itself as a world church.<sup>38</sup> This work is excellent for understanding the missionary encounter, as is Adam Becker’s *Revival and Awakening* for addressing the manner in which the missionary encounter itself contributed to secularization, enabling a detachment of social and religious identity which, along with the missionary press,

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<sup>38</sup> William Taylor, *Narratives of Identity: The Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of England 1895-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

helped the Assyrian identity movement emerge in Urmiah.<sup>39</sup> Becker's work, which includes sources from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Neo-Aramaic journal *Zahire d-Bahre (Rays of Light)* helps add local voices to a research topic typically dominated by missionary, foreign office, and Ottoman governmental records. The voices of average members of these communities appear often in brief encounters with missionaries, as hosts or potential converts, but insufficiently to provide a fuller picture of the period from their perspective. This dissertation, however, fully reorientates the narrative to a local perspective, and by doing so demonstrates that Assyrian nationalism in the Ottoman Empire was not simply an importation of ideas from America and Europe, as Becker's work argues. Rather, it shows that the discourses of Assyrian nationalism were in this case developed locally and in response to historically contingent factors.

Early in my research for this dissertation I decided to seek to understand events first from a local lens, and to then read into them outside sources as necessary. This was only achievable through the support of members of the Assyrian community who shared archival material, most of which has either not yet been analyzed to any extent or has not been used for local history. First, this included an in-depth reading of three journals produced in the Ottoman Empire: *al-Hikmah (Wisdom)*, *Murşid Athuriyon (Guide of the Assyrians)*, and *Kawkab Madnaha (Star of the East)*.<sup>40</sup> These offered both ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical intellectuals' views and are central to Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation alongside their Kurdish counterparts. Through a close reading of these journals, this dissertation demonstrates both what and why specific historical, cultural, linguistic, or other delimiting elements became strengthened within the

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<sup>39</sup> Adam Becker, *Revival and Awakening: American Evangelical Missionaries in Iran and the Origins of Assyrian Nationalism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> I am grateful for the Modern Assyrian Research Archive providing the first two of these, and for the efforts of Mary St. Germain, head of the Near East Section at the University of Washington Libraries, for securing the third.

nascent Assyrian nationalist movement. Additionally, by covering their entirety it leads to a much more concrete view of how these figures helped shape the nationalist movement. What little scholarship exists on these journals had focused on select portions of Ottoman and Ottoman-Garshuni entries, which, similar to reading only the Turkish portions of Kurdish journals, leads the reader to assume that their primary function was to advocate for Ottomanism.<sup>41</sup> I argue instead that these journals' Arabic, Syriac, and Kurdish entries present clear discussions of national identity and how these were discussed and reframed through communications between intellectuals. *Al-Hikmah*, as the official publication of the Syriac Orthodox Church, refrains from the explicitly nationalist language of *Murşid Athuriyon* and *Kawkab Madnaha*, which directly engage with Assyrian nationalist identity. However, all three are involved in a complex process of answering questions of identity regarding communal history, boundary, and future, and play significant roles in the formulation of Assyrian nationalist identity.

The most significant body of source material, and perhaps this dissertation's greatest contribution, is a close reading and analysis of thousands of individual correspondences related to the Syriac Orthodox Church. This project does not fully exhaust these resources, but does draw on hundreds of these letters to paint a better portrait of daily life in the broader region of Tur Abdin and Northern Kurdistan, from new, hitherto unknown evidence for how the Hamidian Massacres and Seyfo (Assyrian Genocide) unfolded. Equally important is how the letters also show how individuals, families, villages, tribes, religious, and political hierarchies lived and interacted in the period. These sources are subdivided into multiple categories. First, there are thousands of external letters copied by the Patriarchate and collected into *defters* by Rumi

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<sup>41</sup> Benjamin Trigona-Harany, *The Ottoman Suryani from 1908 to 1914* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009).

calendar year. Primarily in Ottoman, a plurality of these documents are letters sent to governmental officials, but the archive also includes correspondence with Kurdish tribal leaders in Arabic and Kurdish, correspondence with Syriac Orthodox and other Syriac Christian churches in Classical Syriac and Arabic, Armenian with the Armenian Patriarchate, and English and French with foreign diplomats and missionaries.<sup>42</sup> These letters range in length from a few short sentences to multiple pages, and many are copies of letters sent to different levels of the government. A single letter itself might suffice as source material for a dissertation and I do not claim to have exhausted their data. My work on this archive involved an initial review and note taking, with roughly 600 letters marked as potentially important. The clear dating and organization of this archive facilitated placing the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate in dialogue with other local voices. The uniqueness of this dialogue is perhaps best demonstrated by correspondence with figures such as Ibrahim Pasha, head of the Millî Confederation, which marks an overlooked aspect of Assyrian-Kurdish relations, and also the value of this archive for Kurdish Studies.

The second and third bodies of archival material consist of collections of correspondence received by various levels of the Syriac Orthodox Church. These are primarily letters received by the Patriarchate at Dayr al-Za'farān in Mardin, but also include letters addressed to various diocese-level leadership in Tur Abdin. The second includes letters provided by the Beth Mardutho Syriac Institute, dating from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century through the First World War. I received access to the roughly 1,200 available documents while providing cataloging support, and personally catalogued 500 of the documents from this collection. Khalid Dinno's recent work is the first to examine these sources in depth, illustrating how the Syriac Orthodox Church

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<sup>42</sup> These are hosted by the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library.

reacted to persecution to help foster an intellectual renaissance in the post-war period.<sup>43</sup> The letters from this collection are primarily Arabic Garshuni, Arabic, Ottoman, and Ottoman Garshuni, but include, as will be discussed later, brief original writings in Kurmanji Kurdish by members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. This archive, which required permission of the Syriac Orthodox Church to access, provides two important viewpoints: that of the Patriarchate as a central authority, and the view of the public and their perception of that authority. They are predominantly petitions asking the Patriarchate to intervene on social, political, or economic disagreements, and in times of violence offer detailed accounts of attacks carried out against local communities. This material was previously uncatalogued, although grouped with some correlation to chronology, with most falling outside of the temporal scope of this dissertation project. Those documents analyzed for this project reflect a sample of the full archive, as only portions at a time were made available during the cataloging process.

The third major body of source material is another, larger collection of digitized archival documents from broader sources within the Syriac Orthodox Church. Made available through another collaborative project with Assyrian scholars, this collection overlaps to some extent with the Beth Mardutho archive but includes documents from various diocese-level administrations. These documents, also part of an ongoing cataloging process, more directly relate to the time period under consideration, and include important voices such as letters from key intellectuals including Naum Faiq and Ashur Yusif, and letters from the *Intibah Cemiyetleri*, the nationalist organizations established in the Second Constitutional Period for the advancement of education. This collection also includes correspondences with Ezîdî and Kurdish leaders, offering a narrative of intercommunal relations from a local perspective, and thus this collection was used

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Khalid Dinno, *Syriac Orthodox Christians in the Late Ottoman Period and Beyond: Crisis then Revival* (Piscataway, NJ: Georgias Press, 2017).

more extensively for this project. The documents of this collection are predominantly in Arabic Garshuni, and to a lesser extent Ottoman Garshuni, with some in Classical Syriac or Arabic written in the Arabic script.

These correspondence archival collections are placed alongside memoirs from these communities written about the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These include the history of the Safar family of Midyat, the senior Christian family of the Late Ottoman Dekşurî Confederation and the most influential family of Midyat's Late Ottoman Christian community. This particular memoir offered hitherto unexamined details on how Christians operated within the tribal structures of Tur Abdin, demonstrating both the power they wielded and the limits to their advancement. Thus, the Safar family history shows how Assyrians were not simply passive actors who wielded power only within their Syriac Orthodox millet, but that understanding the period through the millet system overlooks the ways Assyrians exercised power within tribal politics. As a consequence of the violence and persecution endured by Assyrians during the Late Ottoman period, scholars have often interpreted Assyrians as not fully participatory in tribal structures, instead seeing them as either excluded or powerless within tribal affairs.<sup>44</sup> These memoirs and archives shed light on how, while acknowledging their generally vulnerable status, such beliefs reflect the collapse of social relations in the Late Ottoman period and obscure the complexities of social history. Other important memoirs include those of various witnesses to the violence of 1894-1896 and the Seyfo, such as the writings of Syriac Orthodox monk and witness Qarabaş, and the autobiography of Philoxenos Yohanna Dolabani (1885-1969), a key figure and leading intellectual of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Syriac Orthodox Church.

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<sup>44</sup> Simon Birol, "Einige Bemerkungen zu der Schrift 'Lawij' des Basilus Šem`un," *Parole de l'Orient*, 40, 2015: 65-100; Merten, Kei: *Untereinander, Nicht Nebeneinander: Das Zusammenleben Religiöser und Kultureller Gruppen im Osmanischen Reich des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Band 6 von Marburger Religionsgeschichtliche Beiträge. Münster; LIT Verlag, 2014

This dissertation mostly addresses the period between 1895 and 1925, with significant attention paid to the Hamidian Massacres as the catalyst for the acceleration of Assyrian and Kurdish nationalist movements within the Ottoman Empire. It also examines how social cohesion continued to break down, not despite, but rather as consequence of ongoing social and legal reforms. Although it can offer only a partial history of these events, it may still contribute to the important and ongoing work documenting the tragedy of the Seyfo.<sup>45</sup>

### **Kurdish Studies Contribution**

This dissertation seeks to contribute to Kurdish Studies by weaving together the history of Kurdish and Assyrian nationalism, situating it within a localized history, and by shedding new light on the Late Ottoman Kurdish community. There are significant sources for Kurdish history within the church archives, such as the aforementioned letters between the Patriarchate and tribal leaders. The largest body of source material regarding Kurdish nationalism within this dissertation comes from close reading of a variety of Kurdish nationalist or Kurdish-oriented journals dating from 1898 to 1913. Typically, these journals' Ottoman Turkish entries were the only articles examined by the bulk of Kurdish Studies experts who were unable to read Kurdish-language material. A recent work by Deniz Ekici expertly demonstrates the deep-rooted inaccuracies this linguistic gap has created in understanding the nascent Kurdish nationalist movement; namely, that the tone of Kurdish-language entries is more clearly nationalist and

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<sup>45</sup> Recent works on this topic include, David Gaunt, Naures Atto and Soner O. Barthoma, *Let Them Not Return: Seyfo: The Genocide Against the Assyrian, Syriac and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Bergahn, 2017); ed. Hannibal Travis, *The Assyrian Genocide: Cultural and Political Legacies* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018). Another useful contribution is a collection of Kurdish short stories that exemplify the narrative of the Seyfo resulting from Kurdish opportunists who abandoned social customs of tribal allegiance, *kirvatî* kinship, and religious obligation: Ismail Dindar, *Seyfo* (Istanbul: Evrensel, 2016).

confrontational, rather than understandable only in terms of Ottomanism.<sup>46</sup> This work is also indebted to that of Janet Klein, who, through similar sources, demonstrates the central importance of the Hamidian Cavalry as a starting point for understanding localized Kurdish history and how intellectuals framed themselves in opposition to the Abdülhamid regime.<sup>47</sup>

This project also utilizes a variety of Kurdish-language secondary sources which have made a tremendous contribution towards understanding the period. Works such as those by Ramazan Pertev and Mesûd Serfiraz played a significant role in understanding how folklore and the development of the Kurdish press coincided with other factors to help solidify Kurdish identity.<sup>48</sup> As intellectuals began communicating their ideas of nationalism, they assumed there to be a sense of *kurdîti* (Kurdishness) that they could identify and elevate within their audiences, with differences discernable between intellectuals based on recent events, family claims, or religious convictions. By tracing the development and contours of this modern Kurdish discourse there emerges a more complex narrative than that often held up by non-Kurdish work on this period. Kurdish Studies scholarship often focuses heavily on the story of the Bedirxan family, the preeminent family of the region of Botan in the pre-Tanzimat era, and some of whose members would help spark the Kurdish nationalist movement in the decades after the defeat and exile of Mîr Bedirxan. Barbara Henning's definitive work on the Bedirxans illuminates a diversity of views even within the family: some willing participants of the state apparatus, some

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<sup>46</sup> Deniz Ekici, *Kurdish Identity, Islamism, and Ottomanism: the Making of a Nation in Kurdish Journalistic Discourse (1898-1914)* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021).

<sup>47</sup> Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Ramazan Pertev, *Folklor û Nasnameya Kurdî ya Neteweyî (1898-1949)* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2018); Mesûd Serfiraz, *Kurd, Kitêb, Çapxane: Weşangeriya Kitêbên Kurdî di Dewra Osmaniyan de (1844-1923)* (Istanbul: Peywend, 2015).

in exile working against the Abdülhamid regime.<sup>49</sup> Members of the Bedirxan family are involved at many of the major steps in the evolution of Kurdish nationalism, such as the establishment of the first Kurdish journal, *Kurdistan* (1898), and in post-war efforts by a new generation in establishing the organization Xoybûn and the journal *Hawar* (1933) in French Mandate Syria. By including other voices in their Kurdish writings, the differences in viewpoints and contributions of other figures becomes more evident. A central goal of this project is to move beyond the narrative of the Bedirxans as the only entity worthy of study in early Kurdish nationalism.

The new sources applied to this dissertation enable a nuanced study of the role of the tribe in Assyrian and Kurdish communities of the late Ottoman period. The first chapter places the Hamidian Massacres in the context of tribal relations, and the fourth chapter focuses specifically on the rivalry between the Heverkî/Heverkan and Dekşurî confederations of Tur Abdin. This project seeks to broaden our understanding of the seams between urban and rural, tribal and non-tribal, or pastoral and agrarian subsets of Northern Kurdistan's social milieu and how the Kurdish movement sought to bridge these divides. This project utilizes local histories in many places to help illuminate how tribal affiliation, and its related obligations and networks, played a role in the social world of the members of these communities.

In regards to Kurdish nationalism itself, previous scholarship has adequately discussed whether Late Ottoman Kurdish society was engaged in a form of nationalism; this question has been satisfactorily answered in the affirmative by various scholars over the decades, and for exemplary works one might read the aforementioned Ekici (2021) or the work of Kamal Soleimani (2019). This project seeks to demonstrate that it was not an inevitability, nor a primordial force, but that the movement itself and its characteristics stemmed from a variety of

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<sup>49</sup> Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2018).

historically contingent factors. Periodizing the movement reveals that the Ararat Rebellion of 1927-1930 marks the first uprising in Northern Kurdistan in which a broad nationalist movement overshadowed religious, personal, tribal, or other motivations. Such divisions were present in those of Mîr Bedirxan of Botan(1840s), Sheikh Ubaydullah (1879-1881), Simko Shikak (1918-1922), Sheikh Said (1925) or more minor uprisings in Bitlis (1914) and elsewhere, and was able to bridge previously disparate subgroups. In the period of nationalism under review, these differences, primarily the exclusion of the Ezidis from the Kurdish nationalist movement, reflect the limits of this earlier stage. One benefit of viewing Kurdish nationalism not as a primordial movement, or even as clearly established by the period of the Abdulhamid regime and later print culture, is that it allows a better understanding of how the concepts of Kurdish nationalism and Kurdishness grew into their first salient forms.

### **Nationalism and Theoretical Framework**

This dissertation also seeks to contribute to the study of nationalism, both by offering a useful empirical study and by demonstrating how nationalism develops in spheres outside of the typical environments central to most analyses of the phenomenon. The process central to this dissertation's inquiry is the formulation of national mission, namely what steps must be taken to mitigate the suffering and destitution afflicting Kurds and Assyrians, and what changes must be made to the nation to facilitate a unified effort.

A common trope about modern Assyrian history is that the community's sense of itself is an invented identity. This claim betrays two inaccuracies in approach, one countered by empirical evidence, the other by examining the validity of the idea itself of an "invented identity." The historical aspect of this claim states that Assyrian nationalism was solely a product

of the intersection of Assyrian notables' self-interest and the Biblically-minded worldviews of the influential missionaries, diplomats, and scholars with whom they interacted increasingly throughout the nineteenth century. According to this narrative, the idea of an Assyrian national past had little to no symbolic value among the community until the coeval ABCFM missions to Urmiah and Hakkâri and the excavations of Nineveh and Nimrud by Paul-Émile Botta and Austen Henry Layard. There are also two possible routes for understanding this narrative: that the community chose a past to which they had no real connection, or, as is still debated, that this movement chose the *wrong* ancient past with which to identify. The Syriac Orthodox Church has long asserted some aspects of this attitude. As demonstrated in the sources within this dissertation, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the present it argues instead for an Aramaean identity, one which is more connected to a past within Syria and the Levant and less so in Mesopotamia, and one which avoids dominance of the Church of the East or Chaldean Catholic Church as having numerical superiority within a shared movement. A parallel also exists within the Chaldean Catholic Church. As this dissertation demonstrates, the seeds of these arguments were sowed in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and figures such as Naum Faiq, Sanherib Bali, and Ashur Yusuf actively worked against an exclusive Aramaean identity to prevent division and failure of the nascent movement through a more flexible, ecumenical Assyrian identity. The framework for an Assyrian national identity was in place from the ethno-religious politicization of the Tanzimat-era *millet* system, and the choice of nomenclature was not considered the most important aspect of their identity, rather, as evidence shows, names might be used interchangeably, or Assyrian identity treated as the best possible option due to the West's familiarity with Assyrians. In the destitution, optimism, urgency, and later anxiety of the Late Ottoman era, other points of identity were treated as more salient.

Of course, the idea of the Assyrian nation as a uniquely “invented identity” also ignores the ways in which all nationalisms have been historically cultivated, with few scholars still professing that the nation is a primordial social organization. An assumption often made by those incorrectly drawing on Anderson’s work *Imagined Communities* and the concept of the nation as an “imagined political community” is that the realness or validity of the nation is undermined by it lacking an objective basis or by situating it solely as a byproduct of modernity.<sup>50</sup> The more important inquiry, and one of the main themes of this project, is the process through which nationalist intellectuals decide on an ancient past with which to associate, one which must be both a source of pride and future-oriented motivation, and also intelligible to their audiences through some degree of symbolic resonance. This is a part of the *discursive* process of nationalism, one of the often overlooked central points of Anderson’s influential work.

As will be demonstrated, many of the choices made by these leaders can seem puzzling in retrospect, such as Kurdish nationalists’ early insistence that the nation came into being after conversion to Islam and the lack of emphasis on the pre-Islamic past, or Assyrians’ use of Christian past as a source of wisdom, but not as the primary repository of national pride. A goal of nationalism is homogenization, inclusively or exclusively, yet for early Kurdish nationalists it was not logical to include the numerically significant and Kurdish-speaking, but non-Muslim Ezîdî population. Much of their rhetoric was predicated on an ethno-religious nationalism which took as a given that Kurds, being the Kurdistan region’s dominant Muslim community, would rule over Christian Armenians and Assyrians. The focus on this aspect made arguments for indigeneity less important, even leading Kurdish intellectuals to assume a common ethnogenesis between Kurds, Armenians, and Assyrians, but to make Islam the primary boundary marker. In

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<sup>50</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 6.

both cases, these are choices made in the context of local realities, such as Kurdish inter-tribal relations and exile nationalism, or for Assyrians the difficulties of navigating a fragmented and contentious Syriac Christian millet system.

A central assertion of this dissertation is that these movements were essentially nationalistic in aim through their desire of institutional autonomy, and that the characteristics of these movements were initially formed by the politics of difference within the Ottoman system. These are, quite obviously, ethnic rather than civil nationalisms, wherein “an individual’s deepest attachments are inherited, not chosen.”<sup>51</sup> Still, an important aspect of nationalism is to impress upon its target audience that it is a natural grouping and something chosen *for* them out of necessity. As argued by Umut Özkirimli, nationalist movements are exclusionary by nature, as they “lay claim to a unique place in history and to certain boundaries.”<sup>52</sup> However, the particular boundaries which these nationalists navigated – real or fictive kinship, language, religious denomination – gave a great deal of leeway for boundary creation. Still, as Özkirimli explores, this must be seen as a discursive process, one which divides between “us” and “them,” naturalizes itself, operates through institutions, and hegemonizes.<sup>53</sup> For Kurdish nationalists, the process of hegemonizing nationalism required attacking the social order of the Abdülhamid regime. For Assyrians, it meant a difficult process of negotiation to persuade the powerful religious hierarchies to buy into their nationalist message, recognizing that the program’s success depended on the legitimacy and influence of these institutions.

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<sup>51</sup> Umut Özkirimli, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism: A Critical Engagement* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 23.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

The early Kurdish and Assyrian nationalist movements provide a useful path of inquiry that offer comparisons to the underlying assertions of Nationalism Studies. As will be explored throughout the dissertation, the development of these movements was in part a response to state centralization, and both were deeply tied to newly expanding or reformulated institutions, such as education, the printing press, or ecclesiastical authorities. What distinguishes Assyrian and Kurdish nationalisms from many other contemporary cases is that they developed outside of a broadly urban, industrialized society, with little restrictions on personal movement, and were forced to engage with an overwhelmingly illiterate target audience. A comparison of some major texts of the field show what benefits these case studies offer. Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* provides many valuable insights into this dissertation's understanding of the historically contingent nature of nationalism. Gellner's discussion of the Weberian idea of the state and its relation to nationalism brings to mind the challenges posed by the still feudal social and political order of Late Ottoman Kurdistan, in which tribal structures possessed a plurality – if not monopoly – on violence in the daily lives for most outside of cities. Still, most notably in the case of the Hamidiye Cavalry, or in action against groups such as the state-aligned Safar family, Kurds and Assyrians were reacting to an increasingly state-integrated milieu in which “such centralized units are taken for granted and treated as normative.”<sup>54</sup> The central component of both nationalist movements at the time was a push for national education reform, and part of this was the tension between the traditional religious and tribal authorities of semi-literate agrarian society, who wished to preserve a hierarchical social order based on patronage and obligation,

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<sup>54</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 4.

and a new, largely urbanized intelligentsia that desired a new order based on cultural boundaries.<sup>55</sup>

Assyrian and Kurdish nationalisms developed out of the intersection of various forces, of which industrialization was not paramount, and emerged outside of the division of labor central to Gellner's thesis.<sup>56</sup> Although there was a proletarianized Kurdish population in Istanbul, many of whom working as porters with whom nationalists engaged, the realities with which these movements contended were rooted in the urban milieu of Diyarbakir just as much as the rural hinterlands of Tur Abdin. The language of industrial society is present: both Kurdish and Assyrian nationalists called for education in terms of industrialization, and as discussed in Chapter 2, even invested in factory construction in their homelands. These movements, were, as Gellner states on the social aspect of nationalism, "the crystallization of new units, suitable for the conditions now prevailing."<sup>57</sup> These units, based on the social boundary of the nation, were encouraged towards economic and educational progress, but were still bound by reinforced but preexisting social boundaries. What was emphasized within these boundaries differed. Kurdish nationalists came to emphasize an idealized rural and Kurmanji-speaking Kurdish world as the source of national high culture for this unit, and the sphere from which the nation's purest virtues could be located. For Assyrians this idealization was not as clear, with intellectuals forced to contend with a more complex urban-rural socio-cultural divide, along with the competing influences of religious authorities.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 49.

The utilization of print culture among Kurds and Assyrians as the primary means of communicating the nation brings to mind Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Their intellectual leaders published articles on national history, language, current events, and, equally important, reprinting national texts such as *Mem û Zîn* or the writings of Syriac Christian Church Fathers, in a manner similar to the deliberate efforts by European nationalists to promote national literature.<sup>58</sup> Anderson reminds readers that for European nationalists printing histories, poems, literature, and other such texts, they did not do so "in a vacuum" but were "producers for the print-market" that sought a consuming public.<sup>59</sup> For Assyrians, language quickly became a boundary marker vis-à-vis Armenians out of necessity, but as mentioned previously, both communities lived in a multi-lingual but predominantly illiterate social environment. As will be discussed, these authors imagined their literate readers sharing their information with the nearby co-nationalists, thus broadening their audience if not that subscription numbers. Another important way these journals functioned was in presentation of news on a local/national, empire-wide, and international level, and included reports directly from readers within the national homeland. This effort, as stated by Anderson, seeks to "reassure" the reader that "the imagined world" of the nation "is visibly rooted in everyday life."<sup>60</sup> For the readers we know of for certain through their letters, such as the Kurdish girl living in western Anatolia, the sheikh from Mardin, or an agha from the Tirkan tribe, all participate together in reawakening the literature, history, culture in a setting that further reifies the idea of Kurdistan. This is, however, dissimilar to the European progression in which a codified vernacular print language emerged in part due to the

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<sup>58</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-36.

Protestant Reformation and the decline of Latin as the language of politics and scholarship.<sup>61</sup> For the Assyrians the nationalist effort involved in part the revival of liturgical Classical Syriac and its literary heritage, with little concern for elevating Surayt/Turoyo or other modern Aramaic dialects; for Kurds it was raising the esteem of their own spoken language and demonstrating its literary history.

Both promoted their own ideas of national language, but in differing forms that in some cases forced Syriac “to mingle on equal ontological footing with a motely plebian crowd of vernacular rivals.”<sup>62</sup> For Kurdish, the national language had to prove itself as a literary language of past, present, and future. Articles discussing the work of Ehmedî Xanî (1650-1707) and other poets thus served these aims. In the 1930s the attitude towards language shifted along with incorporation of the Ezîdîs, with texts such as a 1933 collection of Ezîdî hymns showing to the world that Kurdish was a vernacular, literary, and sacred language.<sup>63</sup>

Assyrian and Kurdish nationalisms, however, differ in many ways from the movements central to the study of nationalism. Although labor plays some role, in the context of Kurdish porters and laborers in Istanbul, the ethno-religious divisions of labor and power prevented a competitive labor market between these groups but did lead to resentment by some in Kurdish society. These factors call into question the extent to which Anderson’s “modular” forms of nationalism developed in the Americas and Europe were introduced to these communities directly. Unlike nationalisms in Italy, Germany, Russia, or other European contexts, Kurds and Assyrian nationalists had few routes for spreading their ideas, with no backing by central state

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>63</sup> Ed. Celadet Ali Bedirxan, *Ninvêjên Êzîdiyan* (Damascus: Tereqî, 1933). The text refers to Ezîdîs as “the original Kurds [Kurdên esîl].” P. 6.

institutions. Assyrian nationalists made no goals of an independent state during this early period, their Kurdish counterparts by and large sought reform of the central government as a part of their national salvation rather than independence, but still did argue for independence if it became necessary.

A major point of departure with this approach to nationalism is the extent to which, as Gellner states, “the cultures it claims to defend and revive are often its own inventions, or are modified out of all recognition.”<sup>64</sup> This dissertation does not seek to date the origin of nationalism at a grand level, but rather to explore the historically contingent factors that guide the process of emerging nationalist movements. One major pillar of this project is the changing importance of social boundaries in defining the group, rather than group identity coalescing solely around preexisting elements. To repeat Fredrik Barth’s famous statement on the study of ethnicity, it is “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff it encloses.”<sup>65</sup> This becomes most obvious from the importance given to Armenian-Syriac Orthodox social boundary maintenance as a central goal of early Assyrian nationalism. In a society in which villages, neighborhoods, churches, and families overlapped across these ethnicities, the Patriarchate and intellectuals like Naum Faiq sought points of difference to create firm boundaries around their community. As such, this movement contended with the hybrid and layered identities of the Assyrians, in which place, language, dialect, religious practices, tribal affiliation, Armenianness, or even Kurdishness formed a complex network of differences and obligations. In the case of Kurdish nationalists, the emphasis on proper religious practice served to mark difference with the dominant Ottoman Turkish culture but had to contend with the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>65</sup> Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 15.

layered tribal and regional identities. Still, these arguments rested upon the “myths, symbols, and memories” upon which nationalist narratives are built, and their arguments were predicated on the assumption that they would bear some resonance within Kurdish and Assyrian communities.<sup>66</sup> Although nationalist ideas of territory and language were integral to these movements, within each of them leaders emphasized an ethnic core as the basis of the emerging national identity, and intellectuals applied elements of the past to create a clearly bounded idea of the nation. These choices helped navigate many of the difficulties inherent in creating a nationalist project within a highly diverse, multi-lingual environment. This process of drawing upon and reshaping these elements to address such concerns forms the basis of this project’s analysis.

The best means for achieving this analysis is through what Anthony D. Smith refers to as *ethno-symbolism*, an approach that developed out of frustration with the structuralism of the Modernist approach to nationalism and “failure to pay attention to the cultural and symbolic elements that play so important a part in the formation and shape of nations and nationalism.”<sup>67</sup> An important link between the ethno-cultural focus of Barth and the ethno-symbolist approach of Smith is Armstrong’s *Nations Before Nationalism*. This work, which largely compares the historical concept of nation across medieval Christian and Muslim societies, offers some specifics that help to understand the movements under review, such as the influence of Christian sacred priesthood and ecclesiastical hierarchies in identity, as well as the provincialization of Miaphysite Christian communities as laying the groundwork for a separate identity.<sup>68</sup> In pre-

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<sup>66</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>67</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 135.

<sup>68</sup> John Alexander Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1982), 204, 206.

modern settings, religious organizations could penetrate down further into communities much more than any other identity-reinforcing institution and enforce religious and linguistic boundaries. This ability is clearly evident through the Syriac Orthodox Church's anti-missionary mobilizations occurring at various levels, from the Patriarchate to the village parish.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps the most important element of Armstrong's work, however, is the emphasis on boundary maintenance as the key to understanding national identities. Building on Barth's ideas, Armstrong's work sees ethnicity as a complex "bundle of shifting interactions" rather than being an inherent core of social organization.<sup>70</sup> Identity, he states, is an affect phenomenon, and in many ways the core myths and symbols of various nations may so closely resemble one another that culture in and of itself cannot distinguish one from another. Instead, "[o]nly the perception of group differences, of insiders and outsiders, as formulated in mythic substance separates many ethnic alignments."<sup>71</sup> An integral part of this approach is how the language of difference develops over the *longue durée*. However, as social boundaries themselves cannot generate myths and symbols, what is more important is the process through existing myths and symbols are repurposed. Smith's work helps to understand this process, offering a useful working definition of ethnicity, and the ability to approach the formation of nationalism from the perspective of the processes it involves.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>72</sup> Smith's definition of the *ethnie* is the following: "A named and self-defined human community whose members possess a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, one or more elements of a common culture, including a link with a territory, and a measure of solidarity, at least among the upper strata." Smith (2009), 27. His definition of nation is similar: "a named community possessing an historic territory, shared myths and memories, a common public culture and common laws and customs." in Anthony D. Smith, "When is a Nation?" *Geopolitics*, Vol.7, No.2 (Autumn 2002): 15.

In Smith's formulation, the ultimate goal of the ethno-symbolist approach as "less concerned with studying everyday, popular national practices for their own sake," instead focusing upon "how popular beliefs, memories and cultures have influenced the views and actions of the elite" in this process of developing and promulgating the idea of nation.<sup>73</sup> The definition of the nation in this approach is "an ideological movement to attain and maintain autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population, some of whose members believe it constitutes an actual or potential 'nation.'"<sup>74</sup> Smith's model aptly describes many aspects of Assyrian and Kurdish nationalism. Neither of them, broadly speaking, sought an independent state in the Late Ottoman period. In their initial stages, these nationalist movements were focused on fostering and preserving unity, clarifying the components of their identity, and increasing influence upon the institutions with which they interacted, often seeking institutional autonomy. Furthermore, at least not directly so, these were not nationalisms created by nation-states such as the archetypical examples of European nationalisms and instead relied on the actions of a fairly small group of organic intellectuals who never gained the tools of the state to spread their movement. Their task required seeking symbols and providing nationalist interpretations in a manner that would broadly resonate across the subdivisions of their audiences and adjust accordingly based on their reception. Additionally, unlike a politically top-down nationalist project, these nationalists attempted to create arguments intelligible to outsiders, perhaps most concretely for the Assyrians in their attempt to litigate against Armenians through the Ottoman government. Sometimes these audiences may be wholly external. For Assyrians, narrating themselves through particular Biblical narratives allowed them to gain the attention of Christian

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<sup>73</sup> Smith 2002, 19.

<sup>74</sup> Smith 2009, 61.

foreigners. Kurdish attempts proved more challenging. Iranian nationalists such as Mirza Fath ‘Ali Akhundzadeh (1812-1878) who while in Europe deliberately promoted an Aryan, racialized national identity did to distance themselves from the Arab and Islamic world while using language readily accepted by European elite.<sup>75</sup> One example is a debate within Kurdish circles over being of Japhetite or Semitic origin within a Semite-Japhetite-Hamite racial-religious framework, but little attention was paid to European logics of classification at the onset of the movement.<sup>76</sup> Reflecting what little resonance they held with outsiders, Kurdish students in Europe were forced to argue against the perception of Kurds as barbarians.

The final useful aspect that the ethno-symbolist approach provides is a framework for understanding the elevation of the nation to sacred status and how the formulation of the idea of national destiny develops within a nationalist setting. In the case of the aforementioned Iranian nationalists, their mission was to prove that they had been, prior to Islam, part of greater European civilization, and their purpose was to reintegrate themselves into this narrative to create distance from Arab and Islamic influence. For the groups under review, the concerns were perhaps more material and immediate.

My approach to nationalism reflects Hobsbawm’s attitude toward the “dual phenomena” of nationalism.<sup>77</sup> Nationalism is “constructed essentially from above,” albeit in this particular

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<sup>75</sup> Afsin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State: 1870-1940* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2008), 75.

<sup>76</sup> An example of racial language is a debate between writers of the post-war journals *Kürdistan* and *Jîn*. In a Turkish language article entitled “Kürdler ‘İrani’ Değil Midir?” [Are the Kurds not Iranian?] Xelîl Xeyalî makes a particularly interesting argument against Seyyid ‘Arif Bey, who argued for a Semitic origin. Xeyalî states that Japhetite can be understood as Iranian, and this distinguishes Kurds from both Arabs and “Turanian” Turks. He continues stating that scriptural understandings of race and nations are not useful, and that Kurdish national myths prove this. “National myths,” he concludes, “are not a fabrication, they are based on real events that have been transformed over generations.” Xelîl Xeyalî, “Kürdler ‘İrani’ Değil Midir?,” *Jîn*, 1 no. 8, 8 Mayıs 1335, 3.

<sup>77</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10.

case by groups of intellectuals without the tools of the state apparatus.<sup>78</sup> The challenge, however, is that nationalism “cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist.”<sup>79</sup> I had initially hoped that through close review of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate archives there would emerge some semblance of routine nationalism, perhaps entering into what Billig refers to as “banal nationalism” embedded in “routine practices and everyday discourses.”<sup>80</sup> It was also difficult to locate a stage in these nationalist projects in which, as Edensor describes, “meanings, images, and activities drawn from popular culture” had been applied towards “traditional” culture for purposes of strengthening nationalist messaging.<sup>81</sup> Although traditional practices, such as long-form oral poetry, may differ slightly across communities, nationalists were forced to look to much more ancient practices to locate something that could be presented as uniquely national.<sup>82</sup> Thus, a final guiding question is what approaches nationalists took to lay claim to particular traditions and practices within a highly diverse and overlapping social setting.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), 154.

<sup>81</sup> Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture, and Everyday Life* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002), 12.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Chyet’s analysis of various Kurdish, Turoyo, Armenian, and Arabic written and audio recordings of Mem û Zîn does reflect variation based in part on religious worldview of the source such as omissions by an Armenian priest. Chyet, Michael L., ‘*And a Thornbush Sprang Up Between Them: Studies on ‘Mem u Zin,’ a Kurdish Romance, Vol. 2* (UC Berkeley Dissertation, 1991), 199. The conclusion of my dissertation further discusses this phenomenon.

## Methodology and Outline

This dissertation contains four content chapters each focusing upon a particular theme and chronology. Chronologically, they span the period dating from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century through the foundation of the Turkish Republic, and address the roles of communal difference, history, language, and social networks in the development of Kurdish and Assyrian nationalisms in what is today Southeast Turkey and Northern Iraq. The bulk of material focuses specifically on the region of Tur Abdin in Southeast Anatolia whose name, meaning “Mountain of the Believers/Servants” reflects its topography as well as its Christian history. The project ultimately emerged from an interest in the social world of Tur Abdin, itself cultivated from routine visits to the region, later leading to the study of Classical Syriac and Turoyo. This coincided with study of Kurdish, initially as a means to understand Ezîdî religious texts, but later developed into a broader interest in Kurdish social history. Anyone fortunate enough to visit the region would immediately recognize its deeply interreligious history, visible, for example, at first glance of the many churches of the region’s primary city Midyat. An immediate comparison may spring to mind of Medieval Andalusia, usually the primary focus of the academic study of Muslim-Christian relations. However, Tur Abdin and its neighboring regions in Southeast Anatolia possessed a far greater degree of ethnic and religious diversity, including not only Muslims, Christians, and Jews, but smaller religious groups such as the Ezîdîs and even smaller Şemsiyye community. For centuries the region’s Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians, Arabs, and Jews lived among one another, with even smaller, under-studied ethnic groups such as the *Mhelmi* a testament to its historical diversity.

This project’s initial ideation was to explore religious practices in search of a localized theology, motivated by the still-commonplace practices of visits to Christian and Muslim holy

sites by Muslim and Ezîdî Kurds, and Christian Assyrians. Although the project's focus shifted early on, answers to those questions have been illuminated by recent works such as James Grehan's *Twilight of the Saints*.<sup>83</sup> A shift towards exploring the region's history in terms of interfaith relations, although an inherent part of any project on Southeast Anatolia, immediately proved to be too simplistic of a paradigm for understanding beyond a surface level. Accounting for the area's complex intertribal relations and increasingly contentious inter-denominational competition, which are often obscured by later historiography, required a different approach. Important works such as Ussama Makdisi's *Artillery of Heaven* helped guide how to formulate new questions around how layers of identity shifted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and to see how these processes helped shape emergent national identity movements.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the project was designed around an intersection of a gap in scholarship, linguistic skills, and source material.

As discussed previously, this dissertation draws on collections of correspondence archives, memoirs, journals, and to a lesser extent state, diplomatic, and missionary records. Access to these records, primarily the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate archives, in many ways dictated the course of this project. Fortunate to have multi-year research funding, this project drew upon archival fieldwork in Istanbul followed by residence in Mardin, which enabled archival work alongside interviews and research site visitation, designed to gain a better appreciation for historical memory of the events described. These encounters also helped guide research towards something more useful. One such example is a discussion about the famous Syriac Orthodox figure Shem'un Hanne Haydo with a friend in Mardin who introduced me to how this figure is remembered in song and historical memory, ultimately leading to the focus on

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<sup>83</sup> James Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>84</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

Heverkî-Dekşurî relations in the dissertation's fourth chapter. One goal of this work is to offer insights into source material that may aid future researchers, particularly those from Assyrian and Kurdish communities. The sheer volume of material no doubt leaves certain gaps for further exploration, but this dissertation's underlying intent is to shed as much light on the topic of early Assyrian and Kurdish nationalism in the Ottoman Empire from the voices of those directly involved in the project and those who served as the projects' audiences.

The first chapter argues that the Hamidian Massacres of 1894-1896 were the events that necessitated Kurdish and Assyrian leaders and intellectuals to make choices that hastened the development of their respective movements. As part of this process, this chapter contends the Hamidian Massacres, the Hamidiye Cavalry system, and the despotism of the Abdülhamid regime forced a politics of difference best exemplified by the adoption of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate as the self-identified *millet-i şādiqa* ("the trustworthy millet"), a phrase used to distance themselves from the Armenians, who had themselves earlier adopted this phrase vis-à-vis rebellious Greeks. For the Syriac Orthodox community, and for other communities of the Syriac Christian tradition, the need to distance from any perceived sedition included debate on how to create firm religious, political, and ideological boundaries, ways to navigate relations with missionaries, and the best way to navigate the heavy-handed and increasingly paranoid Ottoman central regime to achieve desired outcomes. One such narrative provided in the chapter is that of the *Mor Haworō* Monastery, a nearly ruined religious site in the Diyarbakir hinterland with rival claims by the Armenian and Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate; the litigation over the monastery forced both parties to express difference in a manner intelligible to the Ottoman authorities. At the same time, many Kurdish notables scrambled to undermine the influence of the Hamidiye Cavalry and criticize the regime, and in doing so gave stronger shape to the

emerging Kurdish national identity and provided a framework for national mobilization to improve their status. Chapter One also discusses how, in these early years, the perception by outsiders of the validity of their claims and the characterizations of their communities led to some reevaluation.

The second chapter demonstrates the central role of education in the formation of a coherent nationalist message. By focusing on educational reforms as a realistic and broadly appealing goal for national mobilization, groups such as the Kurdish Society for Cooperation and Progress (Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti), and the Assyrian Awakening (Society Intibah Cemiyeti) could organize under the new freedoms offered by the dynamic changes of 1908-1909. The chapter then portrays how these topics were discussed within the boom of community publications in the period.

The third chapter continues with a deep exploration of how the nationalist movements grew in complexity in the period between 1909-1914. It focuses primarily on the ways various intellectuals and leaders formulated and utilized a conception of national history to locate symbols to deal with contemporary concerns. It shows how these figures explored questions such as the role of language, national history, archetypes and core attributes of the nation, and the role of gender in their movements and imagined futures.

The fourth chapter moves away from the debates within print culture to examine the politics of difference, and the ways ethnic and national identities functioned within the setting of Tur Abdin. Dominated by two tribal confederations, the Heverkî and Dekşurî, it follows the decades preceding the First World War, and then offers important new analysis on how the Seyfo unfolded in the region. It does not seek to offer a definitive history of the tragedy, but does offer an important example in its narrative of figures such as the Christian leaders H̄anna Safar and

Şem‘ūn Hanne Haydo, and Kurdish leaders Êlikê Batê, Haco Agha and Çelebî Agha. The chapter draws on multiple unique sources, including memoirs and church archival documents. To aid future scholars it also provides evidence on how the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch in Jerusalem, the Patriarchate in Mardin, and various clergy discussed the ongoing genocide. Most significantly the chapter discusses a document by the Patriarchate asserting that all Christians in the region were being eradicated, and also analyzes letters discussing whether the church and its followers were still obligated to support the Ottoman government.

The dissertation’s narrative ends with the collapse of the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, the final event that led to the execution of many key Kurdish nationalists and the exile of many surviving intellectual and political notables from the Kurdish nationalist movement. These nationalists would then reformulate many of the core ideas of the movement and engage in trans-national organization under the Xoybûn organization. For Assyrians, the devastation of the Seyfo Genocide of the First World War reduced the remaining Syriac Christian community of the newly formed Turkish Republic into a state of bare survival. The newly elected Patriarch, Ignatius Elias III, was forced to relocate from the centuries-old Patriarch’s residence in Mardin to Jerusalem and distanced the church from any semblance of support for the Assyrian nationalist movement. Many of the genocide’s survivors were forced into the diaspora, some joining those like Naum Faiq who had previously emigrated to America. It is from the Assyrian diaspora in New York that poet Sanherib Bali wrote the Ottoman Turkish-language dirge “A Lullaby to Hammurabi,” the first, third, seventh, and eighth verses presented here:

Once upon a time, we had our own homeland  
I cannot say what happened to us  
It couldn’t withstand it, your little heart  
Sleep my dear, sleep today, stay asleep  
First grow older and then you will hear of our state

.....  
It is forbidden for us to settle down in the homeland  
For it is the time of the enemy striking the fruits of our labor  
It is the time of shorn hair and of the burned liver  
Sleep my dear, sleep today, stay asleep  
Tomorrow take revenge for this malady  
.....

The Adays, Ashurs, and Bünyamins<sup>85</sup> are coming to an end  
We are in mourning while the enemy makes festivities  
The nation of my Hammurabi waits for you to grow up  
Sleep my dear, sleep today, stay asleep  
Tomorrow take revenge for this malady

Turn the other cheek to he who slaps you  
Love your enemies like you love yourself  
This is the reason the homeland is ruined  
Sleep my dear, sleep today, stay asleep  
For every blow you receive, deal its repercussion back ten times<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> This a reference to Bishop Aday Sher, Ashur Yusif, killed in the Seyfo in 1915 and Patriarch Mar Shem ‘un Bünyamin, later murdered by Kurdish nationalist rebel Simko Shikak in 1918.

<sup>86</sup> Sanherib Bali, “Oğlum Hamurabiye Ninni [A Lullaby to Hammurabi],” 1916. This poem, written in Ottoman Garshuni, was gratefully provided to me by Abboud Zeitoune.

## **Chapter One: Responses to the Hamidian Massacres within the Syriac Orthodox Church and Kurdish Nationalist Movement**

This chapter examines reactions to the Hamidian Massacres by the Syriac Orthodox Church and Suryani community, Assyrian nationalists, and Kurdish intellectuals between 1895 and 1914. Through this comparison, this chapter demonstrates how, in the case of the Suryani, the vulnerabilities of association with Armenians influenced and accelerated a language of ethnic, political, religious and national difference. Through this process, both clergy and lay-intellectuals sought to more clearly define their own communities by identifying points of difference in language, culture and history between them and the Armenians with whom they were deeply socially and politically intertwined. Drawing upon Barth's work on frontiers of ethnic self-identity through difference, these processes reflect an emphasis on a language of difference through which Syriac Orthodox or Suryani identity became reified.<sup>87</sup> Although, as I will demonstrate, the Syriac Orthodox Church later refocused this language of difference in its public communications against its older rival, Uniate Catholic churches, Suryani community publications and Patriarchate-state correspondence indicate how, although culture and national identity crossed the Orthodox-Catholic divide, Armenians more broadly became a target which the Suryani used to assert their identity. An integral aspect of asserting this clear division was the portrayal of Armenians as the Sultan's disloyal subjects in comparison to the dependable Suryani. In this case, the Patriarchate's binary of loyalty and sedition, and lay intellectuals' promotion of the church's integrity and political mobilization, reflect what Wimmer describes as the institutionalist tradition, in which operating through institutions "provide[s] incentives for

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<sup>87</sup> Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 15.

actors to draw upon certain types of boundaries.”<sup>88</sup> In the case of the response to the Hamidian Massacres, this was an assertive redrawing of ethno-religious and ethno-linguistic boundaries to maximize potential opportunities, in which ecclesiastical and lay Suryani, and Kurdish intellectuals each responded to this period through their own particular reconfigurations of social difference.

The Kurdish nationalist intellectual discourse indicates the opposite trend: that, while the Suryani were establishing clearer social boundaries, Kurdish periodicals were using the greater concerns of proper Kurdish leadership and a core ethno-religious identity in an attempt to bring about collaboration between various Kurdish groups. For instance, discourses critical of the complicity by Kurdish tribal leaders within the Hamidiye Cavalry become a means both to assert identity and to imagine a particular socio-political expression of Kurdishness, in which certain lineages and adherence to religious edict and social tradition were promoted as a basis for communal future and proper leadership. At times, Kurds and Armenians or Kurds and Assyrians would even adopt a narrative of a shared ethnic origin, but identify as two separate nations with religion creating the unbridgeable boundary marker. In both the case of the Suryani and the Kurds, nationalists used new languages of culture, communal boundary and difference accelerated by the violence of the Hamidian Massacres. In the case of the Suryani, the church and community engaged in acts and discourses of distinction as a community vis-à-vis the Armenians to ensure the state’s protection during and after the massacres, as a defensive measure to protect church property, to regulate its own internal dissidents to preserve the millet’s integrity, and as a foil against which the underdeveloped Suryani community’s goals could be articulated. In the Kurdish case, it resulted in existential anxieties over foreign intervention in

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<sup>88</sup> Andreas Wimmer, “The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multi-level Process Theory,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 113 no. 4, January, 2008, 988.

accordance with the Treaty of Berlin, concern over the reputation of Kurds as barbaric in European intellectual circles, and as a means to express Islam and religiously proscribed rules for treatment of non-Muslims as a central aspect of proper Kurdish leadership and society.

### **The Hamidian Massacres**

The Hamidian Massacres of 1894-1896, were a wave of violence and lawlessness throughout Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, reaching its apex surrounding Diyarbakir Massacres of early November, 1895. These events began in August and September of 1894 with widespread anti-Armenian violence in the region of Sasun within the vilayet of Bitlis, located roughly 200km north-northeast of Mardin. Competing historiographies treat the initial violence as a reaction to Armenian rebellion or as a deliberate act of extermination under the guise of suppressing Armenian insurrection.<sup>89</sup>The following year, as violence plagued the region, Suryani began to suffer increasingly from widespread looting, and thousands were massacred in the Diyarbakir Massacres. Central to these events were the actions of the Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments (*Hamidiye Hafif Süvari Alayları*), units composed mostly of loyal Kurdish regiments, but also including Arab, Circassian and, to a very minor extent, small numbers of non-Muslim populations found in the border region. Ostensibly created to protect the empire's eastern frontier, as demonstrated by Janet Klein, a "key priority" in the creation of the Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments was "[to] counter Armenian revolutionary activities in the region, to protect the border from all threats... and to ensure the loyalty of the peoples who lived along the important

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<sup>89</sup> For an excellent analysis of the region's history, the multitude of local actors and factors involved in these events, and the importance of understanding the representation of these events in Turkish and Armenian nationalist historiographies, see Owen Miller, *Sasun 1894: Mountains, Missionaries and Massacres at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation (Columbia University, New York. 2015).

frontier.”<sup>90</sup> In reality, these units were often responsible for opportunistic violence, looting and wide-spread forced conversion against non-Hamidiye communities, Kurdish, Armenian, Suryani or otherwise, and for fostering a general state of lawlessness.

Research on the Hamidian Massacres has typically focused on the Armenians, numerically these events’ greatest victims, and one of the state’s intended targets of control in the creation of these units. Syriac Christian communities have typically been discussed peripheral to the experiences of Armenians, but recent contributions such as those by David Gaunt seek to introduce sources more closely related to the Syriac community to provide a narrative from the Syriac Christian perspective (Gaunt, 2006, 2018). Such sources include unpublished memoirs by Safar Safar, the post-WWI memoirs by Chaldean Bishop of Mardin Israel Audo and that of Syriac Orthodox monk `Abd Meshiho Na`iman Qarabash, which are placed in dialogue with Ottoman, missionary and diplomatic sources. However, these memoirs, written shortly after the Seyfo, or Assyrian Genocide of WWI, place these events directly into a particular teleology linking the two events. They also reflect a discourse of Armenian blameworthiness which quickly manifests itself within the Syriac Orthodox Church’s communications with the Ottoman government. The work of Israel Audo provides evidence of a polemical and inter-Christian sectarian element to the memory of these events that at times obscures these massacres’ human toll on the Syriac community. Recalling the 1895 massacres, Audo openly blames the Armenians, claiming that they instigated these events through their opposition to the government, and going so far as to claim that the government’s attacks only focused on the Armenians, and that the “murdering and stealing only lasted a few days, because

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<sup>90</sup> Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 50.

this was a punishment and not an annihilation.”<sup>91</sup> This minimization of the event’s human tragedy stands in opposition to the very profound physical effect on the Syriac community during the period, and to documentary evidence provided by both internal (i.e. Syriac Christian sources) and external (i.e. American missionary sources) that attest to widespread low and high-intensity violence targeting non-Armenian Christians over a timespan much longer than a few days. However, the unjust or inaccurate narrative that the massacres were instigated by and related primarily to Armenian Christians became embedded within even the Syriac Orthodox Church’s historical memory. a product of political and social distancing undertaken during and after the Hamidian Massacres.

### **Review of Archival Sources**

Narratives like Audo’s became embedded within the Syriac Orthodox Church’s historical memory of the events as part of the political and social distancing undertaken during and after the Hamidian Massacres. During the massacres themselves, the church also publicly blamed Armenian revolutionaries and tried to create a specific discourse demonstrating Syriac Christian loyalty to the state. From reading the Ottoman archival record, one gathers the impression that anti-Suryani violence was part of this climate of lawlessness, and that the state took great effort when possible to protect the loyal Syriac Orthodox community. During the Diyarbakir Massacres of November 1-3, 1895, for example, the newly elected Patriarch Abdulmesih’s direct, in-person intervention with the vali of Diyarbakir resulted in security forces being used to protect that community. Furthermore, oft-cited documents from the Ottoman Archives include statements by

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<sup>91</sup> As opposed to the annihilation of the Seyfo in Audo’s view. Audo, quoted in Gaunt, 2018.

the Patriarch thanking the Ottoman government for its protection, not only from Kurdish bandits, but from Armenians machinations as well.<sup>92</sup> Rather than take these official narratives for granted, a closer examination of local Suryani voices helps illuminate the varied, conflicting experiences of the community, as well as the ways in which the church often reframed these events in its communication with the government to fit a narrative better suited to seeking advantage against the supposedly disloyal Armenian community.

The archives utilized for this chapter include multiple sets of internal and external correspondences, enabling clear identification of how these events were discussed, processed and communicated across members of the church, to local Ottoman officials and to tribal leaders, and how broader interests of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate were incorporated into discussions of immediate events and requests for assistance. The first set of documents, letters primarily from members of the clergy, include letters sent directly to the Patriarch as well as others sent to bishops or other ecclesiastics. These are held in collections in Deyrülzafaran, the Church of the Forty Martyrs, and multiple smaller collections from churches through Tur Abdin.<sup>93</sup> This body of documents has been placed in dialogue with other collections from Midyat and elsewhere, made available through collaboration with Assyrian researchers. These documents are, in decreasing order of linguistic frequency, in Garshuni Arabic, Ottoman, Garshuni Ottoman, Syriac, Malayalam and Kurmanji. They range from brief, multi-sentence to multi-page letters, and discuss a multitude of topics related to administration and social life of the Syriac Orthodox

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<sup>92</sup> BOA Y.PRK.AZN 15.1

<sup>93</sup> These Deyrulzafaran and Church of the Forty Martyrs collections are hosted through Beth Mardutho. I want to thank His Eminence Mor Filoksinus Saliba Özmen, Metropolitan of Mardin, for granting me access to these archives. I also wish to thank Hanna Bet-Sawoce for providing copies of these additional collections.

population. This archive provides real-time, local perspectives on the myriad issues facing the church and community.

The second set of documents consists of a set of *defters* [notebooks] consisting of copies of outgoing correspondence. This correspondence consists mainly of letters sent from the Patriarchate to various Ottoman administrative entities, ranging from local district officials and military commanders to governors, ministries and the Sultan. Less frequently, these include copies of correspondence with non-governmental officials, including Kurdish and Arab tribal leaders and the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul, missionaries and foreign consular representatives. Each defter, covering roughly the span of one Rumi calendar year and containing at times multiple hundreds of pages, and many with multiple entries, provides a detailed account of how the Syriac Orthodox Church communicated with the Ottoman authorities, providing unique evidence of both on-the-ground events and how they were interpreted and conveyed to government officials, such as how the Patriarchate understood the government's willingness to assist, or how broader language of loyalty was interjected. Furthermore, not all communications with the central government are housed in the Ottoman Başbakanlık Archive, indicating either an initial lack of archiving, or later purging, and underscoring the importance of this archival material for providing otherwise unavailable data.

### **The Syriac Orthodox Church of the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ottoman Empire**

The newly elected Patriarch Abdulmesih entered into leadership of a church which was technically, but not necessarily functionally, under authority of the Armenian Apostolic Church. This policy, in which the Syriac Orthodox community was treated by the Ottoman state as *yâmaq* [patch] of the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate of Jerusalem was tested by the increasingly

complex *millet* system of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Archival evidence documents the gradual process by which the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Tur Abdin and the reunified Patriarchate in Mardin were codified into such an arrangement.<sup>94</sup> The official relationship between the Armenian and Syriac Orthodox Patriarchates within Ottoman policy reflects Istanbul-centered administration of an increasingly integrated periphery. Both the processes of subordination of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate to the Armenian Patriarch, and its later separation, occurred through gradual processes stemming from continuations of local arrangements in Jerusalem, but became formalized as part of imperial church management in 1782. According to Ibrahim Özcoşar, this bureaucratic process was a result of coordination between the Ottoman government and the Syriac and Armenian Orthodox Patriarchates to combat Catholic conversion, and also reflected the gradual processes of centralization.<sup>95</sup> During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the subordination of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate to the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate in Istanbul increased, with the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate's correspondence with Istanbul carried out via the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate, as evidenced by such correspondences' being cataloged within the state's Armenian defters.<sup>96</sup> A significant disadvantage of this system, one noticed even by the Ottoman government itself, was a lack of an official representative of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul, which meant a gap between the amount of authority which the church wielded in the provinces and its visibility in the central Ottoman administration. Documents from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century indicate the ways in which the church exhibited its local authority, such as in issues of marriage, property and conversion. One such document from 1858 details the public interview of

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<sup>94</sup> Mehmet Şimşek, "Süryani Kadim Ortodoks Kilisesi Patrikhane Nizamnamesi," *Sosyal Bilimler Araştırma Dergisi (SBArD)*, 3 no. 6, 2005, 725.

<sup>95</sup> Ibrahim Özcoşar, "Osmanlı Taşrasında Bir Patriklik: Yakubî Süryani Patrikliği," *Avrasya İncelemeleri Dergisi-Journal of Eurasian Inquiries*, 7 no. 2, 2018, 171.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 170.

a woman named Ḥani bint Cim‘a who wished to convert to Islam, and who was interrogated by a committee consisting of a Syriac priest named Yūsif and Ottoman government representatives to assess the genuineness of her religious conviction.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the Ottoman government maintained direct communication with the Patriarchate on local issues, indicating a de-facto autonomy. Records of requests for full, official separation of the millet date to 1873.<sup>98</sup> The full and official separation between the Syriac Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic churches was not formalized until the submission of a *Nizâmnâme* by the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, voted upon by a committee of clergy, in 1914.<sup>99</sup>

Internal Ottoman discussions about the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate and community demonstrate not only recognition of the difficulties of its official representation, but also an acknowledgement of fundamental ethnic and cultural differences between the two – factors that the Patriarchate did not strongly assert in its later claims to uniqueness and obedience. An Ottoman archival document from the Başkitâbet [chief secretary] to Sultan Abdulhamid II summarizes the status of the Patriarchate’s position with regards to a series of mazbatas, or declarations of fealty, which it had recently submitted to the government.<sup>100</sup> The letter acknowledges the disadvantage of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, stating “because only the

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<sup>97</sup> A\_}MKT\_UM\_325.14.2 23 Muharram 1275 (2 September 1858). She was ultimately given permission. She provides biographical information in the interview stating she was born in Mosul but grew up in the Pasha district of Baghdad. She is married, with an 8 year old son, but had not seen her husband in 4 years and was accompanied by her father for the interview. A line of questioning seems to indicate concern she does not have financial support from her family, which she denies. She also says it is not acceptable for her to ask her husband’s permission to convert, as they have no contact, and that she is not converting out of hate for him, but is doing so from “the desire of her heart.” Members of her community attempted to pressure her out of converting, and she assured them that nobody was forcing her to convert.

<sup>98</sup> Özcoşar, 2018: 174.

<sup>99</sup> I will analyze the details of this document in a subsequent chapter on the buildup and events of the Seyfo. Mehmet Şimşek, *Süryaniler ve Diyarbakir* (Istanbul: Kent Yayınları, 2006), 299-314.

<sup>100</sup> BOA.Y.EE. 38/71 22 Şubat 1308 (6 March 1893). It is unclear if this document was written by the chief secretary or if it is an edited copy of another document.

Greek and Armenian Patriarchates are located in the Dar-i Sa`adet [Istanbul], the Armenians were instrumental in dealing with other Christians who brought issues to the government,” and that, despite the existence of an “independent [Suryani] Patriarchate in Mosul province, the Armenian Patriarch became their intermediary.” As for the motivations of the Armenian Patriarchate to continue this relationship, the author’s view is that “the Armenian Patriarchate has all along wanted to maintain its role as intermediary... to account for them [the Suryani] as a patch (*yamaq*), and want them to be added as an addition to their numbers in the census books” and has led them to “interfering with the longstanding legal system of our nation for years.”<sup>101</sup> This portion of the document indicates that these concerns had been brought to the attention of Sultan Abdulhamid II. However, in addition to these statements about the administrative relationship between the two groups, the letter also expresses the government’s perspective on the historical and ethnic differences between these groups. After indicating the existence of a separate Suryani Patriarchate, the government official reports to the Sultan that:

The Süryani, are on the other hand, the remnants of the ancient Babylonians, and even more the classical Suryani language is an ancient language, and was spoken even in Babylon before the time of Ibrahīm. Long ago, the Suryani were members of the Sabian religion, and a group became Christians, and they also possess sects that are different from those of the Greeks and Armenians.<sup>102</sup>

This statement attributes multiple beneficial characteristics regarding the Süryani. First, they are descendants of an ancient Mesopotamian community and thus carry a distinct and indigenous lineage. Second, that even prior to conversion to Christianity, they were members of a religious tradition classified as *ahl al-kitāb*, which can be interpreted as the official indicating a

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

level of prestige within Süryani history.<sup>103</sup> Although various Suryani intellectuals would engage in discussions of ancient origin, a peculiar factor of the Syriac Orthodox Church's correspondence is an avoidance of discussing ethnic difference between them and the Armenians. Instead, the Syriac Orthodox Church gravitated towards discussions of their uniqueness that were centered upon more immediate and politically expedient points of difference.

During this period of formal subjugation, the Armenian and Syriac Orthodox Patriarchates engaged in various disputes with one another, many of which arguments would adopt new discourses of loyalty and sedition following the Hamidian Massacres. Furthermore, the threat of conversion to the Armenian church emerged as a central focus of the Syriac Patriarchate's internal administration prior to the Hamidian Massacres. In a letter from 1891 to the Archbishop of Canterbury, then Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Peter III expresses his frustration at his subordination to the Armenians, describing how, in Jerusalem, they "are forcing us to become their subjects in order that they may seize what remains of our churches, convents and their establishments."<sup>104</sup> However, in a new setting of a binary of loyalty and sedition, the church found new ways to attach such discourses to internal and external concerns. In such, what was previously a concern about the financial and spiritual health of the church and community becomes an existential question in a context of government distrust and violence. Examples prior to the Hamidian Massacres indicate the ways in which the threat of conversion of community members could be used as leverage in engagement with the Patriarchate. A notable example of

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<sup>103</sup> The term *ahl al-kitāb*, or "People of the Book," is a term originating in the early Islamic period to refer to religious communities who believed in a single God and had received divine revelation: for Jews in the form of the Torah and Psalms, and Christians in the form of the Gospel. There is an ambiguity about which community the Quran's use of the term *Sabian* refers to, but they are included within the category of *ahl al-kitāb*.

<sup>104</sup> Khalid Dinno, *The Syrian Orthodox Christians in the Late Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Periods: Crisis then Revival* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2019), 76.

this tension involves internal power struggles in Midyat, in which the Safar family was engaged in political struggles with other notable families.<sup>105</sup> In a letter dated to November, 1888, Hanne Safar writes to the Patriarch warning him that multiple members of the local community, including Matran Zeytun and thirty to forty households have converted to Catholicism. The language of the letter states that the underlying cause of this conversion is “due to the looseness of the religion, and its having become like a game for children,” and that there is a very realistic threat that Midyat would become “like Aleppo, in which not a single Syriac Orthodox house remains other than that of Antonius Azar.”<sup>106</sup> This is presented as a local struggle, whose goal is to force the influential Hanna Jawwo and his followers into the Armenian community, who, distanced from their mother Syriac Orthodox Church, would then become Catholic. What is of further importance is Safar’s mention of a repeat of a previous humiliation as a threat against the Patriarch’s inaction, claiming that some years prior, “1,400 who were from Tur Abdin became Armenians expressly for the purpose of harming your prestige.”<sup>107</sup> An episode detailed in a series of articles by Sait Çetinoğlu demonstrates, according to French sources, that language of loyalty to the government was used as a means to rouse anti-Catholic support from the Muslim Mosul public in 1876 within its property disputes. In this example, reported in the French Catholic journal *Annales Catholique*, Syriac Orthodox Christians, reportedly having earlier given a large bribe to the Ottoman government, believed that two Catholic churches in Mosul had been returned and occupied by force.<sup>108</sup> According to a letter written by Mosul Syrian Catholic

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<sup>105</sup> I will also discuss the Safar family in more depth in a later chapter. This family, one of the most powerful Suryani families of Tur Abdin, were heavily involved in the region’s major events.

<sup>106</sup> MPA K05-607, Safar, Hanne, “Letter to Patriarch Peter”, 12 Kanun al-Thani [January] 1888.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>108</sup> “La Persecution a Mossoul” *Annales Catholique*, Vol. II, 8 July 1876, pp. 73-78. Translated by Memet Baytimur, Edited by Jan Beṭ-Shawoçe, in Sait Çetinoğlu., “Yakubi Süryanilerin Süryani Katoliklere Yönelik Baskı ve

Mihayel Faris, the Catholics had received no such order, and sought to rectify this situation with the governor in Baghdad. Through bribery and political connections, according to Faris, the Syriac Orthodox community received an edict assigning ownership to them. After Catholics refused to vacate, a mob of Muslims led by members of the Syriac Orthodox community attacked the Catholics, with Orthodox leaders provoking these attacks by telling the crowd that the Catholics “are betraying our Sultan, they are siding with the French,” and giving shouts of “long live the Sultan,” placing their own community as loyal subjects vis-à-vis the Catholics. Thus, the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, beset on all sides by conversion to Uniate Catholic churches, or by movement to the Armenian church, became deeply invested in boundary maintenance. The Hamidian Massacres only accelerated this trend.

### **The Hamidian Massacres from the Syriac Orthodox Church’s Perspective**

The archival record indicates the Syriac Orthodox community suffered increased violence at roughly the same time as Diyarbakir Massacre of 1895. Here, I will discuss how the community reported these events to the Patriarchate, and how the Patriarchate then relayed this information and sought assistance or intervention. As the external correspondence is clearly ordered, collected into a number of sequential letters organized by year, this approach offers a clearer systematic analysis in comparison to its internal letters, which, as many were mixed together chronologically or regarding region, can at times lack the broader context to make sense of larger events. Thus, for this section, I have selected a few well-documented events based on letters which I have cataloged and placed them in dialogue with the Patriarchate’s outgoing

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Zulümleri II. Bölüm,” *Yakındoğu Yazıları*, <https://yakindoguyazilari.com/sait-cetinoglu-yakubi-suryaniler-suryani-katolikler-baski-ve-zulum-ii-bolum/> Accessed 10 December, 2020.

correspondence.

The Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate's external archival records of the Hamidian Massacres are contained in a notebook catalogued as CFMM 00857, hosted by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, which covers a period from early May, 1895 through August, 1896, then followed by separate *defters*. Early topics in this volume include discussions and confirmation of the selection of Abdulmesih as Patriarch. As an indication of relations between communities in the region prior to the intense outbreak of violence later in the year, a letter jointly submitted to the government by the Syriac Orthodox, Syriac and Armenian Catholic and Protestant church representatives together stated their coordinated efforts to prevent the spread of illness in Diyarbakir.<sup>109</sup> Other communications prior to the onset of violence in the region reflect ongoing concerns regarding conversion to the Catholic church and questions of property ownership, including a petition to the Ministry of Justice regarding the activities of the Catholics and conversion from the Syriac Orthodox community over the prior thirty years in Mardin, (007v). These communications thus indicate an immediate concern over Orthodox-Catholic competition.

Shortly before the violence in Diyarbakir on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1895, the focus of the archive's entries shifts dramatically, detailing attacks throughout the broader region. Initially, reports from the periphery submitted to the vali of Diyarbakir describe atrocities committed by "Kurdish vermin" in multiple villages in Diyarbakir and Tur Abdin, including Ka`aba and Qatirbil, with one letter including 14 separate villages as having been attacked.<sup>110</sup> This initial entry is followed by a rapid succession of related petitions to the Diyarabkir vali seeking aid against these attacks, then shift to a mixture of letters with further detail on violence in the

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<sup>109</sup> "Letter to the Vali of Diyarbakir," 5 September 1895, CFMM 00857-14r.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 19v, 5 October 1895.

broader Diyarbakir region submitted to the Vali along with individualized petitions to local Jandarma commanders.

During the Diyarbakir Massacres, which coincided with another rapid increase in attacks, the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate sent multiple communications which developed into a discourse describing the Syriac Orthodox community as loyal citizens who have due to the activities of the Armenians.<sup>111</sup> The first chronological attestation of this language comes in a letter written to the Diyarbakir vali dated November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1895. The letter begins by openly blaming the “seditious Armenians” for inciting violence and blames them for the destruction of homes and the deaths of families in the Sulûki (Sülüklü) district of central Diyarbakir. It also introduces language thanking local officials for their efforts, including Shukru and Nazif Effendi for their service to the Suryani community.<sup>112</sup>

The same day, the Patriarch sent another letter to the central government, repeating similar language blaming seditious acts by the Armenians for the violence occurring in the region, and within the next few days a series of letters to the Diyarbakir Vali detailed the specific human impact of the violence against the Suryani community. One such list submitted by the Patriarchate on November 17<sup>th</sup> enumerates 61 homes pillaged during the violence within the city.<sup>113</sup> These early petitions are structured to seek protection while documenting the specific incidences of violence committed against the Süryani, and are coupled directly with language distancing the Suryani, more specifically the Syriac Orthodox, from the Armenian community. An additional element was soon added to these communications, referring to the obedience of

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<sup>111</sup> “Letter to the Diyarbakir Governor,” 13 November, 1895, CFMM 857-26r.

<sup>112</sup> “Letter to the Diyarbakir Governor,” 13 November, 1895, CFMM 857-26r.

<sup>113</sup> “Letter to the Diyarbakir Governor,” 17 November, 1895, CFMM 857-26v.

the Suryani community “since the days of Hazreti [ʿUmar] ibn al-Khattab.”<sup>114</sup> It is worth noting, that this particular phrase is mirrored in a communication submitted by then Patriarchate Abdullah to the governor of Diyarbakir during the height of the Seyfo, or Assyrian/Suryani Genocide of 1915.<sup>115</sup> Additionally, the archival record shows signatories from religious leaders of the Syriac Orthodox and Greek churches of Diyarbakir claiming that they ordered their communities not to take part in any activities that would be seen as action against the government, their Muslim neighbors, or as taking part in the Armenians’ sedition.<sup>116</sup> Such statements were later employed in presenting Ottoman-Christian relations as irenic, with the violence of the region stemming solely from Armenian insurrection and surrounding chaos.<sup>117</sup>

Within two months of the main outbreak of violence in Diyarbakir, the Syriac Orthodox Church had further elaborated its language of loyalty and historical subservience to their Muslim rulers in correspondence with the central government, placed against the “creeping” Armenian presence which was characterized by corruption, chaos, and disloyalty. The Syriac Orthodox Patriarch used this newly elaborated language in seeking the government’s intervention on issues between the two communities. In one such example, sent in January, 1896 to the Ministry of Justice and *Mezahib* (denominations), and to the Diyarbakir government, the Patriarchate proclaims that the loyal members of the Suryani community, who he states have never committed a single disloyal act, have suffered due to chaos stemming from the “corrupt thoughts” of the Armenians who have brought about these calamities wherever they have

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 27r, 17 November 1895.

<sup>115</sup> CFMM 00861-41v.

<sup>116</sup> Y.PRK.AZN. 15.1 20 December 1895.

<sup>117</sup> A copy of such a letter was published in *Sabah*, cf. Taylor, *Narratives of Identity*, 161.

become established.<sup>118</sup> The Patriarch describes the loyal Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate as “better than other Patriarchates,” reflecting the claim to unique loyalty and innocence within these events in seeking to elevate their standing in the eyes of the government.

Work by David Gaunt and others on this period have asserted that given previously available archival evidence the church did report violence outside of Diyarbakir. This scholarship largely relies on memoirs, missionary and Foreign Office reports which serve as testimonial evidence for violence committed in and around Mardin, Tur `Abdin and Urfa. However, within these the initial days of this outbreak of violence, numerous reports from Mardin report attacks in the villages of Gölê, Binêbil and nearby Qala`a Nimra and attempts to communicate with local Kurdish tribal leaders.<sup>119</sup> Other initial petitions detail attacks throughout the region, ranging from Derik, west of Mardin, to villages surrounding Diyarbakir. This information also demonstrates efforts to protect specific individuals through enacting language of difference between Armenian and Suryani communities. One such communication, sent to a government representative in Mardin on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, sought to clarify the status of a clockmaker named Grigor of Armenian origin from Harput who had changed to the Syriac denomination, and thus community, upon his arrival to Mardin ten years prior.<sup>120</sup> The Patriarchate’s direct involvement in this matter reflects the sense of protection that registration as non-Armenian may provide, as well as the ways in which, in a social reality of deeply mixed communities, the Patriarchate represented an authority to define social categories as if this ambiguity was not a central characteristic of the social milieu.

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<sup>118</sup> CFMM 00857-54v, 15 January 1896. Copies of this letter, with altered introductory formula, were sent to various offices, from the Diyarbakir Vali, ministries and the Sultan.

<sup>119</sup> CFMM 00857-29r

<sup>120</sup> CFMM 00857-30v.

In the wake of the main period of violence, the Syriac Orthodox Church continued to protest the innocence of its community, which had fallen victim to lawlessness due to the activities of Armenians, rather than as the target of state-sponsored violence. Furthermore, the discourse employed by the church shifted, now repeatedly utilizing the term *ightişâş*, which is used as well in later Ottoman sources as a euphemism for the massacres.<sup>121</sup> This term is also later employed not in direct connection to Armenians, but to euphemistically refer to these tragic events in both the Patriarchate and government's communications.<sup>122</sup> Writing to the Interior Ministry the Church refers to the "great destruction" brought upon the Suryani community throughout their territories. The Patriarchate cites the regions of Garzan, greater Diyarbakir, Mardin, and Beşiri in particular as suffering violence brought about through confusion resulting from the seditious activities of Armenians in Diyarbakir, and that the community has been left in a state of destitution.<sup>123</sup> Further noting the widespread impact of this catastrophe, and the implementation of this discourse at the local level, similar language is used in a petition to the Bitlis provincial and Siirt *sanjak* (district) government, reporting the pillaging of Suryani homes and churches during the violence.<sup>124</sup> These documents also provide specifics regarding financial costs of damages assessed by the church.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> CFMM 00857-105r.

<sup>122</sup> Government communications in 1914 regarding a Suryani-Armenian property dispute refer to the period using this term. BOA, DH-Dahiliye Nezareti, İD. 162-2/51-2

<sup>123</sup> "Letter to the Interior Ministry," 9 June, 1895, CFMM 00857-109v.

<sup>124</sup> CFMM 00857-111v.

<sup>125</sup> CFMM 00857-116r.

## A Comparison of Events in Farqin and Nusaybin

The archive of the Syriac Orthodox Church's outgoing correspondence provides valuable data, with structured chronology and organization, on the particulars of the violence of the Hamidian Massacres. In this section, I will place these in dialogue with internal correspondence which enables better understanding of these events from an on-the-ground perspective. These documents, drawn from multiple collections, including the Deyrulzafaran, Mardin and Midyat archives, are the product of unrelated cataloging projects, and together reveal a clear narrative through finding a plethora of correspondence related to a specific town and event. Here, I will discuss the Hamidian Massacres from the perspective of its Suryani victims within two regions of the Diyarbakir vilayet, in Farqîn, located north-east of Diyarbakir city, and Aznavur, located near Nusaybin in the heart of Tur Abdin.<sup>126</sup>

The Patriarchate's archive includes a multitude of letters from community members who had suffered during this period, and an overarching sense that the cause was due to indifference of local government officials before, during and after the attacks. The tone of many of these letters from the community express a perception that this violence and its consequences can be remedied only by the Patriarch's direct intervention with the Ottoman government, rather than any expectation that the government will act on its own initiative to protect them. In one of the most detailed letters expressing this sentiment, Donabed bin Hagop, writing from the region of Lice, states that he traveled to Diyarbakir city with his three-year-old son, and was present for the massacres therein.<sup>127</sup> Due to banditry and murder along the roads leading home, he was forced to remain in Diyarbakir, but returning to his village with a priest, he learned that his wife

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<sup>126</sup> Although Aznavur is an Armenian placename the village's Christian population was largely Suryani.

<sup>127</sup> "Letter to Patriarch Abdulmesih from Donabed bin Hagop," 21 March, 1896, MPA K05-098.

had been kidnapped by members of an unnamed Kurdish tribe, and, unable to rescue her, promptly returned to Diyarbakir to inform the vali. The vali reportedly had her rescued and brought to the “house of a Muslim” in a village on the Diyarbakir-Mardin road in which her brothers lived. Donabed states that her host had threatened to kill her brothers if she left, and through torture had led her to renounce her faith. Seeing the half-hearted attempt by the Ottoman government to assist, he thus requests the Patriarch’s direct intercession to pressure the vali. Such communications indicate that, even if the government was not openly hostile, Ottoman officials demonstrated either a disinterest or inability to respond forcefully or sensitively to the abuse of local Suryani by local Kurds.

A detailed review of the events in Farqîn, how they were locally understood and communicated to and interpreted by the Patriarchate reflects the ways in which violence, conversion, loyalty and corruption were tied to local inter-church politics. Farqîn, now known as Silvan located roughly 80km east of Diyarbakir’s city center and was inhabited by a mix of Kurds, Armenians and Syriac Christians. The population as recorded in the 1871-72 Diyarbakir *Sâlnâme* (government annual report) lists the province’s population as 3122 Muslim and 2212 non-Muslims, although this number is not further divided by millet or denomination. The region was heavily affected during the Hamidian Massacres. However, from the perspective of the Syriac Orthodox clergy who wrote to the Patriarch, this violence was deeply intertwined with local politics.

The archive of the Church of the Forty Martyrs includes two initial letters to the Patriarch detailing events from the perspective of the village of Mir Ali and from the district center of Farqîn. As events unfolded in early 1895, the authors of these letters reflect two emergent camps within the intra-Syriac Orthodox in-fighting that had led to widespread conversion of the

beleaguered community, as well as how the discourses of these events shifted to include efforts to distance the Syriac Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox communities. In a letter dated January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1895, as violence in the countryside of Diyarbakir increased, the deacon Ibrahim sent a letter from the village of Mir Ali to inform the Patriarchate of local events.<sup>128</sup> According to the author, a local Muslim leader named Darwish had sent his followers to attack the village and were killing members of the Suryani community. As a result of these attacks, the author reports that many in the area had been forced to convert to Islam, and that two girls had been kidnapped, with one taken to the nearby village of Boşat (modern Boyunlu). Ibrahim indicates the perceived willingness of local Ottoman authorities to protect the Suryani, although with significant limitations and a sense of a need for direct intervention by the Patriarchate to prompt mobilization by local Ottoman officials. Ibrahim states that, with the protection of the local onbaşı (junior officer) Mustafa, they traveled to the Farqin provincial center to request aid from the qaymaqam (subprovince governor), who offered no response to their plea to help the kidnapped girls and those who had been forcibly converted.

Another letter, dated three weeks later, was sent to the Patriarch by the deacon Jebraïl from the Farqin provincial center.<sup>129</sup> Written as a response to a letter from the Patriarchate absent from the archive, Jebraïl more broadly discusses the dire situation in Farqin, but provides greater detail on the relationships between the church, the government and local Kurdish tribes. Jebraïl reports that, likely at the Patriarchate's request, members of the community petitioned the qaymaqam of Farqin, Azimet Beg, for aid, petitioning about forced conversions and the looting of property. Although he claims that the entire government, and particularly Mustafa Beg, look

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<sup>128</sup> "Letter from Shammas Ibrahim to the Patriarchate," 2 Kanun al-Thani (January), 1895, MPA-K05-24/40-116.

<sup>129</sup> "Letter from Shammas Jebraïl to the Patriarchate," 24 Kanun al-Thani (January), 1895, MPA-K05-24/40-145.

favorably upon the “Patriarch’s children,” he asserts that because the qaymaqam is “not firm” with the local tribes, nothing of use would come out of this request, necessitating direct intervention by the Patriarch. Therefore, other government officials requested a letter from the Patriarch in hopes of prompting a solid response. As this rivalry becomes more important to the parties after the violence, the author, Jebrail, states in a note in the bottom of the letter that he wishes the Patriarch to keep a “watchful eye” over other clergy.

As the violence increased, the tone of local clergy shifts to include harsh discussion of conversion and separation from the denomination, and political infighting within broader discourses of anti-Suryani violence. In a letter dated March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1896, Jebrail and Ibrahim again discuss the government’s indifference, stating they have found no benefit from asking the qaymaqam for help, even having met with him personally the day prior to no avail. The authors point out the specific requests which have been ignored, such as that they have no food and that the community has been left destitute, with “nothing to eat.”<sup>130</sup> Additionally, the kidnapping of local Suryani girls had increased, reaching a total of 50, and although it is not indicated if all remain in captivity, the locations and names of at least four are given, along with the identity of one of the perpetrators, a mullah named Mustafa, yet the authors complain that no response has been undertaken by government officials.<sup>131</sup> In noting the greater violence in the region, they also state that these kidnappings have led to infighting between local Muslims in Mir Ali, yet the qaymaqam’s sole interest is freeing a kidnapper named Darwish from prison.

Two letters directly state the community’s intent to clearly split the Suryani millet from the Armenian millet in Farqîn. A letter dated April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1896 associates frustrations with local

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<sup>130</sup> “Letter from Priests Jebrail and Ibrahim to the Patriarchate,” 3 Adhar [March] 1896, MPA-K05-24/40-149.

<sup>131</sup> Two are listed as still in captivity in Mir Ali, one in Boshat (modern Boyunlu), and one in a village whose name is not fully legible.

corruption, and that attempts to differentiate communities are threatened by the qaymaqam's indifference or perhaps irritation at local Armenian-Suryani disputes. As a result the qaymaqam had decided not to allow certain Syriac Orthodox community members to participate in local elections.<sup>132</sup> Another letter, dated April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1896, was submitted by a group of clergy and laity, including the Jebrail, from the center of Farqîn. Writers explain that they submitted a petition to the local administrative council (*meclis-I idare*) requesting formal recognition of the separation of the twenty-two Suryani houses of Farqîn from the Armenian community in the eyes of the government, and that with the exception of one clergyman the community is united in this desire. This was followed by a letter written one week later, claiming qayma request to separate has sparked intense resistance by the Armenian community in the form of slander and an attempt at preventing any Suryani from participating in the administrative council. This is followed by yet another, dated April 15<sup>th</sup>, signed by a group of twenty community members, including the priest Yūsif, stating that the problems in pushing for recognition of a split between the communities by local authorities stems from problems in their local communal management, placing blame on members of the church.<sup>133</sup>

As these communications continue, the importance of this infighting as the reason for their inability to separate becomes clearer. These letters may be divided into two camps: one, from the priests Ishaq and his son Yūsif, and the others by their rivals Ibrahim and Jebrail. Despite the Patriarchate's direct engagement with the qaymaqam, priests of the faction opposed to Jebrail proclaim their frustration at the church's inaction and the effects of infighting caused by the political machinations of Jebrail, as well as the deeply interpersonal dimensions of this

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<sup>132</sup> MPA-K05-155. 11 Nisan, 1896.

<sup>133</sup> MPA-K05-134. 15 Nisan, 1896.

conflict. In a letter dated to January, 1897, the priest Ishaq states that his ongoing conflict with Jebrail resulted in the latter's denying him the sacraments as well. His son, Yūsif, then visited Jebrail's colleague to request the sacraments, resulting in a quarrel and a request to have him arrested.<sup>134</sup> Ishaq states that, in his forty years of service in Farqin, no one had ever deprived him of the sacraments, and that these struggles and Jebrail's misdeeds were threatening the integrity of the community. A letter written in March, 1897 by Yūsif, states that he and his father had repeatedly informed the church of corrupt activities by priests in Farqin over the previous two years.<sup>135</sup> He again characterizes the problems as cases of real and perceived corruption, their loss of status among government officials, and the lack of enforcement of boundaries across millets.

Although on its surface this appears to be a local, interpersonal conflict between two factions of clergy, these events prompted a measured response by their superior, Metropolitan Abdullah. In a letter from March, 1897, Abdullah reports that he has discussed the activities of Jebrail in Farqîn with two priests, assumedly Ishaq and his son Yūsif.<sup>136</sup> Although he speaks briefly in positive tones about Jebrail's past behavior, he discusses his recent activities as "not walking in the path of the priesthood" and causing division within the millet. Much of intrigue, he states, is financially motivated: although the church had given Jebrail his due privileges, Jebrail now "requests that which is beyond his rights, by that I mean his salary."<sup>137</sup> As a result of this avarice, Metropolitan Abdullah warns that Jebrail has been accepting bribes from other communities, but feigns ignorance of such detrimental activities in his correspondence with the

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<sup>134</sup> MPA-K05-24/40-137. 23 Kanun al-Awwal 1312 [4 January, 1897].

<sup>135</sup> "Letter to the Patriarch from the priest Yūsif ibn Ishaq," 17 Adar 1313 [29 March 1897], MPA-K05-24/40-135.

<sup>136</sup> "Letter to the Patriarch from Matran Abdullah," 29 Adar 1897. [17 March 1897], MPA-K05-24/40-082.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

Patriarchate. A note at the bottom expands upon his personal criticism errant: Jebrail does not fast, sleeps until noon, doesn't observe his religious responsibilities such as leading mass, and, despite his poor character, still carefully cultivates a relationship with local authorities and Armenian leaders in order to line his pockets. Metropolitan Abdullah concludes that even as he is writing Jebrail had not conducted his prayers the day prior or that morning, instead sitting among the Armenian *mukhtars* to facilitate some manner of bribe.<sup>138</sup>

As these local tensions continued, the priest Ishaq sent another letter in which he quite vividly describes his frustration at the ongoing situation. He reports that because of the issue of the *mazbata* of Jebrail, either referring to his declaration of support for the government, or in his allotted rights and duties, a group has departed the millet, presumably to the Armenian community based on the context of prior communications. Ishaq bemoans that in his forty years in the priesthood, some “coming and going” has occurred, but indicates that recent events and the flight of a group from the millet is unusual.<sup>139</sup> Ishaq warns of the financial consequences and political risk posed by either conversion or any ambiguity in the stance of the local community in the eyes of the government. He writes that he had even written a letter to local government officials to clarify the ongoing dispute in an attempt to convince the state that Jebrail and his followers hold no legal claim on church property.<sup>140</sup> The qaymaqam responded that they were in fact unsure at that point who actually represented the Syriac Orthodox Church; as Jebrail still claimed to do so despite his conflict with other church members.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> “Letter to the Patriarch from the priest Ishaq,” 26 Ab 1313 [7 September, 1897], MPA-K05-24/40-133-134.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

In addition to the political and financial liabilities created by this conflict, Ishaq, through colorful language, reminds the Patriarchate of the religious implications for those that leave the Syriac Orthodox faith. He states that, under the guidance of the priest Jebrail, the people of the millet have left, and with this departure “have become something in which the fear of God is absent.”<sup>141</sup> Ishaq says that, in his prayer, he speaks to God as a “shepherd without sheep” wandering the mountain, beseeching God’s guidance in reminding Jebrail’s followers of their debt to their original denomination in the hopes that they would return. Furthermore, reflecting his deep animosity towards those who had caused members of the community to leave, he claims that the only desire that keeps him living is that on Judgement Day he may “become a prosecutor for the truth in front of the throne of the Lord of the Two Worlds,” to judge those who have corrupted their faith and “degenerated the apostolic throne and its forebears.”<sup>142</sup> To prevent such damnation, he requests the Patriarch write a formal letter ordering members of the community not to follow priest Jebrail. Furthermore, in an indication of the socio-linguistic nature of the region, the reverse of this petition contains brief poems in Classical Syriac and Kurmanji Garshuni penned by Ishaq.<sup>143</sup> Based on matching the idiosyncrasies of his handwriting, the archive contains another unsigned and undated Kurdish Garshuni poem attributable to him.

The Patriarchate’s discussions with the government regarding Farqîn details specifics of the violence, kidnapping and looting in the region during the winter of 1895-96.<sup>144</sup> Following the

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> The poem in Classical Syriac is written above: “Like the blind man open my eyes to see your light; like the deaf man open my ears to your words; like the leper, cleanse my insides with hyssop, like the one paralyzed, heal the illness, and give praise to your name”

<sup>144</sup> Cf. CFMM 857/28r, 17 November, 1895.

Diyarbakir Massacres, in which the Patriarch Abdulmesih was present and helped organize the protection of his community, the Patriarchate's communications reflect a rapid series of short letters sent to every level of Ottoman representation documenting events in various regions, even in such local letters asserting that they have been loyal subjects since the days of Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab.<sup>145</sup> In early letters, the Patriarchate directly described ongoing violence, such as one relating information received from the priest Ibrahim about violence in Mir Ali.<sup>146</sup> As time progresses a more formulaic language is introduced, placing the violence in the context of *ightishâsh*. A report from mid-March, 1896 written by the Patriarchate to the vali of Diyarbakir sets out the impact of recent events.<sup>147</sup> Foremost, the letter begins by stating that an unnamed woman had been kidnapped and taken to the house of Reşid Agha, and, while there, has reportedly been forced to convert, and, despite efforts to retrieve her, had been taken again. The letter indicates that the qaymaqam had been notified, but the Patriarch still requests intervention on behalf of the governor. As communications continue, the Patriarch begins to clarify questions of local Syriac Orthodox authority, explaining that Jebrail is the community's representative, and seeks clarification on the community's participation in the local council.<sup>148</sup> Still, although there is at times mention of the *ightishash*, which has become euphemism for the massacres, the church had not yet applied language of Armenian subversiveness into political leverage, despite the real threat of conversion to the Armenian millet, and the local corruption supposedly at play between Jebrail, the qaymaqam and the Armenian community. However, by the summer of

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> "Letter to Saif al-Din Beg," 25 December, 1895, CFMM 857/42v.

<sup>147</sup> "Letter from the Patriarch to the Wali of Diyarbakir," 25 March 1896, CFMM 857/74v.

<sup>148</sup> "Letter from the Patriarch to the Wali of Diyarbakir," 22 June, 1896, CFMM 00857/117r. Other such statements were sent to the Qaymaqam and local courts, CFMM 857, 118r.

1896, discussions of Armenians had entered into topics even in cases where the initial local reports sent to the Patriarch did not mention them. A letter to the Diyarbakir vali, dated August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1896, discusses the region of Aznavur, to be described in detail in the following section, as having been attacked by Kurdish and Arab tribes. The letter begins by attributing the chaos to the impetus of “the Armenians’ stirring about in various regions.”<sup>149</sup> Thus, language blaming Armenians for violence found its use as a means to assign blame to events throughout the broader region. Comparing Aznavur to Farqîn reflects a deeper concern about maintaining Syriac Orthodox presence in administration, and reassurance of a clear line of authority from the Patriarchate through to local representation.

A contemporary comparison, further from Diyarbakir, in the village of Aznavur, now known as Sınırtepe, located east of Nusaybin along what is now the Syrian-Turkish border. The 1871-72 salname lists the area’s population as 978 Muslims, and 621 non-Muslims, again with no further division beyond Muslim and non-Muslim.<sup>150</sup> These accounts not only place the violence in the context of an immediate increase in widespread anti-Christian attacks in the days following the Diyarbakir riots, but also indicate perceived indifference by the Ottoman government. Crucially, no indication is given regarding the presence of Armenians as a factor in or victims of these attacks.

Two documents from Midyat dated 3 December, 1895 offer a ground-level account of the escalating attacks on Christian villages. The first, addressed to Matran Gergis, after the common brief introductory formula, states that the community has been “plundered by Muslims [lit. by “Islam”],” and names the chief perpetrators, including the “whole of the Muslim mukhtars” in

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<sup>149</sup> “Letter from the Patriarch to the Wali of Diyarbakir,” 30 August, 1896, CFMM 00857/135v.

<sup>150</sup> *Diyarbakir Salnâmeleri, Vol. I*, ed. İzgöer, Ahmet Zeki (Diyarbakir: Acar Matbaası, 1999), 222.

the area.<sup>151</sup> The letter provides a breakdown of events during the preceding month. On the evening of November 5<sup>th</sup>, a raiding party set upon the Christians of the village of Marbab (Syriac Mor Bobo/ Turkish Günyurdu), killing, pillaging their property and burning their homes. The authors of this letter, indicating their perceptions of the readiness of the Ottoman authorities to attack them, recall that “we thought that this was the work of the government, and out of fear we fled to the mountains, leaving everything behind, and couldn’t protect anything at all except for our souls.”<sup>152</sup> After remaining for some weeks in two groups atop the mountains, they were promised by the authorities that they could return, and that their property would be restored. Despite their fear of dying from hunger, they believed the local qaymaqam to be unwilling to help, even after their bishop Hanna met with the qaymaqam and local military commander. Days later, a separate group, including Matran Hanna, sent another letter to another bishop, Matran Gergis, offering new details of the violence and their perceptions of how to remedy their situation. Skipping introductory formalities, the letter repeats information about those leading the attacks, further stating that “they gathered up the Kurds in the region, and drove them on to attack and pillage,” leading to severe losses in the village of Mor Bobo.<sup>153</sup>

The Patriarchate received word of these events, and on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December began communicating about the situation with Ottoman authorities. The Patriarchate reported the names of the perpetrators mentioned in the letters from the community, with the addition of mentioning that a group of Ezîdîs were “compelled” into participation in these actions. Like elsewhere, the Patriarchate sought to leverage its authority and relationship with the government

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<sup>151</sup> From the private archives of Hanna Bet-Sawoce, from here after referred to as HBS. “Letter to Matran Gergis from the community of Aznavur,” 3 December 1895, HBS, 2/8/102.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> “Letter to Matran Gergis,” 5 December 1895, HBS, 2/8/102.

to provide aid and recovery of property. Although this violence is presented as occurring within broader *ightishash* there is no direct blame placed upon the Armenians in initial discussions, a theme that appears in communications by August, 1896. The letter does, however, mention that this is a community that had affirmed its loyalty via a “mazbata,” a formal petition of allegiance, one often coerced by the government. In the following summer, as violence had subsided, the Patriarchate wrote to the vali of Diyarbakir about the situation in Aznavur, mentioning that the area is still under control of various tribes, and the community suffering abuse.<sup>154</sup> Other letters, such as another to the vali written the same date, discuss Aznavur in the broader context of violence in Nusaybin, and attribute murders, looting of property and the destitute state of the Suryani community to Arab tribes that have taken control over the region.<sup>155</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Patriarch issued a series of letters to local government and tribal authorities, including one to an Abdurrahman Bey, addressed him in flattering language using his many various titles, as “Leader of the Tayy Tribe, Hamidiye Qaymaqam, Abdurrahman Bey.”<sup>156</sup> The letter, one of few in Arabic sent to a recipient outside of the church, mentions the suffering of the Suryani in Nusaybin and in the district of Aznavur and asks for Abdurrahman Bey’s intercession in the returning of property and to place the Suryani community under his protection. As reflected in other Patriarchal correspondence with local, non-senior officials, such letters do not mention either the loyalty of the Syriac Orthodox community, nor do they frame events as stemming from Armenians’ activities.

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<sup>154</sup> “Letter to the Wali of Diyarbakir,” 13 August 1896, CFMM 857/128v.1.

<sup>155</sup> “Letter to the Wali of Diyarbakir,” 13 August 1896, CFMM 857/128v.2.

<sup>156</sup> “Letter to Abdurrahman Bey, Leader of the Tayy Tribe,” 1 September 1896, CFMM 857/140r.

The Patriarch's writing campaign engaged other tribal leaders, such as Mustafa Pasha, the notorious head of the Miran tribe, and Ibrahim Pasha, leader of the Millî Confederation whose Hamidiye Cavalry units bore much of the responsibility for the violence of 1894-1896. The Millî Confederation was, at the time of the Hamidian Massacres, the most powerful confederation of Northern Kurdistan, and its members comprised five of its eleven core units. In such letters, again written as the violence in the region had begun to subside, the Patriarch asked for Ibrahim's assistance in local matters which were ostensibly under the purview of the government such as the returning of livestock and other property to the Suryani in the area of Xirabê Tirkan west of Diyarbakir and other issues in regions surrounding Mardin.<sup>157</sup> These communications demonstrate three important points. First, that existence of direct communication between the Patriarchate and tribal leaders. Second, the status of state-client tribal leaders as politically appointed qaymaqams and the Patriarch's appeals to both modes of authority. Third, the perception that engagement with extra-governmental or non-district level government officials was a means to achieve redress for specific, often village-level problems, normally under the jurisdiction of the qaymaqam or mukhtar, providing multiple avenues to solve local problems. In such correspondence to tribal leaders, for instance an earlier letter to Ibrahim Pasha referring to events in Siverek, the Patriarchate places attacks against Suryani villages within the context of *ightishâsh*, and, unlike those sent to the vali and other government officials, makes no mention of these concerns as ultimately stemming from Armenian insurrection, indicating the uselessness of this language in engagement with tribal authorities.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> "Letter to Ibrahim Pasha, Head of the Milli," 7 July 1896, CFMM 857/119v. "Letter to Ibrahim Pasha, Head of the Milli Tribe," 28 June, 1896, CFMM 857/116v/118r. "Letter to Ibrahim Pasha, Head of the Milli, in Diyarbakir," 1 June, 1896, CFMM 857/113r.

<sup>158</sup> "Letter to Ibrahim Pasha in Yenişehir 'Agha' of the 'Millu'," 11 May, 1896, CFMM 857/101v.

During this period, individuals' correspondences to the Patriarchate routinely demonstrate acts of fealty to the church, rejection of the Armenians, or acts of contrition for involvement with the Armenian church. Such language clearly indicates the Patriarchate's concern over the community's integrity and wellbeing, and the ways in which assuaging these fears became part of formal communication. Despite the common overlapping between these groups, the new violent social and political realities brought forth by the massacres were understood as driving a wedge between the communities. In April of 1896, *shammas* (deacon) Ilyas al-Khouri, dozens of whose letters in the archive detail these events, states that in Garzan, two Syriac Orthodox villages had begun to identify as Armenians, going so far as to communicate in Armenian, due to their perception that Armenians were receiving aid more quickly.<sup>159</sup> In a context of multi-lingual communities as standard, al-Khouri's description reflects how the deliberate choice of language of communication in particular contexts could still be used as a means of asserting a particular communal identity. Elsewhere, in multiple letters, he discusses how the village of Geydûk (Tr. Denктаş), west of Mardin, made a financial arrangement with Serkis Agha, who later used his leverage to move Armenians into the village, a problem about which the Patriarch had already attempted to intervene.<sup>160</sup> In another letter, reflecting a desire to distance himself from the Armenians, Ilyas reports that a communication arrived from Midyat about a man who wished to repent for having a marriage to his wife's sister by an Armenian priest four or five years prior.<sup>161</sup> Still, the first examples reflect a sense that, despite the efforts to broadly place blame upon Armenians, and promote social boundary

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<sup>159</sup> "Letter from Shammas Ilyas to Patriarch Abdulmesih," 4 March 1896, MPA-K05-24/40-186.

<sup>160</sup> "Letter from Shammas Ilyas to Patriarch Abdulmesih," MPA-K05-24/40-215, 220, 223; CFMM 857/93v.

<sup>161</sup> "Letter from Shammas Ilyas to Patriarch Abdulmesi, 15 April 1896, MPA-K05-24/40-206.

between them, the perceived superiority of the Armenian community in terms of resources and aid underscores the continued weakness of the Syriac Orthodox community and the Patriarch's perceived inability to meaningfully protect his community.

### **Heritage and Social Boundary**

In identifying and enforcing social boundaries, ecclesiastical and lay intellectuals centered their discourses on property, religious practices, and language. In each case, the deep overlap between these communities complicated their ability to enforce such division. This section will discuss the importance of boundary enforcement from physical use of church space, rather than ownership, an idea that becomes central to Naum Faiq's calls for preserving Suryani culture. Central to these arguments within the broader region are long-standing disputes between the Syriac Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic Churches, which this chapter will shortly address in detail.<sup>162</sup> Other churches are also discussed in terms of social boundary, such as Maryam Ana Kilise in Farqin. In a letter from 1906 to the Diyarbakir vali, the Patriarch details burial of Armenians within this church, which was claimed by both communities. Although, in the case of The Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin, the church openly allowed separate Armenian worship, in this example, the Patriarch explicitly states "for a church that has been designated to a community, the earnest efforts of another community regarding entry and burial of the dead is unlawful," characterizing such efforts as harassment.<sup>163</sup> At times, the Patriarchate intervened on issues of marriage across communities, indicating that performance of sacraments as a means of reinforcing communal integrity. A letter from the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate to the Armenian

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<sup>162</sup> "Letter to the Vali of Diyarbakir,' 31 December 1906, CFMM 862/48r.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., "Bir cema`ate makhsus olan kilisede akhr cemaat tarafından mudakhil etmek ve mevta dafa`a etmek teşebbüşinde bulunları gayr-I caiz."

Patriarchate in Istanbul details the church's understanding of religious duties in the context of a marriage in Diyarbakir between a Suryani and an Armenian; that clergy from one community can fill in only if clergy from the millet were not easily available.<sup>164</sup>

Purported Armenian harassment of the Suryani community sometimes found common ground between Suryani and Muslims. A letter from 1904 sent to the Interior and Justice Ministry discusses perceived abuse or indifference to neighboring communities by the Armenians in Diyarbakir. The letter, signed by Petrus, the church's representative in Diyarbakir, Hanush, the mukhtar of the Hissam al-Din district, and the district's imam, complains at length about how a newly erected Armenian pottery house in the neighborhood is "causing problems for the locals, who are bothered by the smoke on the street or when going to the mosque or churches, and students at the school are having to be sheltered somewhere else."<sup>165</sup> The authors make an appeal to an edict issued by the religious courts in 1888 which forbade any activity that interfered with the operation of places of worship – precisely the issue ignored by the Armenian owner of the pottery house. The Patriarchate's archive contains a copy of the government's report of the mediation of this issue, which, in further detailing the parties involved, also provides interpretation of the aforementioned 1888 decree.<sup>166</sup>

These denominational competitions also overlapped with the efforts to separate from the Armenian community in the eyes of the government, in which new language of loyalty as opposed to alleged Armenian sedition was employed. One such examples was a coordinated effort to have various debates over monastery and church ownership between Armenians and the

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<sup>164</sup> "To the Armenian Patriarchate in Dersaadet," CFMM 862/84v.

<sup>165</sup> CFMM 862/142r.

<sup>166</sup> CFMM 00862/14r.

church settled favorably on behalf of the Syriac Orthodox. In these discussions, centered on the control over a particular religious site, the Patriarchate eventually combined language of loyalty, Armenian sedition and banditry, and the linguistic and historical uniqueness of the Syriac Orthodox Church. A lengthy statement submitted to the Diyarbakir governor recognized the decision of the Ministry of Justice declaring Armenian ownership of the “Aqkilise” (*Akkilise*/White Church) monastery in the province’s Lice district.<sup>167</sup> Underscoring the severity of tensions between the communities, the ministry additionally declared that Suryani clergy were forbidden to enter this monastery, referred to at the time by the Suryani as Deyrül’abyaz (The White Monastery). As a point of contention with the court’s decision, the Patriarchate cited the presence of engraved masonry indicating its original Syriac name as *Mor Ḥaworō* (“white”) to undermine Armenian claims of ownership, a piece of evidence often later repeated.<sup>168</sup> This dispute remained a constant point of contention between the two communities through at least 1914. The Patriarchate’s own communication with the state provides an index of previous correspondence, indicating the intermittent but continuous discussion of this issue, as fact attested as well in the Ottoman archival record. This debate lasted until the summer of 1914, the same period in which the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate received official recognition as the head of a separate millet.<sup>169</sup> Although, by this point, as demonstrated in the Patriarchate’s official journal *al-Hikma*, attention, in its public communication, had turned towards Uniate Catholics, as little attention is paid to the Armenian community. Still, other figures such as Naum Faiq

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<sup>167</sup> “Letter to the Diyarbakir Governor,” 17 June, 1898, CFMM 858/186r.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. I am unable to find secondary sources attesting to a Mor Ḥaworo who founded such a monastery, and thus this may be a retroactive application of the monastery’s current name to a Syriac origin.

<sup>169</sup> BOA DH.ID. 162.51., Hijri: 24 Ramazan 1332 [16 August, 1914].

continued to emphasize the Armenian-Suryani division, and had these efforts joined by Syriac Orthodox clergy. As the meaningful site for boundary making

Even over a decade after the massacres, the church continued to employ language of the loyalty of the Syriac Orthodox community vis-à-vis the corrupt and chaos-causing Armenians in their disputes over property. An undated letter, written in response to a report issued in August, 1910, summarized previous decisions about the *Mor Haworō* Monastery, understanding them to be in the church's favor.<sup>170</sup> Debates over the monastery predate the Hamidian Massacres, but it remained one of the most commonly recurring topics in correspondence between the Patriarchate and the government. Attempting to emphasize the separate identity of and loyalty to the state by the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Patriarchate introduced new language tied to these currents after the massacres. Returning to this debate in 1896, the Patriarch decried the expulsion and prohibition of Syriac Orthodox monks from reentering. Such abuse, the Patriarch states, is due to the orders of the Armenian Patriarchate and the work of Armenian "bandits" (*eṣqiya*).

The language of this letter is a series of responses to specific questions posed by the government. The government sought clarification the historical use of the monastery, and the Patriarchate's response drew upon a variety of arguments centered upon documentation of the church's history in Syriac records and the uniqueness of Syriac Orthodox Christianity vis-à-vis the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Patriarchate also appealed to the government through language of loyalty as the *millet-I sadiqa* (loyal millet). Regarding its history, the Patriarch cites the presence of Syriac Orthodox monks in the church's own records dating from 1212 CE. The government had directly asked the Patriarch to attest to "which millet's writing has [the church] been engraved," which allowed a response indicating the presence of Syriac grave markers of

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<sup>170</sup> "Letter to the Vali of Diyarbakir" 13 September 1910, CFMM 865/16v-18r.

notable monks, as well as the presence of inscriptions in Syriac on the church's walls. The government then proceeded in a line of questions involving the language written on burial markers as a basis of evidence for their claim.<sup>171</sup> Other lines stemming from these questions of the language of physical heritage indicate the government's consideration of language as a factor for delineating these two communities.

In a follow-up some months later, the Patriarchate revisits this issue with the government, stating that due to the "pervasive influence of the chaos (*ightishâsh*) on the part of the Armenian community," Armenians had taken ownership of the monastery from the Syriac Orthodox Church through harassment and legal maneuvering.<sup>172</sup> Both parties had submitted responses to the government's questionnaire, however, this petition seeks to criticize points made by the Armenians and to supplement previously submitted information. The Patriarchate appeals specifically to the common perception among those living in the region of it being a Syriac Orthodox monastery, its allotment to the Suryani in the period of the region's organization as the Kurdistan Eyaleti (1847), and repeatedly notes that Syriac Orthodox monks were forcibly expelled and prevented from reentering. Another important complaint is the Patriarchate discussing frustration with the Armenian Orthodox Church who, in their view, were equipped to deceptively present their case through better organized efforts.

The case of *Mor Haworō* became a centerpiece of discussion of Suryani-Armenian relations in early issues of Naum Faiq's Assyrian nationalist journal *Kawkab Madnḥā*. In Faiq's introduction to his readers on this particular topic, he adds that the expulsion of the monks was carried out with the assistance of an Ottoman army captain, a commissioner and six cavalry,

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid. 17r-17v.

<sup>172</sup> "Letter to the State Shura" 27 August 1911, CFMM 865/42r.

framing this issue in terms of Armenians' ability to mobilize government support.<sup>173</sup> Elsewhere, Iyawwanis Matran Ilyas, bishop of Diyarbakir, submitted a letter in Arabic Garshuni to the journal entitled "Congratulations and Clarification," which received two published responses from Naum Faiq. After praising Faiq and his journal for their contribution to the millet, he expands upon the harm done to the Suryani by the Armenians in their capturing *Mor Haworō*. He clarifies that this process involved the gathering of armed men, who "destroyed [its] ancient heritage, and erased the writings from the walls, those from which it would be inferred that it is a Suryani property."<sup>174</sup> When the bishop and Diyarbakir clergy heard this, they presented the information to the vali, who ordered the Armenians priests to leave. With their claim weakened by the erasure Syriac inscriptions from the monastery, the journal asks for any of its readers with detailed, citable information to provide it to bolster the community's claims. By this, he calls for the journals' readers to seek out information about the monastery in the community's chronicles, "books that have been written about this monastery, historical articles or official documents, whole or part," arguing that this would be the "greatest aid... for the preservation of our sect's rights."<sup>175</sup> As a starting point, he then clarifies the Patriarchate's foundational historical claim, that a book by Mattai al-Mosuli written in 1212 and held at the Patriarchate supports the community's right to the church through historical precedent.

Naum Faiq, writing as editor of the journal, affirms his appreciation of the Matran's support and the importance of this issue to the community. He then provides greater historical context, stating that monastery's neighboring village, Antakh, is attested as *Hatko* in Syriac

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<sup>173</sup> Naum Faiq, "Regarding Mor Heworo Monastery" *Kawkab Madnḥā*, 1 no. 3, 31 Temmuz 1910.

<sup>174</sup> Iyawannis Elyas, Matran of Diyarbakir and its Environs, "Tabrikh w-IstidhaH," *Kawkab Madnḥā*, 1. no. 3, 31 Temmuz 1910, 4-5.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

chronicles, and that its current name directly derives from this, thus presenting this sub-region of Lice as historically Suryani. He then cites examples from the book mentioned by the Matran stating the name *Mor Haworō*, and its connection to the village of Antek.<sup>176</sup> Other readers soon joined into this effort. In the following issue, Dionysius Matran Behnam, bishop of Mosul, submitted a letter spelling out his appreciation of the journal and offering his own assistance on the issue. He writes that after seeing Matran Ilyas's call for information, he located a mention of *Mor Haworō* in a book in his library entitled *Kitab al-Majma'a al-Efesosi*.<sup>177</sup> This exchange shows how the journal's editors communicated with their reading public techniques to document claims based on the church's own history and to use place-names as indicators of long-standing Suryani presence. Furthermore, this mode of communication enabled a greater coordinated effort of the community's intellectual wealth.

The debate over ownership of the monastery continued until after WWI. A review of inter-governmental correspondences over a brief period in March and April, 1914, reveals how the government sought to correctly restore the monastery to its rightful owner. This Ottoman Turkish correspondence also indicates the government's understanding of the functional and social differences between the Armenian and Syriac Orthodox churches. The first document, prepared by the Interior Ministry for submission to the Sublime Porte, provides a lengthy description of the dispute's history. The legal debates are divided into those prior to and after the "zaman-I ightishash" (period of chaos), the euphemism the government itself had settled upon

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<sup>176</sup> The examples he gives: 1. "The rite of the Last Sunday before Christmas was conducted in the Mor Heworō Monastery of Antek by the hand of the monk Mattai the Assyrian." 2. "It was written in the Mor Heworō Monastery in the land of Antek in the Year of Our Lord 1212." 3. "It was conducted in the Mor Heworō Monastery of Antek by the hand of Mattai the Assyrian, in the year 1212 of Our Lord." 4. "The rite of the Holy Epiphany was conducted on its appointed day in Mor Heworō Monastery of Antek, near the blessed village of Helhel." Faiq, Naum,"Tawdih suwwal sayyadat al-Matran Ilyas Effendi."

<sup>177</sup> Diyonisus Matran Behnam, "Tabrikât" *Kawkab Madnḥā*, 1. No. 5, 1 September, 1910.

for referring to the Hamidian Massacres. Noting the names in various languages used to refer to the monastery, Deyrulabyad/Ak Kilise/Deyra Spî/Mor Heworo, the bureaucrats of the Interior Ministry conclude that the original name is Surp Arakil, or Makapayezoz, and its current name is a result of it being painted white either 55 or 75 years prior by a bishop named Tatyos.<sup>178</sup> This version of the church's history undermines the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate's claim that the church's diverse names in Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish all derive from its original Syriac designation as "Mor Haworō." Basing the Armenians' claims on the documented presence of Bishop Tatyos in 1834, the bureaucrats conclude that the Suryani's fundamental argument, as had been promoted by the Patriarchate's representative in Istanbul, Timotheos Paulus, is insufficient, and that their claim to on the church may be a deliberate misrepresentation by the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch, using information referring to a nearby church, instead of the actual monastery. The government accepted claims of Armenian writing found in the monastery and its historical use as a common place of visit by the Armenian community. A nearby church, referred to locally as "Senparus," also bolstered the Armenians' claims. Thus, the Syriac Orthodox Church's appeal to language, tradition and their own internal historical record were insufficient against the better organized lobbying power held by the Armenians. When this decision was summarized for the Diyarbakir Vali, the Interior Ministry again emphasized the presence of Armenian burial markers inside the monastery and in its surroundings.<sup>179</sup> Still, although the decision was final, the Patriarch's request, sent from Jerusalem, delayed its implementation.<sup>180</sup> In this episode the varieties of newly tested discourses of loyalty, arguments over language and heritage, and the intellectual weight of the broad Suryani public were employed, albeit

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<sup>178</sup> BOA, DH-Dahiliye Nezareti, İD. 162-2/51-2. 1 Nisan 1330 [14 April, 1914].

<sup>179</sup> BOA, DH. İD. 162-2/51-1. 19 Nisan 1330 [2 May, 1914].

<sup>180</sup> BOA, DH. İD. 162-2/51-5. 23 Haziran 1330 [6 July, 1914].

unsuccessfully. The dispute nonetheless demonstrates how the Syriac Orthodox Church manifested a broader sense of desire to separate from the Armenians in the eyes of the state, and the central importance of questions of property as a motivation alongside state protection.

### **Non-Ecclesiastical Perspectives on Suryani-Armenian Relations**

While the Patriarchate attempted to control church property and membership, non-ecclesiastical writers such as Ashur Yusuf's *Murshid Athuriyon*, and Naum Faiq's *Kawkab Madnḥā* engaged in discussions of the importance of social boundary-making and sought grounds of unity to combat the Suryani's comparative disadvantage. These early 20<sup>th</sup> century authors often cite the Armenians' comparatively much greater advancement in the promotion of language, education and publishing as a cause of shame for the Syriac community, and use this to detail goals from language promotion, to the reading and writing of historical texts, and Suryani-focused educational curricula. However, at times these authors exhort their audiences regarding the enforcement of boundaries between groups. Property disputes such as that regarding Mor Ḥaworō, often serve as a central point of reference for discussions in non-church sources regarding the differences between these communities, offering a format in which discussions of history, religious traditions, language and other topics are marshaled to express fundamental differences between these groups.

It must be noted, however, that despite their complaints, these journals do not present Armenians as enemies, but rather emphasize the importance of maintaining cultural heritage. Discussions by contributors to *Kawkab Madnḥā* indicate a sense of brotherhood across these communities, both as fellow Christians and fellow Ottoman citizens and lament that the Armenians' political activities and perceived disrespect have threatened or fractured this kinship.

Bishar Hilmi, publisher of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Diyarbakir-based Suryani journal *Şifuro*, submitted an article to *Kawkab Madnhā* entitled “A Boundary-Mixing Activity” in July, 1910.<sup>181</sup> In it, he describes continued optimism for the Second Constitutional period, in which there is the possibility for all communities, ethnic or religious, to be free of discrimination. However, he criticizes the work of Zaven Effendi who had been elected Armenian Apostolic Patriarch of Constantinople in 1913 after serving briefly in 1910 serving in Diyarbakir, being ordained as a bishop the same year, and now using the power of his religious position to disparage the Suryani community.<sup>182</sup>

In an October, 1911 letter published in *Murshid Athuriyon*, the author Syriac Orthodox Christian ‘Abd al-Wāhid Lutfi Effendi returns to discussion regarding Farqîn’s Maryam Ana Church. Lutfi Effendi details a lengthy legal battle for the aforementioned church, criticizing its lack of upkeep, and describing the back-and-forth legal battles, which apparently included overtures from the Armenian community to share its use, inviting discussion for perspectives on what the author refers to as “Christian brotherhood” in relation to the defense of the Syriac church.<sup>183</sup> Ultimately, the state claimed that there was insufficient evidence to assign the church in Farqîn to the Syriac community. Ashur Yusuf, editor of the periodical was himself married to an Armenian and deeply connected to Harput’s Armenian community. Still, he comments that Armenians commonly seize Syriac property and adds his own analysis of the situation, placing blame on the Suryani for their negligence in allowing this property to be assigned to another community. Yusuf does not use this space for chastisement, rather using it as a teaching moment

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<sup>181</sup> Bishar Hilmi,, “Muxallat Had Bir Hareket,” *Kawkab Madnhā*, 1 no. 3, 31 July 1910.

<sup>182</sup> Zaven, Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, ed. Vatche Ghazarian, *My Patriarchal Memoirs* (Barrington, RI: Mayreni Publishing, 2002), 4.

<sup>183</sup> ‘Abd al-Wahid Lutfi Kafrazoluzade, “Mufâriqînde Süryânî Kilisâsi Mesilesi,” *Murshid Athuriyon*, 3. No. 9., October 1911, 10-12.

to instruct his audience the methods of proving Syriac origin of church property. This instruction serves as a critique of the indifference or ignorance that he sees as allowing such problems to come about in the first place. First, an examination of historical sources provides a useful basis, in this case claiming that Bar Hebraeus himself mentioned this specific church as belonging to the Syriac Christian community.<sup>184</sup> Second, an awareness of the sectarian difference in church architecture also provides this evidence, with Yusuf citing the location of baptismal fonts differing from Syriac and Armenian traditions.<sup>185</sup> Additionally he claims that Armenian churches, of course, will always have their names inscribed in Armenian.<sup>186</sup>

Yusuf also investigates these churches' early history to assert non-dominance of the Armenians compared to the Suryani regarding their historical development. In a lengthy article entitled "The Relations of the Armenian Church with the Syriac Church", Yusuf engages in an academic debate regarding the introduction of Christianity among the Armenians. This debate hinges on an interpretation of a 335-page work he states is entitled Bâlâdeki (بالادمكى) written by a well-educated monk living in Echmiadzin. The work was reportedly first written in German in 1904, then translated into Armenian in 1908 at the request of the author's fellow Armenians.<sup>187</sup> Against the book's central argument, examining the validity of claims that Thaddeus and Bartholomeus introduced Christianity to the Armenians, Yusuf's central critique is that the city of Edessa during the first two centuries of Christianity represented a foremost intellectual center of Christianity, and was thus the vector through which Christianity arrived elsewhere in the

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ashur Yusuf, "Ermeni Kilisâsinin Süryânî Kilisâları ile Olân `Alaqeleri," *Murshid Athuriyon*, 4. No 11, Dec. 1912, 2.

region.<sup>188</sup> This is ultimately presented as a debate over the strength of the early Syriac church in Mesopotamia in comparison to the Greek church in Cappadocia. However, Yusuf utilizes his community's traditional claim of the conversion of Abgar the Black to Christianity's origin in Urfa, but that its expansion into Armenia was due to the work of two figures, Tatianus the Assyrian and Bardaisan. Here, this intercommunal competition moves into scholarly debate, communicated to the reading public, but also seeks to place Syriac Christianity as source through which the now more powerful Armenian Christianity arose.

Yusuf worked for the advancement of his community while writing from the heavily Armenian-populated city of Harput. His attitudes towards the Armenian community are less antagonistic than many of the opinions in *Kawkab Madnhā* but he still saw these communities operating within a world of resource and political competition. However, he deeply admired the efforts undertaken by the Armenians for communal advancement and saw them as a reference for Suryani aspirations. In one such example, Yusuf wrote an article consisting of a series of questions and answers about the activities of the Armenians, which he was often asked while “wandering our homeland.”<sup>189</sup> First asked, “what are the Armenians doing,” Yusuf responds “they are working for the enlightenment and benefit of their own nation.”<sup>190</sup> This effort contrasts that of the Suryani who “are a *yāmaq* (patch) nation, deep in the slumber of ignorance.”<sup>191</sup> This effort, primarily centered around education, is funded largely (and to the author's audience,

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ashur Yusuf, “Vatanimiz Dolaşan bir Mukhabar-i İstijvâb Suwwal: Ermeniler Ne Yapiyor?” 3 No. 8, September, 1911.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

surprisingly) by wealthy Armenian youth, and facilitated through communal corporations, further coordinated by the Armenian Patriarchate.

Yusuf also sees the Armenian community as more adept at unifying into a single ethnic identity, as well as politically mobilizing to their benefit within the Ottoman parliamentary system. This is outlined in an article entitled “Let us Possess our Rights,” written in the February, 1912.<sup>192</sup> His voice represents a unique call to unity across denominational differences, an attitude sometimes misrepresented as beginning with Naum Faiq’s writing from the diaspora in America.<sup>193</sup> In this article, Yusuf writes that the Armenians were unhappy with ten representatives in parliament, saying that they claim twenty would better reflect their population of two million. This, however, must reflect a total of the combined Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Armenian population under a politically unified banner.<sup>194</sup> In response, he calls for “Maronite, Protestant, Catholic Suryani, Chaldeans and Nestorians” to unite through the work of the church and social advancement organizations, saying that combined they will far surpass this number.<sup>195</sup> Naum Faiq, although not discussing this as part of Suryani competition with Armenians, does make a claim based on language unity in 1912, stating in an article entitled “Advancement of Thought,” “Let it be known under the name Assyrian, or Aramaean, Jacobite, and from one race deliver those of ignorance unto our five divisions: Suryani, Nestorian, Chaldean, Syriac Catholic and Maronite.”<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Ashur Yusuf, “Huququmuza Sâhib Olalım [Let Us Possess Our Rights],” *Murshid Athuriyon*, 4 no. 2, February, 1912, 226.

<sup>193</sup> Gaunt 2006, 250.

<sup>194</sup> Yusuf, “Let Us Possess Our Rights,” 227.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Naum Faiq, “Tarqiyât-i Fikriyye” *Kawkab Madnhâ*, 1 No. 4, 28 August, 1910, 1.

Faiq takes a more antagonistic approach to the issue of Armenian-Suryani boundaries. In a series of articles entitled “A Great Mental Sleep in the Period of Awakening,” Faiq writes to address the sources of this slumber so as to awaken the “sons of the nation” towards its revival.<sup>197</sup> He places much blame upon Syriac Orthodox clergy and their lack of awareness of what he perceives as the Armenians’ intent to apply their hegemony over the Syriac community. Faiq discusses two events at length to make his point: one in Mardin, representing the failure of the clergy and communal leaders to act with “national zeal,” and another in Diyarbakir, reflecting the enactment of such zeal in matters of ambiguity between the communities. This attitude is important as it links both criticism and praise of the church for the clergy’s responsibility to preserve Suryani national identity and nurture knowledge.

In the first article in the series, dated April 22, 1912, Faiq compares the Suryani and the Armenians of Mardin, specifically the Armenian Catholics. He states of the Armenians that they are “found in a state so perfect” that their churches, schools and community buildings require no support from outside of their community.<sup>198</sup> Despite this, he directly accuses the Syriac Orthodox Church’s bishop of Mardin of conceding part of the Church of the Forty Martyrs to the Armenian community. In multiple pages dedicated to this incident, Faiq details the specific context of this concession, how it relates to other ongoing property disputes between the communities, and how it reflects the ignorance of his community’s ignorance and inaction to preserve the uniqueness of Syriac material culture and heritage. This episode stems from the appointment of a Doctor Yazaryan Effendi as the head physician of the Mardin Municipality. Faiq claims that upon his arrival, having found his spiritual needs not met by the current demographic conditions, “brought

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<sup>197</sup> Naum Faiq, “Dûr-i İntibâhda Azîm Bir Ghaflet” *Kawkab Madnâ*, 1 No 27, 22 April 1912.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

an Armenian priest,” and requested from Matran Toma a portion of the Church of the Forty Martyrs to be used, which the bishop allocated “estimating then for himself what is of the communal benefit.”<sup>199</sup> In a sarcastic tone, Faiq pronounces that now “inside our Church of the Forty Martyrs, from one side is sung Suryani vocal music [nagheme], and from the other the mutterings of Armenian prayers [zemzeme]. What a beautiful communal brotherhood!”<sup>200</sup> In an ominous tone, he warns the result will be that “after a very brief period, maybe tomorrow, prayer [in the church’s entirety] will be in Armenian.”<sup>201</sup>

Brief entries in the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate’s archives, which indicate the work of Doctor Yazaryan treating members of the Syriac community years before Faiq’s essay, support the claim of the physician’s positive reception in Mardin. Such documentation includes treatment of the daughter of a community member in August, 1906 (MS 862 7v), and work in Siirt in November of that year. Mor Toma, according to Faiq, thus saw this granting of space at the Church of the Forty Martyrs as a debt of gratitude for this work on behalf of the Suryani. Faiq’s cynical view is that this may itself be a technique of the Armenian community to wrest control of Syriac property over time by exploiting higher levels of education among the Armenians vis-à-vis the Syriac Christian community. He asks how it could be that “for the Suryani in Mardin for a period of one thousand, nine hundred and ten years,” the poor had been taken care of “how they are managed now.” By this, he means that “an Armenian doctor comes through the medium of providing treatment and a church is offered to them.”<sup>202</sup> The Armenians, he decries, have no real need for such churches other than to further their own advantage, as they possess “churches

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

and monasteries in Izmir, Samsun, Van and other large cities. Let these belong to them.”<sup>203</sup> But he states the inverse of such concessions are never seen, and as Armenian churches firmly resist efforts by the Suryani to receive titles for property such as the Mor Ḥaworō monastery in Lice. This, Faiq thunders, shows that Armenians would not willingly leave “a finger of a stone” for anyone else.

Ultimately, Faiq places blame upon Bishop Toma, communal leaders, the ineffective Syriac Christian *Intibah* (Awakening) Committees and others who he says must one day take account of the consequences of inaction. These failures show the inevitable result of church leaders failing to understand the historical relationship between the Syriac and Armenian religious traditions. Were figures such as Matran Toma to be familiar with the work of the great Syriac historical chroniclers, says Faiq, they would know that this idea of unity in all but language is inaccurate, and is simply a narrative employed by the Armenians “for the purpose of the elimination of our nation, race, our language and control over the Suryani’s churches, monasteries and endowments for mastery over us.”<sup>204</sup> These differences amount to greater than language, and for figures such as Matran Toma to understand this, they must return to the great scholars of the medieval period. Specifically, Faiq recommends that one could travel to Deyrulzafran, and read the works of Dionysius Bar Salibi (d. 1171) to understand how deeply entrenched are the differences between communities regarding “religious services, in Mass, and in religious customs.”<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Naum Faiq, “Dûr-i İntibâhda Azîm Bir Ghaflet, Part Two,” *Kawkab Madnhā* 1. No. 28, 23 Nisan, 1327 [6 May, 1911], 1. It is worth noting that large sections of this work, including those talking about Armenians, were published in this journal based on a translation created by future Patriarch Ephrem I Barsoum.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. Dionysius Bar Salibi’s composed polemical texts against the Armenians, as well as Melkites, Jews, and Muslims. Sebastian P. Brock, “Dionysios bar Ṣalibi,” in *Dionysios bar Ṣalibi*, edited by Sebastian P. Brock, Aaron M. Butts, George A. Kiraz and Lucas Van Rompay, <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Dionysios-bar-Salibi>.

In contrast to such chastisement, another recent event demonstrates the enactment of “national zeal” required to prevent the community’s “Armenianization.” Reportedly six or seven years prior, a Syriac Orthodox parishiner of Diyarbakir’s Maryam Ana Church passed away. His marriage to an Armenian woman resulted in his becoming Armenianized, but upon his death he wished to still be buried in the graveyard of his original parish. After a few months, Faiq noticed that one of his relatives had sneaked in and etched the departed man’s name (Matufyan, itself an Armenian name) in Armenian script on his gravestone. Upon reporting this “violation of our Suryani national zeal” to Matran Elias Shakir, Syriac Orthodox Bishop of Diyarbakir, the bishop became furious, ordered his name and date of death be re-etched in Syriac, and forbid any further writing of Armenian.<sup>206</sup>

The official publication of the Syriac Orthodox Church, the journal *al-Hikma*, published at Deryrulzafran Monastery from 1913-14, offers a church-sanctioned voice, more easily accessible to the public due to its language and print in Arabic, rather than Ottoman, Arabic and Kurdish Garshuni such as *Kawkab Madnḥā*. Notably, this journal rarely discusses disputes with Armenians; whenever polemical voices reach the surface, their focus is against the Catholic Church. One article written in praise of the recently deceased Said Pasha, directly discusses the Hamidian Massacres. The article provides biographical information on Said Pasha, native of Erzurum, who served formerly the head of the senate, head of the internal and justice ministries, and former editor of *Takvim-I Vekayi*, is praised by the author as one of the great statesmen of the Ottoman Empire. He is praised particularly for his opposition to what the author refers to as

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<sup>206</sup> Elyas Shakir was appointed Bishop of Diyarbakir in 1908, then as Bishop of Mosul in 1912, and was declared Patriarch Mor Ignatius Elias III Shakir in 1917. Ibid. 2-3.

the “famous Armenian events,” in which he actively fought with the Sultan to prevent these massacres, leading to his being forced to take refuge in the British Embassy.<sup>207</sup>

### **Perspective of the Ottoman Government:**

Internal Ottoman sources, meaning those independent of communication with the Syriac Church, show the government’s discussions about issues of intrigue, Suryani-Armenian infighting, property disputes and contestation over conversion. Additionally, they explore issues of confusion over the boundaries between these two groups, which were not fully codified until 1914. The narrative presented from Ottoman archive is that the relationship between them is characterized by the government’s protection of Suryani from Armenian and Kurdish “bandits.” As mentioned previously, a letter written to Sultan Abdulhamid II from the Patriarch thanks him for the state’s protection during these events, which is also present in the Interior Ministry’s records.<sup>208</sup> Years later, another letter submitted to the Interior Ministry by the Patriarch’s representative Boulus again thanks the government and its internal security services for “working to prevent the actions of Armenian sedition,” stating further that the Suryani have been understood as “loyal” in matters related to the government.<sup>209</sup> The efficacy of this discourse of *millet-i sadiqa* (loyal millet) is attested by inter-Ottoman communication. A letter from the vali of Bitlis to the Interior Ministry in July, 1896, describes an event in which three members of the Syriac Orthodox community were killed, blaming the violence on the activities of Armenian *fedayeen*. The vali’s choice of words in describing the murdered Suryani as “rafiq” indicates a

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<sup>207</sup> “Sa ‘īd Bāshā,” *al-Hikma*, 1. No. 4, Feb 28, 1914.

<sup>208</sup> BOA HR.TH 176.41 17 June 1896, Y.PRK.AZN. 15.1 19 Dec, 1895: this document was signed by other (non-Armenian) religious representatives of Diyarbakir.

<sup>209</sup> BOA DH.TMIK.M 13.70 8 September, 1898.

sense of support for the community. However, he also juxtaposes the activities of Armenians against the Suryani, whom he refers to as the *millet-I sadiqa*.<sup>210</sup>

Registration in a given community was of great importance, indicated by records of individuals either switching their categorization as Suryani or Armenian depending on the situation, or seeking correction of incorrect registration. In 1896, ten families who had moved from Harput to a “mixed community district” (Suryani and Armenian) of Erzincan requested that they be registered as Syriac Orthodox instead of Armenian.<sup>211</sup> Later, claiming that they wrote this in error, they requested the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate to verify their information and submitted a petition to adjust their registration. Although reportedly in error, the initial entry on behalf of ten families as Armenian, which was later reversed, likely reflects sensitivity towards various conditions applied to these two groups.

There was an incentive for proving Syriac Christian origin. Following the 1895 events, increased travel restrictions were placed upon Armenians, which many sought to circumvent.<sup>212</sup> According to a 1906 document from Bitlis, one exemption to these restrictions was reserved for those Armenians who had not changed denominations but “were of origin within the Syriac community.”<sup>213</sup> This exemption reportedly enabled a woman (assumedly of Armenian origin) to emigrate to Russia to join her husband. In another case from 1903, a Suryani who reportedly traveled to America for trade wished to return. However, his status as either Armenian or Suryani was ambiguous according to Ottoman officials, requiring further investigation and

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<sup>210</sup> BOA DH.TMIK.M 11.02 29 July, 1896.

<sup>211</sup> BOA DH.TMIK.M. 20.97, 23 October, 1896.

<sup>212</sup> Jelle Verheij, “Diyarbakir and the Armenian Crisis of 1895,” in *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbakir, 1870-1915*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 109.

<sup>213</sup> BOA DH.TMIK.M 228.1/18, 12 June 1906.

documentation from the church which determined he originally registered as a child as Suryani. This intra-governmental discussion notes conversion between Armenian and Syriac communities was treated by the government as a means of avoiding investigation or facilitating easier travel.<sup>214</sup>

In response, the archive reveals that the Ottomans took some means to institute a process for formally recognizing conversion to the Syriac Orthodox millet. Although details are lacking, one document originating from the Bitlis vilayet briefly discusses a process of confirmation for those converting to the Syriac Orthodox community, indicating that those proven to be of original Suryani origin were categorized differently than those unable to demonstrate this.<sup>215</sup> Multiple documents discussing emigration back into the Ottoman Empire from Russia address questions of ambiguity over naming. These center around groups of “Suryani and Chaldeans” seeking to return to the Ottoman Empire, with a note indicating the purview of this discussion to include the eastern provinces of Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Ma`amurat-ul-aziz (modern Elazığ), Sivas and Diyarbakir.<sup>216</sup> In these documents, the local administration wishes to confirm their millet status, as their names are understood as Armenian, rather than Suryani/Chaldean in origin. In a second page of the document, the administration determines that the petitioners’ possession of Armenian names and no proof of Suryani origin is cause for rejection from returning into the empire.<sup>217</sup>

Ecclesiastical, community, intellectual and state documents all attest to the newly increased importance of distinction between Armenian and Suryani communities in first decade

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<sup>214</sup> BOA DH.TMIK.M 157.71. 6 October 1903.

<sup>215</sup> BOA DH.TMIK.M 210.50, 3 January, 1905.

<sup>216</sup> BOA DH.TMIK.M 210.56, 4 February, 1906.

<sup>217</sup> BOA DH.TMIK.M 211.42 12 February, 1906.

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Hamidian Massacres, the Patriarchate began to employ new language of loyalty and sedition as a means to build a differentiation between these communities in the eyes of the government, and in doing so sought often unfulfilled advantage in debates over property rights. For intellectuals such as Naum Faiq, boundary enforcement becomes a means for better ascertaining and developing a core Suryani identity; for Ashur Yusuf, the realities of a better politically organized Armenian community necessitated new broad cross-denominational coalitions.

### **Kurdish Intellectuals' Responses to the Hamidian Massacres**

Similar to the Syriac Christian community, the Armenians often serves as the point of comparative reference by Kurdish intellectual authors in terms of their advanced communal development, education and outside support. Similarly, they also became a point of reference for conveying nationalistic ideas of proper governance, religiosity, leadership and national history. This section will now briefly explore how the violence of the Hamidian Massacres, and the participation of Kurdish Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments helped foster new discourses of ethno-religious identity as demonstrated in Late Ottoman Kurdish periodicals. This discourse centered upon distancing from the Hamidiye Cavalry through language of religious observance, histories of social harmony disrupted by the state and awareness of the influence of Kurdistan's violence in negative perceptions of Kurds among foreign audiences.

First among these journals is *Kurdistan* (1898-1902), published in Cairo, Geneva and London and edited by members of the Bedirxan family. The esteemed status of the Bedirxan family is often shaped by the shadow of Bedirxan Beg, mîr of Bohtan, who led a rebellion against the Ottoman government in the early 1840s. The journal, edited by two of his

descendants, Mikhdad Midhat Bedirxan, and later Abdurrahman Bedirxan, was written in Ottoman and Kurmanji, and strikes a critical tone against both Abdulhamid's regime and those perceived as usurpers of the Bedirxan family's leading role in Botan. Deniz Ekici's extensive analysis of pre-WWI Kurdish periodicals marks language of Kurdish-Armenian relations as a part of a greater discursive shift which elevated criticism of the Sultan and self-criticism of the Kurds and their vulnerabilities as a major divergence from "an ostensibly Ottomanist position to a more anti-Turkish, Kurdish nationalist line."<sup>218</sup> Focus on Kurdish-Armenian relations also became a means to assert essential qualities which nationalist authors wished to identify with the Kurdish nation and its future. In multiple articles in *Kurdistan*, the authors present the Hamidian Cavalry, drawn from and presented as collaborating Kurdish tribes, as a tool of state oppression, one that does not reflect the nature of Kurdish values and leadership, as well as a factor that poses an existential threat to Kurdish self-determination. In a lengthy article describing the Hamidian Cavalry, Abdurrahman Bedirxan argues that rather than the long-standing social world of Kurdistan as being dominated by Kurds and Armenians, it is now the domain of three millets: "Armenians, the Hamidian Cavalry, and non-Hamidian Kurds."<sup>219</sup>

Nationalist authors also address the persecution of Christians (Armenian and Suryani), either in general or as part of state-sanctioned violence, as emblematic of the underdeveloped state of Kurdish society and as a cause for tremendous risk to the region's future. One author for the journal warns, "Now the great Christian states all say that "because the Kurds are ignorant in issues of knowledge, unrefined (*kemhuner*), how sad it is that Armenia would remain under their

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<sup>218</sup> Readers of both Ottoman and Kurmanji entries will note that the Kurdish entries contain far more nationalistic and severe rhetoric, an issue unfortunately missed by those limited to the Ottoman sections. Ekici, Deniz, *Kurdish Identity. Islamism and Ottomanism: The Making of a Nation in Kurdish Journalistic Discourse (1898-1914)* (Lexington Books: 2021), 41.

<sup>219</sup> Abdurrahman Bedirxan, "Alayên Siwarên Hemîdî", *Kurdistan*, 3 no. 28, 2.

control. It should be so that Kurdistan instead becomes Armenia.”<sup>220</sup> This message is given great urgency, with the author forewarning “and so if Kurds remain ignorant, one day this will happen.”<sup>221</sup> This difference between the Hamidian leaders, as opportunists who reject the tenets of their faith and murder Christians in the service of a tyrannical Sultan, is juxtaposed at multiple points with figures such as Sheikh Ubeydullah Nehri, the famed Naqshibandi sheikh who led a rebellion against the Ottomans in the 1880s. One of the underlying reasons for his own rebellion, according to Hakan Özoğlu and Wadie Jwaideh, was a reaction against Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin, which stipulated that the Ottoman government would ensure the protection of Armenians in the Eastern Vilayets against violence by Kurdish and Circassian populations.<sup>222</sup> However, this rebellion, which occurred in both Persian and Ottoman territory, cannot be considered anti-Christian, as Ubeydullah’s close relationship with foreign missionaries and support from Assyrian Christians is well-documented.<sup>223</sup> In a Kurdish-language article denouncing those who participated in the atrocities of the Hamidiye Cavalry, Sheikh Ubeydullah, as a guide for proper Kurdish behavior, is attributed the pithy caution: “If today you kill the Armenians without reason, in the future a nation will come and kill us.”<sup>224</sup> Elsewhere, he is reported to have said that if the Sultan gave such an order, he would deserve to be deposed, of course referring to the illegitimacy of Abdulhamid II’s rule after condoning such violence. These

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<sup>220</sup> “Leyse l-al Insanî illa Ma Sea,” *Kurdistan*, 1. No 7, 4 Nov., 1898.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), 74.

<sup>223</sup> A basis of the claim that his rebellion is the first to ostensibly be for the purpose of the creation of a Kurdish nation is based on a letter sent to the British Consul at Tabriz via missionary Joseph Cochran, in which he referred to the Kurds as “a people apart” and his desire that “our affairs be in our own hands.” Quoted in Owen Robert Miller and Kamal Soleimani, “The Sheikh and the Missionary: Notes on a Conversation on Christianity, Islam and the Kurdish Nation,” *The Muslim World*, 109 no. 3, July 2019: 394-416.

<sup>224</sup> Abdurrahman Bedirxan, “Kürdlere”, 4. No 27, 28 Şubat, 1317 [13 March, 1902].

examples thus provide a framework of dealing with the perceived risks placed upon Kurdish nobility by the Treaty of Berlin, but that the goals of Kurdish-Armenian relations should be a social harmony in accordance with core Islamic religious values.

In *Kurdistan*'s 26<sup>th</sup> issue, Abdurrahman Bedirxan offers a lengthy exposition on Kurdish-Armenian relations and the despotism of the “blood-drinking” Sultan Abdulhamid.<sup>225</sup> He presents these relations in an often later-repeated framework: that for centuries Kurds and Armenians lived in harmony, yet “the hate between one another as it is today is a result of the seed of corruption sewn between them.”<sup>226</sup> Abdurrahman Bedirxan blames the members of the Hamidiye Cavalry who participated in these atrocities. He specifically denounces Mîran chief Mustafa Paşa, as one who, ten to fifteen years prior, “was a shepherd of seemingly no great significance,” yet had now become a powerful member of the Hamidiye Cavalry, holding great unchecked power backed by the regime.<sup>227</sup> He also holds the government, and the Sultan in particular, as responsible for having instigated or encouraged these atrocities.

Even during this initial period of nationalist publication, many in the reading public appear to have embraced and augmented these anti-regime comments of thought. In letter from Mardin written by Mullah Salihê Cizirî, the Mullah praises the Bedirxan family, and repeats criticism of Sultan Abdulhamid II mentioned in previous entries in the periodical.<sup>228</sup> Rather than promoting the advancement of Kurds through education or other assistance, he states the Sultan wishes for Kurds to remain in conflict. To do this, Cizirî writes that the Sultan “constantly incites

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<sup>225</sup> Abdurrahman Bedirxan, “Kürdler ve Ermeniler,” *Kurdistan* 3. no 26, 1 Kanun-i Evvel, 1316 [14 December, 1900].

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Miqdad Midhat Bedirxan, “Ev Kaxida Ha Ji Ulemek Kurd Ji Mardînê Ji Min Re Hat” 1, No. 14, 8 Nisan 1315 [20 April, 1899].

Kurds to kill Armenians. We thus know that the deArmenians are oppressed. We know his aim; that we should remain in a state of beastliness, and attack every Armenian.”<sup>229</sup>

Efforts to counter stereotyping of Kurds as holding enmity towards Armenians is an often-visited topic in Kurdish periodicals. In the first issue of the 1908-1909 journal *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi* (KTTG), a letter from Babanzade Ismail Hakki engages this topic. Ismail Hakki decries the perception of Kurds, writing “one of the harsh slanders against the Kurds is that they have for a long time held so-called enmity towards the Armenians, and have been the enemies of the Armenians for a long time.”<sup>230</sup> Acting against the idea of long-standing enmity between the communities, he states that recent events must be understood in their context, rather than as an indication of traditional animosity, and that if such feelings existed at the core of their relations, they would have manifested in similar violence after the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. Referencing the edicts of the Prophet Muhammad, he states that it is imperative to respect the non-Muslims of their state.

The journal also published a letter signed by Armenian, Chaldean and Syriac Orthodox representatives on Kurdish-Christian relations. The letter briefly mentions a conflict between the Pınçınar tribe and followers of the Beşirî leader Mirze Agha in Garzan in which livestock were taken, leading to a loss of security and the cessation of grain shipments.<sup>231</sup> Placing the process of mediation in a climate of optimism brought about by the Second Constitutional period, the authors state the *mutasarrif* (sancak-level administrator) brought together Christian leaders as part of the mediation as a sign of the diverse character of the region. Elsewhere, the same

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Babanzade Ismail Hakki, “Kürdler ve Kurdistan,” *KTTG*, 1 no. 1, 22 Teşrin-i Sani, 1324 [5 December, 1908], in M. Emîn Bozarslan, *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakki Gazetesi* (Uppsala: Weşanxana Deng, 1998), 68.

<sup>231</sup> “Telgrafât-i Hususiye” *KTTG*, 1 no. 20 Kanun-i Evvel, 1324 [5 December 1908].

journal discusses efforts by its backing organization, the *Kurd Teaviün ve Terakkî Cemiyeti*, to resolve previous grievances between the communities in hopes of building a better future for both Kurds and Armenians.<sup>232</sup> Thus, the presentation of reform of degenerated Kurdish and Armenian relations is an often-visited topic of these publications, and, in the wake of reintroduction of the Ottoman Constitution, such disharmony is presented as a result of the Sultan's cruel management.

The new Kurdish periodicals opened space for debates about Kurdish and Armenian ethnicity. The *KTTG* stakes out its views at length on Kurdish-Armenian relations in an article entitled "Kurds and Armenians," repeating the reality of their close links and the religious duty of Kurds to treat Armenians with respect. Written by Huseyin Paşa Suleyman, the lengthy article opens the journal's ninth issue, and connects ancient social relations to the present. Presenting the Kurds as descendants of the Medes, Suleyman reviews the closeness of the two communities in their "moral and physical qualities," noting that even "the Kurds' world-renowned hospitality, honor (*namûs*) and bravery are found among the Armenians."<sup>233</sup> This recent violence, he states, is an aberration, for "if... from 2600 BC, the earliest period one can reach in history, all the way through the present, there had been such alleged discord and enmity between the Kurds, and Armenians living in Kurdistan... one would have necessarily eliminated the other."<sup>234</sup> Instead, their relations were based on mutual admiration and deeply rooted intermingling and cohabitation between communities. Instead, the violence which the author sees as being generalized to characterize both Kurds and Kurdish-Armenian relations, stems from the actions

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<sup>232</sup> "Kürdler Ermeniler" *KTTG*, 1. no. 8, 3 Kanun-i Sani 1324 [16 January, 1909].

<sup>233</sup> Süleyman, Huseyin Paşazade, "Kürdler ve Ermeniler" *KTTG*, 1 no. 9, 17 Kanun-i Sani, 1324 [30 January, 1909].

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

of “hypocrites” who disregard their duty to offer Armenians the respect due to them in accordance with Shariah, from the poor management of the government, which, in part, led to a structural advantages in areas such as education, which were not in turn offered to the Kurds.<sup>235</sup> A means for remedying these recent ruptures is through the efforts of good leaders who promote justice and equality and that the communities recognize their common cause. Perhaps, Suleyman imagines, in the next election the Kurds of Van might say “Karabet Effendi and Hamparsum Effendi” should be their representatives, or the Armenians of Diyarbakir to say “Ahmed Effendi” and “Mehmet Bey” should be theirs.<sup>236</sup>

This approach culminates in the idea of shared Kurdish-Armenian origin proposed by Mevlanizâde Rifat in the periodical *Hetawî Kurd*.<sup>237</sup> In his article, “To the Honorable Founders of *Hetawî Kurd*” he writes to the “six or seven million” of his Kurdish compatriots residing in Kurdish provinces, underlining the potential for cooperation. He proposes the following theory on the ethnic origins of Kurds and Armenians:

It is known that the Kurds and Armenians are the common descendants of one people (*qawm*): the Urdu/Urartu. Both ours and their historical beginning: from the Palestinian mountains to the mountains of Rawanduz they constituted the “Urdu” people, we and the Armenians are the sons of these “Urdu.” The writing, literature and culture of our race were one and the same until finally the Armenians accepted Christianity, and so they sought a separate existence. In recent times that have advanced, from an unknown impetus they have set out running. And so, at this rate of movement the Armenians are now found on a different path than us.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Mevlanizade Rifat, later a member of the *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (Society for the Elevation of Kurdistan), was at that time editor of the anti-CUP *Serbestî* newspaper.

<sup>238</sup> Mevlanizade Rifat, “Muhterrem Hetawî Kurd Muessislerine,” *Hetawî Kurd* 1 No. 2 21 Teshrin-i Thani 1329, 1-2.

This shared origin is seen as a cause for collaborative effort. Rifat continues, announcing “I want that these two co-ethnicities, Kurds give their hands to those of the Armenians, and working with the same motivation found a fundamental concordance of livelihood. Yes, the Kurds are a step behind, the Armenians are a little advanced.”<sup>239</sup> It is worth noting that this narrative of common Urartu origin was not universal within this Kurdish intellectual circle. A near-contemporary article, published in 1913 in the journal *Rojî Kurd*, additionally assigns common ethnic origin to the Kurds and Christians of Kurdistan, as both descended from the Assyrians, rather than the Urartu, with meaningful divisions happening after local communities converted to Christianity and then later to Islam.<sup>240</sup> These approaches thus explore a shared common origin, but, in doing so, relate a sense of nation defined by religious boundary rather than descent from an ancient ethnicity. Despite common Urartu or Assyrian origins, Islam is a defining characteristic of Kurdishness, as Christianity is a defining aspect of the Armenian nation.

Letters from the public also reflect a desire to both counter a sense of perpetual Kurdish-Armenian animosity, as well as to assert the importance of Islam to identity. One letter, written to the journal *Hetawî Kurd* by a Siverek-based member of the Têrkan tribe, offers another local perspective on boundary, identity, and interfaith relations. The author, Babê Cindo, writes his letter to make an appeal for support for new educational institutions in the region, provides detail on the characteristics of the tribe and its livelihoods, as well as to counter against incorrect statements he has read in available newspapers. These mistaken views, he believes, present a myth of hostility characterizing relations between these two groups.<sup>241</sup> In his survey of Kurdish

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>240</sup> Xezal, “Dema Kalê Me Çaxa Me Dema Tê,” *Rojî Kurd*, 1 no.1, 6 Haziran 1329 [19 June, 1913], 23.

<sup>241</sup> Cindo, “Siverek,” *Hetawî Kurd*, 1 no. 10, 20 Haziran, 1330 [3 July, 1914], 4.

tribes, British geographer Mark Sykes comments on the author's tribe as partially populated by Armenians. However, these members of the Armenian millet believed themselves to be of Kurdish origin, reflected by Noel's observation on these Armenians that "they are of common origin and that they (the Armenians) are not of Armenian race," a fact which Armenian clergy of Diyarbakir were actively working against.<sup>242</sup>

Outside perception of Kurds, based on Kurdish-Armenian relations, became another important aspect of Kurdish nationalism, reflecting the inability of Kurds to communicate their identity or characteristics to outside audiences. This concern was not new. A major event in shaping international views of the Kurds even before the Hamidian Massacres was the Musa Bey incident of 1889.<sup>243</sup> During the winter of 1888-1889, Armenians from the region had repeatedly complained to the central government about the depredations committed by Kurdish tribal leader Musa Bey, leading to his arrest, a detention made brief by a bribe offered to the government. Upon his release he took out revenge on those who had reported him to the government, burning alive the Armenian Ohan, headman of the village of Argavank.<sup>244</sup> In March of 1889 Musa Bey kidnapped a young Armenian girl named Gulizar from her home village of Khars near Muş. After demanding her conversion to Islam, Musa bey then gave Gulizar as a bride to his younger brother. Protests against this atrocity spread throughout Muş, then throughout Ottoman Armenian communities and the Armenian exile press of Europe. Musa Bey was eventually charged with "several counts of murder, rape, arson, and grand larceny" with most charges

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<sup>242</sup> Mark Sykes, "The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 38. Jul.-Dec. 1908, 464.

<sup>243</sup> Owen Miller, "'Back to the Homeland' (Tebi Yergir): Or, How Peasants Became Revolutionaries in Muş," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, Vol. 4, no. 2 (November, 2017), 298.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

eventually dropped due to lack of evidence.<sup>245</sup> According to historian Owen Miller, as a result of Armenian and international outcry, the Abdulhamid regime, wishing to avoid a repeat of the 1876 Bulgarian Uprising, committed itself to greater repression of political organization among Armenians. This repression and continued mistreatment then pushed many Armenians towards taking up arms. Furthermore, it fueled international disdain for the Kurdish population of the Ottoman Empire.

Kurdish intellectuals recognized their negative perception internationally, and sought to mobilize their co-nationalists to counter these beliefs. A letter in *Hetawî Kurd*, entitled “Take Warning, O People of Insight” by Babê Najo expresses frustration with an article written by Arşak Çobanyan that was distributed at a conference in Paris and reprinted in Abdullah Cevdet’s journal *Iqdâm*.<sup>246</sup> Babê Najo, in his lengthy critique of this article, takes issue with the presentation of the Kurds as a backwards people. Çobanyan is reported as saying “the first thing that Armenians want once reforms are started, is to establish schools for the Kurds, to change the ones that teach hatred and animosity about the Christians into real houses of knowledge.”<sup>247</sup> Çobanyan reported that the Armenians can boast of having 82,000 students within the empire’s eastern provinces. The purpose of Çobanyan’s article, it seems, is in part to state that the advancements undertaken by Armenians themselves are a source of envy from the Kurds and Turkish authorities. Babê Najo notes that, whatever good intentions there may be in establishing schools for Kurds, this would only serve to place Armenians in a higher status that could be exploited by foreign powers; thus he calls upon Kurdish youth to seek to create their own

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> The title is a reference to Surah al-Hashr, v:2.

<sup>247</sup> Babê Najo, “Fe’ Tebirû Ya Uli’l Esbar,” *Hetawî Kurd*, 1 no. 1, 11 Teşrin-i Evvel 1329 (1913), in Alan (2016), 163.

educational institutions. Regarding the claim that the few Kurdish schools are sources of anti-Christian bigotry, he states “we reject this whole heartedly, and we say the religion which we obey is not suited to [such ideas].”<sup>248</sup> Of note, Çobanyan derogatorily refers to the Kurds as having remained in a state akin to theirs in Xenophon’s writings.<sup>249</sup> Babê Naco’s response to this is to state “time will tell which race those of the Kurds who accepted Christianity will wish to be allotted to,” and again defines conversion to Islam as central to Kurdish identity.<sup>250</sup> Indicating his respect for Armenian scholarship, he then relates the story of scholar Khachatur Abovian (1809-1848) as a model for what Kurds must achieve. Specifically, he calls for Kurds to emulate Abovian’s zeal for promoting his own dialect, which should inspire Kurds to undertake publication efforts so that they would share their own literary history, and not be subject to figures such as Çobanyan who can deceive foreign audiences with such characterizations of the Kurds. This frustration of foreign presentations of Kurds as backwards by Armenian audiences is more directly connected to anti-Armenian violence in an episode reported by Kadri Cemilpaşazade (1891-1973) from his time studying in Lausanne prior to WWI. In his memoirs, published in 1969, Kadri, a scion of the elite Diyarbakir Cemilpaşazade family discusses his frustrations and the inability of Kurds to control their image abroad. He recounted examples of the challenges he faced when he would introduce himself as Kurdish, with public perception of Kurds having been shaped by what he describes as “Armenian propaganda.” Kadri, along with his brothers Ekrem and Şemsettin, moved to Lausanne where they were accompanied by a member of the prominent Babanizade family. While there the group opened a branch of the *Hevî*

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> This is based on the connection of the Kurds with the Kardouchoi, an idea which developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*Cemiyeti*, the organization which published the journals *Rojî* and *Hetawî Kurd*, with the permission of the main Istanbul branch. Kadri stated that the group's goal in founding a Swiss branch of the Kurdish organization was to unify other Kurdish students in Europe and to "introduce Europeans to our nation."<sup>251</sup> In their pursuit of the latter, the group found either ignorance of or negative attitudes towards Kurds, often fostered by missionaries. Kadri describes a foreigner's insistence that, as a former resident of Istanbul, he must either be a "Turk" or "Greek," to which through his limited French he asserted his Kurdish identity through indicating his homeland of Diyarbakir, and was challenged by one present that he would never expect to meet a "wild mountain Kurd" in European halls, an attitude Kadri relates to Armenian propaganda.<sup>252</sup> On one puzzling occasion, Kadri recalls seeing an advertisement featuring a man dressed in traditional Kurdish clothing. The man, he recalls, advertised himself as an American missionary who having spent years in Kurdistan, would offer a detailed presentation on the Kurds. Attending the talk with his brother Ekrem, he watched as the speaker, dressed in traditional Kurdish *şal* and *şepik*, derided the Kurds as wild and ignorant of religion. The speaker then asked for donations to distribute Bibles among them.<sup>253</sup> Eventually deducing during his lecture that he was an Armenian "fraudster" claiming to be an American missionary, they confronted him leaving the church where his talk was held. The Armenian speaker told them he was not apologetic for what he had reported to the audience, and said to them, in Kurdish, that he was Armenian, that the Kurds had inflicted injury upon him and his ancestors with their rifles. He then dared them to draw their knives and stab him, as if they "were back in the mountains of Kurdistan." Such examples as Çobanyan's lecture, and Kadri Cemalpaşazade's experiences

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<sup>251</sup> Zinar Silopi, *Doza Kurdistan* (Beirut: Stewr, 1969), 30.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

demonstrate the perceived impact of the presentation of Kurds in European intellectual circles, the inability not just to be recognized as a community worthy of consideration, but to even be seen as civilized.

## **Conclusion**

The Hamidian Massacres of 1894-1896, first initiated in Sasun, quickly spread throughout Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, leaving devastation in their wake. Although the Ottoman government eventually restored order in the affected areas, the impact on the region's communities was profound. As part of the legacy of these massacres, ecclesiastic and lay members of the Syriac Orthodox *millet* were forced into a politics of difference with their Armenian neighbors, and quickly sought new ways to create firm boundaries between Suryani and Armenians, and to communicate these to the state. Integral in the emerging discourse was the idea of the Syriac Orthodox as the *millet-i sadıqa*, or loyal millet. As intellectuals of the emerging Assyrian nationalist movement later found journalistic spaces to share their ideas, figures such as Naum Faiq and Ashur Yusuf decried their own community's destitution, and offered the Armenians as a model for organization. These writers additionally warned their readers of the risks of assimilation, and provided instruction on how to maintain the boundaries between the two communities.

The massacres also resulted in the solidification of Kurdish nationalist discourse. Kurdish intellectuals, first led by scions of the Bedirxan family, decried the violence against Armenians as abuse by opportunistic and tyrannical elements of Kurdish society, whose activities were creating a very real threat of Russian invasion. As demonstrated in this chapter, these events provided the catalyst for intellectuals to advance nationalist discourses, presenting their

own visions of an idealized future Kurdish society set in opposition to the violence of the Hamidiye Cavalry. Unlike their Assyrian nationalist counterparts, they did not feel it necessary to develop a claim of indigeneity, with their Muslim status and numerical superiority making their rule of the region a given. What then emerged was an idea that Armenians, Assyrians, and Kurds all may share a common origin but conversion to Christianity and Islam were the fundamental events in creating unique ethnicities.

## Chapter Two: Education and the Imagining of National Future

The interim between the Hamidian Massacres (1894-1896) and the Young Turk Revolution (1908) served as the critical juncture for the trajectories of Kurdish and Assyrian Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire. This chapter demonstrates how, by negotiating the limited rights which leaders saw as available, Kurdish and Assyrian intellectuals promoted education as the best potential avenue for communal advancement and revival. Through developing ideas of proper education, both communities were also confronted with decisions about communal boundaries, debate over expediency and national integrity vis-à-vis missionary and state schools, the histories of their nations, the role of language and nation, and debates over who should serve as the torchbearers for these movements. To examine this process, this chapter centers upon the story of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's attempts to create the *Zehra* school and the Syriac Orthodox Church's attempts to reinstitute a coordinated series of parochial schools. It demonstrates the similarities as well in organizing utilized by these groups, in the form of the *Kürt Teaviin ve Terakkî Cemiyeti* (Kurdish Society for Unity and Advancement), and the Assyrian *Intibah Cemiyetleri* (Awakening Societies, which at first served as secret or semi-secretive organizations, but, in the wave of reestablished rights of 1908-1909 became the structures for a clearer, public nationalist advocacy.

The Hamidian Massacres of the 1890s had in many ways set the overall trajectory for these nationalist movements, with both forced to define national boundaries and characteristics vis-à-vis their Armenian neighbors. Additionally, the violence and chaos of that decade sparked an existential urgency in both, with difference with Armenians being a key to survival for the Assyrian community, and the Hamidiye Regiments and their abuses seen by Kurdish nationalists as a potential casus belli for Russian occupation of Kurdistan. Along with this new urgency, both

Assyrian and Kurdish nationalists also saw education as another layer of threat, one in which they were willing to put themselves as great personal to pursue, but the one specific area where they believed they could achieve any meaningful success in the nationalist project.

In both cases of the Suryani and Kurdish communities, leaders sought to foster internally-driven education reforms that addressed similar concerns: maintenance of religious education alongside secular curricula, approval and recognition of the Ottoman government for these programs, building conceptual ties between community and a reinvigorated homeland, and a resistance to Ottoman government and Protestant missionary educational institutions. In the context of Abdülhamid-era reforms, these Suryani and Kurdish efforts also resisted against state-imposed ideology and identity, coinciding with a heavy-handed government approach that treated education reform as a proving ground for state authority. Works by Selim Deringil and Benjamin Fortna have addressed the ways in which Ottoman educational reforms under the Abdülhamid regime also sought to reconcile the tension between religious and secular education while fostering a sense of Ottoman loyalty and identity. Furthermore, Fortna's work demonstrates a few major factors, such as the importance of removing the "predeterministic assumption of education as a vehicle for modernization," and the ways in which education was an indigenous effort, not simply importation or copying of European education systems.<sup>254</sup> Likewise, the focus on moral rejuvenation served as a guiding principal for the Abdülhamid's own vision of the empire's educational system.<sup>255</sup> It is in many ways that these principles, manifesting in a state Sunni education curriculum and its often violent imposition in the

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<sup>254</sup> Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11, 45.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

periphery, became a central aspect of the region's experience, most notably in attempts to Islamize the non-Muslim Ezîdî community.

### **Ezîdîs and Education as State Ideology**

This weaponization of education is most evident in the case of the Ezîdîs, whose experiences demonstrated the role of religion and school creation as an increasingly central tool of identity shaping. The successful implementation of state education saw the case of the Ezîdîs as a valuable test subject for the state's increasingly religious identity, and as a demonstration of government power against both minorities and of the influence of foreign missionaries. The Ezîdîs had, at various times, been a focus of interest from American Protestants, and had enjoyed some measure of peace in the half-century following widespread massacres of Ezîdîs during the Bedirxan Rebellion and the process of Ottoman centralization.<sup>256</sup> By 1886 Ezîdî leaders had engaged with American and British Protestant missionaries and a Russian imperial representative in Mosul.<sup>257</sup> Their relationship with the central government had long been precarious and they were still subject to intermittent persecution, and were increasingly precarious under the state religious identity movement under the Abdülhamid regime. In 1872, Ezîdî leadership petitioned the government, successfully gaining permission to pay an exemption tax in lieu of military service. Military service, the leaders argued, proved impossible for the community due to prohibitions regarding food and clothing, and due to obligations relating to pilgrimage and religious holiday observances.<sup>258</sup> "The Yezidis" according to John Guest, "...represented an

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<sup>256</sup> John Guest, *The Yezidis: A Study in Survival*, (London; New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 125.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>258</sup> The text provides the earliest account written from within the Ezîdî community on their religious taboos, such as prohibition against wearing the color blue and the consumption of cabbage. The text of the document is reprinted in

anomaly in the eyes of military planners and a heresy in the mind of the pious sultan.”<sup>259</sup> This ambiguity had proven too perilous for some communities, with the under-researched Şemsiyye community of Mardin eventually choosing conversion to the Syriac Orthodox Church as their best option, albeit, according to local missionaries, while maintaining their own religious rituals.<sup>260</sup> For the Ottoman state, the Ezîdîs, despite their own religious and historical beliefs, were considered to be apostate Muslims. As a result, the government lifted this exemption in 1885, and were able to, with some success, conscript Ezîdîs from the community’s peripheral communities in Aleppo, Diyarbakir, and Van provinces.<sup>261</sup>

In Sheikhan and Sinjar, however, the state was unable to impose its will as easily. Driven in part by concern over the state’s increasing abuses, and looking for similar modes of external support offered to their Christian neighbors, Ezîdî leaders in Sheikhan reached out to Protestant missionaries via a member of the Protestant community in Mosul. They requested to meet with Edmund McDowell and Alpheus Andrus, the senior ABCFM missionary in Mardin who had himself established schools for Ezîdîs in Viranşehir.<sup>262</sup> As is noted elsewhere, Andrus’s success in education, and its associated risk of conversion of students, had drawn the ire of Syriac Orthodox leadership at times. According to Guest, Andrus sent a questionnaire back to Mosul requesting details of the Ezîdî leadership’s intentions in order to move forward, with Andrus

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Isya Joseph, “Yezidi Texts,” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1909: 111–56. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/527914>. Accessed 13 Apr. 2023.

<sup>259</sup> Guest, *Survival*, 126.

<sup>260</sup> This community’s presence in Mardin is attested in an early 17<sup>th</sup> century travelogue. Explorer Carsten Niebuhr (1733-1815) and American Episcopal missionary Horatio Southgate (1812-1894) also describe them as undergoing a process of conversion that was under the auspices of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate. Cf. Nejat Göyünç, *XVI. Yüzyilda Mardin Sancağı* (Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1969), 78.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

confident in the potential of this exchange.<sup>263</sup> It would, however, not come to fruition, with the state directly intervening in July of the same year, perhaps due to being made aware of the Ezîdîs' inquiry.

The situation changed with the arrival of a delegation from the central government which, in a public and violent fashion, forced the state's vision of religious orthodoxy upon the Ezîdîs, and deliberately used this as a warning against the Christian communities. In May of 1891, a government advisory commission traveled to Sheikhan to persuade Ezîdî leadership to comply with conscription. According to Deringil, the commission's conclusion was to banish their leaders "as soon as possible to areas of the empire where there were no Yezidis."<sup>264</sup> The project was dictated by the state's practical and ideological goals. For the first, full incorporation of the 150,000-strong Ezîdî population and loyal tribes' incorporation into the Hamidiyye Regiments would bolster its military. For the second, the state saw the Ezîdîs as a "heretical sect" (*fırak-i dalle*) and was deliberately working towards "changing their beliefs," bringing the non-Muslim Ezîdîs "back into" Islam.<sup>265</sup> In July, 1891, the Ottoman government appointed general Ömer Vehbi Paşa to oversee implementation of the state's agenda in the Mosul region, including the conversion of the Ezîdîs. By 1892, with the program having failed to meet its objectives via investment, Ömer Vehbi Paşa began use of force, first through a deadly, public humiliation of Ezîdî leadership tricked into visiting Mosul. This event, held on August 9<sup>th</sup>, is documented in a terrified letter sent by a Syriac Orthodox deacon in Mosul who, also imprisoned to exert pressure, was forced to witness the event.

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 70.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

The letter's author, Elias al-Khouri, was imprisoned by the Paşa along with other members of the Syriac Orthodox and other Christian millet councils, a group totaling 35 individuals.<sup>266</sup> They were harshly interrogated overnight, leaving the author in a state to believe that "no hope remained for the prisoners."<sup>267</sup> From two passing mentions in the letter it appears the arrests were in part due to "slander of a woman" by some in their neighborhood, with the interrogations producing the slanderers' names, but that the Christians' fear of the paşa was so severe he felt he could not even ask for the Patriarchate's intervention. However, it became clear that these arrests may have been timed to further intimidate the Christian prisoners. On the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> there was great fanfare outside, and a horse-drawn carriage was brought out to meet the group of Ezîdî notables that had been ordered to a meeting in the city. The Ezîdîs were forcibly taken by soldiers to the citadel, where, forced to convert, "all you could hear was the *shahada* being declared, and condemnation of Satan," with the notables forced to make these statements to the crowds that had gathered to watch. Due to some refraining, or having "converted only in language," the soldiers set upon the Ezîdîs, killing some and wounding nearly all the others. The paşa then held a celebration and informed the Christian prisoners, telling them "you have seen what I have done. I have the power to kill, to imprison, release, and forgive."<sup>268</sup> Stating his happiness at the outcome of the conversions, he released the Christians with a warning to "go back to your progeny and take heed of justice and the law." The state could, as it had now shown all, conduct itself with impunity.

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<sup>266</sup> "Letter to Patriarch Peter from Shammas Elias al-Khouri," 9 Ab [August], 1892, MPA K05-0254.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

The government began appointing teachers and imams to Ezîdî villages, but were frustrated by reports of many of the Ezîdîs renouncing Islam. When news came that the Ezîdîs had reached out to the French consulate about potential conversion to Christianity, on the condition that conversion would grant them France's protection against the paşa, Ottoman officials decided to take even more drastic measures.<sup>269</sup> The government's response included exile of Ezîdî leadership, followed by a brutal punitive expedition to Sheikhan and Sinjar, in the wake of which the government dispatched more teachers to implement the state's Sunni Hanefi educational program. Ottoman forces also captured and converted into a medrese of the Tomb of Sheikh Adi in Lalesh, the holiest site of the Ezîdî religious tradition. This was a short-lived transformation, as within a year Ömer Vehbi Paşa was recalled to Istanbul for his excesses. The episode nonetheless marks the importance of education as a tool of the state, in this case as the means to transform the Ezîdî population into ideal Ottoman Muslim subjects.

### **Discourses on the State of Education in the Late Ottoman Syriac Orthodox Community**

The Syriac Orthodox Church's situation deteriorated in the wake of the Hamidian Massacres. In their immediate aftermath the community sought to restructure its educational system, and its leadership demonstrated the lengths they would go to maintain communal boundaries during the process. A letter to the Patriarchate in February, 1897 indicates this concern. The author, a resident of the Suryani village of Qarabash, writes that four months prior, his nephew went off to study and reside at the "Protestant school" in Mardin, without providing any notification to the village. His family requested multiple times for him to return. Saying that they would prefer to send him to a church school, they requested the Patriarch to order him

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<sup>269</sup> Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, 73.

“taken out of the Protestant school, and sent to the Monastery of the Throne of Antioch, known as Deyrulzafaran,” where his brother was already studying.<sup>270</sup> The author mentions that both brothers were orphaned, probably during the Hamidian Massacres two years prior, and thus it appears that these two competing educational systems, Protestant or the Patriarchate, offered their best opportunity.

The church hierarchy’s responses to these appeals were swift. In one case, which may in fact be related to ibn Serkis’s appeal, the Patriarch sent word to the Diyarbakir diocese to solve this problem. The Patriarchate received word from then Matran, and future Patriarch, Elias Shakir in a letter narrating his “rescue” of a group of the community’s children from the clutches of the Mardin Protestant school, implying use or threat of force in the process. In a scathing tone, however, Matran Elias accused the Patriarch and his close associates of “corrupting the thoughts of [the community’s] children” through their unwillingness to provide substantive schooling.<sup>271</sup> Elias raises the issue that, while his actions may have satisfied the desires of the Patriarch, the undeniable shortcoming of the church’s educational system and the inability and corruption of its instructors were cause for immediate concern.

The Syriac Orthodox community, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was faced by the dual disadvantage of a dysfunctional Syriac Orthodox millet education system, driven further into decline by the massacres 1894-1896, and the significant financial and networking advantages of the Armenian and Syriac Catholic communities. Communications between the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch’s representative and the Ottoman administration demonstrate both the sparsity of schools, as well as the means which communal leadership recognized as possibilities for

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<sup>270</sup> “Letter to Patriarch Abdulmesih from ibn Serkis,” 6 Şubat, 1897, MPA-K05-40M-71.

<sup>271</sup> “Letter to Patriarch Abdulmesih from Matran Elias Shakir,” 23 Şubat, 1897, MPA-K05-24/40-238-239.

developing their community. Ottoman *salnames* and state archival documents provide the numbers of non-Muslim students enrolled and enrolled free-of-charge (*mejjânan*) to various Ottoman schools, with Süryani enrollment seemingly disproportionately lower than Armenian and Greek communities at the turn of the century.<sup>272</sup>

Numerous documents in the church's archives of incoming and outgoing correspondences and Ottoman archive demonstrate the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate's attitude towards their schools' current state, and their recognition of the opportunity provided by Ottoman schools. For example, a petition from the Patriarchate from 1900 states its community's children's desire to "seek the lights of sciences and arts and knowledge for enlightenment," and requests free admittance for seven students.<sup>273</sup> In another from 1899, the Patriarch's office states that given the poor state of his own schools, he requests an increase of two students to be admitted free of charge for enrollment in the Mekteb-I Sultan in addition to those students already admitted in accordance with the Ottoman government's official permission; the request was ultimately denied by the Ottoman authorities.<sup>274</sup> Correspondence between the Syriac Catholic representation and the Ottoman government indicate similar concerns.<sup>275</sup> The students discussed in these documents represent a small percentage of the total of school-enrolled students from these communities, since more were being educated in the small number of community schools.

While increased admittance of students to state schools helped build the Suryanis' ties with the state, the Patriarchate's true goal was to avoid attendance of its children in Protestant

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<sup>272</sup> BEO 1545.115819 8 Aġustos 1317 [21 August, 1901].

<sup>273</sup> Y.PRK.AZN. 00022 19 Aġustos 1319 [1 September, 1901].

<sup>274</sup> MK.MFT 00472. 28 Aġustos, 1315 [9 September, 1899].

<sup>275</sup> MF.MKT 1154.55. 2 Haziran, 1326, [15 June, 1910].

schools, which were more likely to lead to conversion. In the wake of the Hamidian Massacres, the better-funded Protestant schools offered clear advantage over the parochial schools of the Syriac Orthodox Church, with well-established Protestant colleges operating in Assyrian-populated areas in Mardin, Adana, and Harput. Attendance by the community's children not only threatened the integrity of the church, but also the social fabric of village communities.

### **Communal Decline and Education Following the Hamidian Massacres**

The archival record, both in the Ottoman and Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate archives, indicates an immediate push towards education as a two-fold partial remedy to the Syriac Orthodox community's plight. First, church leaders present education as a means to adequately care for children orphaned by the recent violence, and second, as a means to assert the millet's independence from both other Christian millets (i.e. Armenians) and as resistance against missionaries. The community also quickly expresses its concerns in the broader context of post-violence rebuilding. In 1897, community leader Yusuf al-Ikhtiyar wrote about the "Mu'allim al-'Aliyya" Syriac Orthodox school in Diyarbakir, embedding important debate over curricular development within a discussion of teachers' salaries. Students in the past two years in Diyarbakir, he states, have benefitted from the teaching abilities of the instructor Hanna and those who teach using his method, with their pedagogical approach being of the main draws bringing in a total of sixty students to the school rather than to missionary schools.<sup>276</sup> However, the priorities of such educators fail to meet what Yusuf al-Ikhtiyar thinks best benefits the community in the long-term. According to Yusuf, the curriculum may serve some practical benefit to students, but not in service of the community's long-term interests. His particular

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<sup>276</sup> "Letter to Patriarch Abdulmesih from Yusuf al-Ikhtiyar, 2 Eylül, 1897, MPA K05-40M-049.

complaint regarding this issue centers on the school's languages of instruction being Turkish and French.<sup>277</sup>

Yusuf al-Ikhtiyar brought this to the attention of the diocese, asking why money from the millet's *awqaf* (foundations) should pay high salaries for instructors when they do not teach what he sees as necessary courses in Classical Syriac and Garshuni Arabic. These languages of the community's religious heritage, he asserted, must be of equal importance as "the rules of God's church" in formation of an educated Suryani millet.<sup>278</sup> Yusuf believed the community must be educated in a manner that facilitates future service within the church, which necessitates emphasis on Syriac as the language of theology, prayer, and religious ritual to guarantee full, meaningful understanding. These are the elements that can, through education, form a new generation who are both prepared for the workforce but also still firmly grounded in their communal identity.

Similar petitions about the church's lack of proper attention also came from village communities. In 1899, a group from the Diyarbakir region wrote in Garshuni Ottoman that their village school had been closed since 1896 and, despite the necessity of providing local education, were unable to reinstitute the school on their own.<sup>279</sup> It is a particular pride among the Christian nations, they lament, that led them into a state of arrogance, which then led to the destitution in which they found themselves. Their bishop, whose name is not directly given, continues this arrogance in his refusal to promote education among the community's children. Thus, the petitioners from the village state that a school must be built during the upcoming year, with a

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> "Letter to Patriarch Abdulmesih," 28 Mart 1899, MPA-K05-40M-016.

crop of teachers to be paid ahead of time to ensure its earliest functioning. The letter briefly mentions the context of this urgency: that the Catholic community in their region now possessed two schools, which, having caught the youth's attention, "they stay there, and let us inform you, that they are moving from our own millet to that of the Catholics."<sup>280</sup> Similarly, an unnamed author added an addendum to a letter from Matran Eliyas Shakir stating that Suryani, one of the oldest Christian nations, has its future put at risk without adequate schooling, the implication being that it is just as serious a risk as the internal rivalries and financial issues described in the main text.<sup>281</sup>

The Patriarchate, through its representation in the capital, Matran Boulus, also worked diligently to maintain whatever allocations had been made to their community for access to state schools. In 1899, a Syriac Orthodox student had been admitted free of charge to study at the Mekteb-I Sultan, but by February of 1900 had left the school without permission.<sup>282</sup> The Church then requested that this slot and its allotted scholarship be allocated to another student from the community, a request which was granted by the Interior Ministry. Although a record of the outgoing letter from the Patriarchate could not be located in the archive, Ottoman officials directly noted the work of the Patriarchate's representative. In what seems like a small proportion of the larger body of students in need of education, the church also asserted itself vis-à-vis its Protestant and Catholic rivals through attempts to gain greater educational opportunities. In a letter to the Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs, Matran Boulus recounts how, in the previous year, six Syriac Catholic students were admitted to Ottoman schools, along with

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> "Letter to Patriarch Abdulmesih from Matran Elias," HBS 2/9/29, 18 Ab, 1898.

<sup>282</sup> BEO 1441.108015 1 Şubat 1315 [13 February, 1900].

unspecified numbers from other denominations. However, the “needy, loyal community” of the Syriac Orthodox Church asks only for another two students to be admitted with government financial support.<sup>283</sup> This request was accepted, with a letter sent to the school to clarify this change.<sup>284</sup>

The Patriarchate directly promoted government support for Suryani education as a privilege earned through their loyalty. A document housed in the Patriarchate archives, a copy of a letter sent to the *Baskitâplik*, appeals to the needs of Suryani children in the broader region, and more specifically in Diyarbakir and asks for seven additional students to be educated free of charge in the Mekteb-I Sultan.<sup>285</sup> There was, however, little meaningful effect of these efforts, which brought few long-term solutions to the problem of education within a community increasingly made destitute by violence, but served as another point of the church building ties with the government and creating new avenues for lobbying as a de-facto independent millet. However, no long-term solution could avoid prioritizing the development of the community’s own educational system, as, just like Protestant schools, groups in the region were aware of the ways in which the state weaponized education as a means to promote its own interests.

### **Debates over Curriculum and School Quality**

Reformers confronted not only a lack of facilities and permissions to operate schools, but also universally shared dismay at the status of available, qualified educators in comparison to Protestant schools. The question of curriculum also influenced these concerns. For many, the

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<sup>283</sup> BEO 528.48.2 31 Augustos 1316 [13 September, 1900].

<sup>284</sup> BEO 528.48.5 25 Eylul 1316 [8 November, 1900].

<sup>285</sup> “Letter to Ottoman Government,” 21 Teşrin-i Sani 1317 [4 December, 1901], HBS 2/3/46.

choice between Protestant or Catholic versus Syriac Orthodox schools was a matter of resource, and the perception of the usefulness of the schools' course of study in preparing for the work force. Ottoman archival records present lists of textbooks in use at Protestant schools, with a detailed example being those in the Protestant college of Merzifon.<sup>286</sup> As the church began reorganizing its educational system, it began to settle on a curriculum notably different from Protestant schools. In a document from 1908, an announcement of completed exams lists the language education courses of a primary school created within the walls of Mardin's Church of the Forty Martyrs as: "Religious Duties," "Syriac Readings," "Arabic Grammar," "Turkish Readings and Grammar," "Syriac Calligraphy," and "Arabic Calligraphy."<sup>287</sup> Those who successfully complete these courses, according to the Patriarchate's correspondence, "have reached preparation for secondary school and are honorable people [*ahl-I namus*]."<sup>288</sup> This dual importance of inculcating both religious devotion and broader educational skills continued as a core concern during curricular changes within the church prior to 1914, eventually manifesting in a clearly defined program that led to the expansion of the Patriarchal seminary.

The issue of language, similarly tied to questions of religious and communal identity, was also a core concern. Just as figures such as Naum Faiq and Ashur Yusuf discussed Syriac as a marker of national identity and a means of distinguishing themselves from Armenian co-religionists, internally the church explored the significance of Syriac beyond its liturgical use. A

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<sup>286</sup> Y.PRK.MF 003.54.1.1. The date of the document is unclear, but the most recent book publication mentioned within the document is 1895 (1311 Rumi). General subjects of the books included "History of Islam," "History of the Ottoman Empire," "French Language Instruction," and "Ottoman Readings." Particular to Christian communities, the list includes Gospels printed at Andover Seminary, books in Armenian published in Venice and Izmir, and Greek-language books published in Athens and from within the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>287</sup> This is a hasty note, and a specific date is difficult to attain as this defter contains entries from multiple years but the handwriting matches with documents dated to Rumi year 1314 (13 March 1898-12 March 1899); CFMM 000865, 12r

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

monk named Abdisho, communicating from an unspecified location in Tur Abdin, composed a document in 1906 entitled “A Brief Treatise on the Ancient Nature of the Syriac Language,” a two-page summary of his findings, intended to be used in schools.<sup>289</sup> The document, written in Classical Syriac, rather than the typical Arabic Garshuni of internal church communication in the region, offers as its foundation that Syriac, as a continuation of Aramaic, is thus the language spoken between Adam and God, and by all of creation prior to the Tower of Babel.

From the more detailed aspects of his argument, the author’s intent can be seen to assert a singular identity among all Christians of the Syriac tradition, as well as to assert Syriac, rather than Arabic, should be given prime status in their community.<sup>290</sup> Although admitting that this work was a summary of his strongly researched evidence, he argues that a meaningful consideration is the historical division of Syriac between its western and eastern forms. Placing this division in a Biblical genealogy, he deduces that, as Syriac was the first language, it was therefore the language of Noah, and thus Noah’s grandchildren Aram and Asshur, from whom came the Aramaeans and Assyrians. From the latter, he states, stemmed the Chaldeans and Babylonians. This statement reflects the already emerging division within Syriac Christian nationalism, association with the Aramaeans, promoted increasingly by the Syriac Orthodox Church as a means of avoiding being subsumed into a broader Assyrian identity. This, as will be shown, quickly becomes the ideological divide which the Patriarchate can use to police efforts by nationalist educators. Abdisho is not arguing necessarily for Aramaean identity. His main point in presenting this narrative is to assert that there is no meaningful distinction between Aramaean and Assyrian, as both are bound together from kinship and Syriac heritage. His

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<sup>289</sup> Abdisho, “A Brief Treatise on the Nature of the Syriac Language,” 15 Temmuz [July] 1906, HBS 2/2/11.

<sup>290</sup> The author uses the term “Araboye”, rather than the term “Tayyoye” common in the region to refer to Arabs.

second point, that Syriac should be given prime status compared to other competing languages, is brief but includes the philologically naïve claim that Persian, Armenian, and Arabic are also derived from, or corrupted forms of, the “father of all languages,” Syriac.<sup>291</sup> Abdisho’s text gives a linguistic *aymaqam* y of Arabic, describing Hebrew as a corruption from Syriac, which was later developed into the language of the “Qahtanites,” which eventually became Arabic. Thus, by asserting that Syriac is both the true divine language, as well as an uncorrupted language from which others stem, Abdisho makes a unique religious case for the study of Syriac in the community. Although the church had clearly identified its shortcomings and vulnerabilities in education, it still failed to achieve any meaningful reform, leading to continued church efforts focusing on creating a religiously-minded Syriac Orthodox community, and efforts of both church and lay-nationalists seeking a more useful educational system.

### **Education, *Al-Hikma*, and Hanna Dolabani**

The church’s struggle to create an educational curriculum that was both thoroughly religious yet also encouraged a sense of the millet’s communal identity was realized through the efforts of a cadre of reformers, most notably by monk Hanna Dolabani, future Archbishop of Mardin, and post-war luminary of the Syriac Christian world. Dolabani was born in 1885 into a family which boasted multiple clergy at various levels. Baptized by future patriarch Elias Shakir, he received his first education in part from his uncle and godfather Father Gabriel Dolabani and cousin Elias Dolabani at the primary school at Mardin’s Church of the Forty Martyrs.<sup>292</sup> He then studied with the Capuchin Fathers in Mardin, where his education included study and translation

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>292</sup> Hanna Dolapönü, 1885-1969, *Taş ‘itā d-ḥaye d-Yuḥanān Dulabani : ‘am ktibātā ‘hrānyātā*. eds. Eliyo Dere and Tomas Isik. Sweden: Assyrian Federation in Sweden, 2007.

in Arabic, Syriac, and Turkish, until financial hardship forced him to quit and become a shoemaker.<sup>293</sup> While contemplating potential service in the clergy, he toured Christian villages, both Suryani and Armenian, throughout Mardin and Tur Abdin, and entered monastic life in 1907. Perhaps reflecting his understanding of the community's needs, he followed his ordination as monk with endeavors to reinvigorate the Syriac Orthodox printing press, and published two short books in 1909, *Jinān al-Na'īm* and *Murshid al-Ta'ib*.<sup>294</sup>

In 1910, partially to satisfy the community's demands, the Patriarchate reopened the seminary at Deyrulzafaran under the management of Mikhail Chaqqi, himself a graduate of the community's *Deir al-Mu'allimin* school in Diyarbakir. Dolabani was assigned to teach both theology and Classical Syriac at the seminary, with notable students from this period including Abdulmesih Qarabash, who later authored a memoir of the Assyrian Genocide entitled *Dmā Zlīhā (Spilled Blood)*. Dolabani's memoirs also state that during this period he discussed education among the Ezidi during a visit by Mîr Ismail Chol Beg, a leader of the Ezidi community of Sinjar. According to Dolabani, he asked the mir why the Ezidi still adhered to their policy of illiteracy in accordance with their religious customs, perhaps reflecting his commitment to literacy among the Suryani community. The mir responded defensively, asking if the "Suryani and Arabs (Muslims)" who read their own holy texts adhered any greater to their commandments.<sup>295</sup> Very often Dolabani's religious and language instruction overlapped, and indicate the idea of religious belief, language, and communal historical identity which the reformer Dolabani wished to impart to his seminary students.

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<sup>293</sup> Gharīghūriyūs Yūḥannā Ibrāhīm, *Dolabani, the Ascetic of Mardin: His Life and Works* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), 14; Dolapönü 2007, 24.

<sup>294</sup> Ibrahim 2010, 18.

<sup>295</sup> Dolapönü, *Taş'ūtā*, 35.

Then, in 1913, Dolabani assisted in the publication of the church's first official periodical, *al-Hikma*, a bi-monthly Arabic journal which ran until August, 1914. *Al-Hikma's* tone, reflecting the officially sanctioned views of the Syriac Orthodox Church, differed in many ways from that of other periodicals mentioned, such as *Kawkab Madnho*, *Murshid Athuriyon*, or *Intibah*, which was then being published in the United States. Printing in Arabic and Syriac typeface, rather than lithographic Arabic or Ottoman Garshuni, *al-Hikma* more broadly targeted the Arabophone community. Although *al-Hikma* lacks critical tone of Faiq and Yusuf's journals, it similarly encourages the building of new schools and emphasizes the importance of Syriac, and on Syriac Christian religious heritage. Dolabani published his own Syriac poetry in the journal, but offered essays that synthesized religion, history, and the promotion of the community's virtue. In one, entitled *al-Nijāh fi-al- Ṣidq* ("Success in Honesty"), a play upon the idiom *al-Nijā fi-al- Ṣidq* ("Salvation in Honesty"), Dolabani calls for moral rejuvenation of the Suryani.<sup>296</sup> It weaves religious scripture, historical references, and Greek philosophy as educative tract on morality, with Dolabani serving as teacher towards improvement of the community.

*Al-Hikma's* discourse on education focuses on themes of building village libraries and schools, building youth clubs, and establishing trade industries, all of which reflect the need for church-sponsored or administered building plans. As reflected in an article entitled "Strength Through Unity," the dearth of well-preserved historical buildings are another indication of the Suryani's degeneration, but that the solution to these problems is clear: that they need to "bring the strength of the past into the present."<sup>297</sup> The link between educational and communal decline, and the deliverance to be offered by focusing on education provides ample opportunity

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<sup>296</sup> Hanna Dolabani, "Success in Honesty," *al-Hikma*, 15 and 28 April, 1914: 268-270.

<sup>297</sup> "Strength in Unity," *al-Hikma*, 1 no., 6, 16 and 29 Teshrīn al-Awwal [October], 1913: 73

throughout the journal to celebrate the Suryani nation's past works, such as the School of Edessa, and to lament that this heritage and its influence has all but disappeared, with even the very manuscripts of their golden age locked away in European libraries. Yaqub Warda, in his series "Until When?" speaks of this as an ultimate humiliation, writing "Does it not break your heart... that which was the mother of sects and peoples... which has now become the lowest of them, which they gaze upon with eyes of schadenfreude (*shimâta*)... with gazes of scorn."<sup>298</sup> For Dolabani, only remembrance and emulation of the "important heroes" the nation has fostered will reawaken the nation.<sup>299</sup>

The journal does relate one peculiar approach to education that can be interpreted either as maintaining intuitional relations with the government, or perhaps as a holdout of Ottomanist optimism. An article subtitled "The Ottoman of Tomorrow is Prepared in the Schools of Today," is a deep reflection on the weak state of the community's schools and the question of preparation of students for future employment. As the unspecified author writes, the fastest way to "acquire a full idea on the situation of any nation or country," is to view its schools, from which you can determine if it is "sitting upon prosperity, or lying in the wasteland of degradation."<sup>300</sup> The journal lays out a plan calling for a focus on constructing primary schools, creating an "army of primary school teachers" to defeat the "ignorance that is the source of our decay."<sup>301</sup> Primary school teachers deal with students "at a time in which thought, emotion, and the body have not fully formed, and have not fully made up their minds, so they leave deep, important influence

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<sup>298</sup> Yaqub Warda, "Until When," *al-Hikma*, 1 no. 15, 1 and 14 Adhar [March], 1913: 219.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> "Secondary Schools and Their Great Importance," *al-Hikma*, 1 no. 9, 1 and 14 Kanun al-Awwal [December], 1913, 120.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 123.

upon morals and feelings.”<sup>302</sup> The models for these efforts are presented first as Germany and Japan, who achieved military prowess through education, and whose educators “evoked famous heroes and victories,” making education part of national identity. In what may be a risky nod to other potential models, the journal also states that by looking “at Ottoman history,” Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria offer examples of nations who have become advanced and successful primarily through “zealous attention” given to primary education. Although neither the journal nor the church advocate for anything resembling separatism, the rapid development of other previously Ottoman Christian minorities offers a stark comparison to their own situation.

The Patriarchate also supported participation in a joint Christian-Muslim student event to foster intercommunal ties. The *Deir al-Mu`allimīn* School in Diyarbakir received an order from the Interior Ministry to organize an outing for students to another of the province’s cities.<sup>303</sup> The trip was organized to Mardin and its surroundings, in accordance with the government’s desire to “encourage pupils” through visits to heritage sites, “and the conditioning of their bodies” through receiving physical activity and “practical training in geography, horticulture, and ethics.”<sup>304</sup> The students stayed three days in Mardin, meeting with various notables and educators, and conducted a visit to Deyrulzafaran, where they were given a tour of the monastery, its school, printing press, and relics.

The Church’s journal also discussed two perhaps competing challenges: their desire for a rapidly established system to educate youth, and the fragmentation at risk caused by the market economy of education in the region due to Protestant and Catholic schools. In an editorial named

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>303</sup> “Local Events: The Diyarbakir Deyr al-Mu`allimin in Mardin,” *al-Hikma*, 1 no. 20, 19 Ayar and 1 Haziran, 1914, 303.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

“Communal Glimmer: The Suryani Millet and Development,” the author describes the failures of education advocates to implement the plans about which they speak, likely a criticism of the *Intibah* committees and their affiliates.<sup>305</sup> However, it warns that the community should not celebrate its own newly emerging intellectuals if their commitment still follows sectarian division, for “if we get sectarian schools, how is this any different from foreign schools?”<sup>306</sup> Their understanding of unity saw the Suryani nation led by the Syriac Orthodox Church, being the true representative of their community. Thus, religious education must be given equal weight. This point is the focus of an article entitled “The Announcement,” which, while celebrating the attention being given to education, argues that these education programs must edify youth throughout the duration of their childhood without neglecting their moral conditioning alongside scientific training. Schools, the author pronounces, “do not evoke anything but the catalog of sciences, and the current arts, for the development of knowledge in the future is imposed upon us.”<sup>307</sup> A proper primary education will give students these tools. However, in both school and in individual learning, morality must be given full attention. The author advocates for the creation of local, village-based libraries, but warns “students must be careful of the sorts of books they read, not bad books with corrupt morals,” specifically referring to short stories from outside of their community.<sup>308</sup> Instead, they should focus primarily on history, as this is the field “which invigorates one towards strengthening their own nation, for nations advance through knowing

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<sup>305</sup> Ibn al-‘Ibrī, “Communal Glimmer: The Suryani Millet and Development,” *Al-Hikma*, 1 no. 7, 1 and 14 Teshrīn al-Thānī [November], 1913: 85

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>307</sup> “The Announcement,” *al-Hikma*, 1 no. 16, 17 and 30 Adhar [March], 1914: 245.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*

their ancient history.”<sup>309</sup> Still, this understanding of communal history forefronts the religious aspect of their ethno-religious identity, and their descriptions are not concerned with the pre-Christian past.

Parallel discussions are presented outside of *al-Hikma*, for example in Ashur Yusuf’s nationalist journal *Murshid Athuriyon*. An author, who gives his name as “S. Parçi” writes of the dangers posed by not creating sufficient or properly structured schools in the homeland. Faced between the option of inadequate community schools, even those parents with some access to wealth feel pressured to send their students abroad, with the United States, where the author lives, as his point of reference.<sup>310</sup> If abroad, these children would be exposed to potentially corrupting influences, and would lack both necessary spiritual guidance and their families, who must play a role in their education in the home.<sup>311</sup> The community believes itself to be in a conundrum: “Suryani often say, to absolve themselves of guilt ‘we are poor, what can we do? ...Either we’ll open schools ourselves or send our children to schools abroad,’” but fail to treat education as an investment that will alleviate this same poverty.<sup>312</sup> Author “S. Parçi,” bringing up the question of language, states that one fundamental complaint of students is a lack of both Syriac and Turkish training in their studies, reflecting the need to provide an education grounded in the community’s tradition as well as preparing them for employment.

Other fields of the nation’s intellectual golden age also receive attention and calls for revival. *Murshid Athuriyon*, for example, in its first issue, specifically calls for a curriculum including natural sciences, chemistry, geography, “spiritual studies,” ethics, finances,

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> S. S. Perçi, “A Few Words to Our National Brothers of Turkey,” *Murshid Athuriyon*, 4 no. 8, Nov. 1912.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

engineering, and algebra. These, Ashur Yusuf asserts, should be coupled with other subjects including “national history, geography, calligraphy, the history of literature, Christianity, and language classes.”<sup>313</sup> An entry entitled “Our Prior and Current State,” juxtaposes this educational past with the present. The nation, the author states, were famous in antiquity for their knowledge, production, and trade, and were “a people who had risen into orbit, but not with a balloon, and conquered the land, but not through force,” but through their schools and “institutes of literature,” which had spread civilization through the region. The author refers to his community as the Suryani, rather than directly associating his golden age with an Assyrian or Aramaean past. In nearly all cases within the journal, however, removing the “veil of ignorance” through education will redraw a line of continuity between the community’s past glory and promising future.

This brings into question the contours and boundaries of the past and present which is to be bridged. Students must, as a teacher from *Deir al-Mu'allimīn* in Diyarbakir wrote to *Kawkab Madnhō* affirms, be prepared for “service to the nation and the homeland,” in that particular case advocating emulation of Napoleonic mass education programs.<sup>314</sup> For Ashur Yusuf, the object of these references is clear. In many of his writings, he lays blame specifically upon the clergy, or the Patriarch himself, as either a cause of or as a humiliating reflection of the community’s ignorance. Yusuf speaks of clergy’s relationship to Syriac as treating it like a near-magical language, and their role in society as like magicians who travel to perform rituals, but with no appreciating for the meaning of the liturgies, or of Syriac beyond the Lord’s Prayer.<sup>315</sup> This

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<sup>313</sup> Ashur Yusuf, “Means of Education,” *Murshid Athuriyon*, 1. No. 1, January, 1909, 2.

<sup>314</sup> Elias Yaso, “Knowledge and Ignorance,” *Kawkab Madnhā*, 1 no 14, January, 1911, 3.

<sup>315</sup> This article also states, paraphrasing Apostle Paul, “I would prefer five words in the appropriate language in order to instruct rather than ten thousand words in tongues.”

attitude towards the impact of ignorance on Assyrian national identity is perhaps best reflected in the following from the journal's first issue:

[A]t the moment, if you were asking a few basic questions about local history, geography and language, you would not receive a satisfying answer, as there is no knowledge regarding things like this. A few times I have encountered clergy I have asked this question in hopes of finding a satisfying answer: Now, are the living Suryani Assyrians? Or are they called Suryani? If it's Assyrian, why are they called Suryani? If Suryani, where sits the issue of the Kingdom of Nineveh? But it is unfortunate, I have yet to receive a persuasive answer.<sup>316</sup>

Asking rhetorically if anyone from the community has a proper response to this question, he continues his discussion of how ignorance of these central issues – national history – are major obstacles towards national revival. Yusuf writes that a Suryani who had traveled to America claimed that upon his return he encountered the (unspecified) Patriarch who asked him “my child, is America in London?”<sup>317</sup> Yusuf's response to this story is a flabbergasted declaration “What a mystifying state, a nation whose Patriarch does not even know that London is England's capital city, and America is a country. But is it the Patriarch's fault? He wouldn't have received a geography education.”<sup>318</sup> Although this account is almost certainly apocryphal, it reflects Ashur Yusuf's nationalist position that the Syriac Orthodox Church has not only failed in its responsibilities to educate Assyrian youth, but that it is likely unable to do so in the future.

The question of what constitutes the homeland also reflects scholarly debate over the saliency of Ottomanism within the post-1909 community. The Patriarchate, and *al-Hikma* engage this question with ambiguity, although a claim of indigeneity to broader North Mesopotamia is a central point of identity, including how these arguments are embedded within

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<sup>316</sup> Ashur Yusuf, “Means of Education,” *Murshid Athuriyon*, 1 no. 1, June, 1909, 3-4.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*

debate over the “White Church” discussed in Chapter 1. The Patriarchate’s journal, which begins with a celebration of Ottoman military victories, and closely follows the recapture of Edirne in a celebratory tone, is in no way advocating for separatism. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, even during the violence of the Seyfo, the church, while pleading for safety and demonstrating their status as “*millet-I sadiqa*” (the loyal millet), internally called for obedience to the state using religious language. *Al-Hikma* even contains a two-article series entitled “Mighty Homeland,” in which the author speaks broadly about service to the homeland as both a civil and religious duty, referring to it in using terms such as *farḍ* [religious duty] and jihad, for both Suryani and all “modern peoples,” without specifying to what exactly “homeland” refers.<sup>319</sup> A priest from Viranşehir, writing to *Kawkab Madnhō*, describes the community’s *watan* [homeland] stating “the land of Syria and Mesopotamia and Nineveh towards its eastern border, and Tur Abdin, and alongside the border of the Armenian region. There we will see the traces of our fathers and ancestors in the monasteries and churches.”<sup>320</sup> The same author uses the terms Suryani and Aramaean interchangeably to refer to his audience, and therefore represents a more Syria-oriented Aramaean national identity, but approaches the concept of homeland as a specific territory defined by Syriac Christian heritage. The same author, reflecting on the article’s opening quote of Romans 3:12 challenges his fellow Christians: “do you have hopes of what we are? Are we not the sons of the Suryani people (ummah), the progeny of the Aramaean nation?”<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> “Mighty Homeland,” *al-Hikma*, 1 no. 5, 1 and 14 Teshrin al-Awwal, 54.

<sup>320</sup> “On the Ignorance Which Has Settled Upon the Nation,” *Kawkab Madnhā*, 1. No. 23, May, 1911.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, “The night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” Michael D. Coogan, et al. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

With this central point of national mobilization shared across these journals, the two camps, with nationalists Naum Faiq and Ashur Yusuf on one side and the church on the other, present responsibility in different contexts. For Faiq and Yusuf, the church must be part of this reform for it to resonate within the community; however, its educational approach must undergo significant transformation and be supported by influential members of the community, paralleling the efforts of the *Intibah* Committees with which they were involved. Yusuf poses the question to his readers “To Whom Should We Be Waiting for the Nation’s Development,” in which he criticizes the church and conservatives who neglect women’s education, a criticism Faiq levels as well, and a topic *al-Hikma* does not address.

For Yusuf, this neglect is a reflection of the church’s general indifference to its subjects’ material needs. He narrates his own transformative experience which led him to this realization. An event where, after studying in Izmir, he was speaking with one of his Armenian friends in Istanbul, and met with an English Pastor Curtis who was in contact with the Patriarch’s representative Boulus. He was advised to ask for assistance from the English for the development of a school, but explains he received no definite response, which prompted him to return to Harput in 1887 and undertake this work on his own.<sup>322</sup> The English pastor had advised him, that given the Syriac Orthodox community’s deep history and well-ordered structure, denominational changes would not ease this burden. Instead, only a rejuvenation of spiritual life could alleviate their condition, which convinced the Protestant Yusuf to view the church as a source of the community’s misfortune, as well as the bedrock for reform. Yusuf wrote the church of his views, but “they gave no importance to their responsibilities,” despite repeated attempts,

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<sup>322</sup> Ashur Yusuf, “Will Anyone Else Help the Suryani Regarding Education?” *Murshid* Athuriyon, 3 no. 8, July, 1913, 119.

an experience that has permanently shaped his views.<sup>323</sup> However, the position of the church prior to and after the Hamidian Massacres underwent transformation, with attempts to bolster the community's status through education taking a central point.

Yusuf, in his effort to advance his community, had helped create the “Mart Shimuni Women’s Organization” in Harput, a counter to the Church’s disinterest in education and advancement of women.<sup>324</sup> Discussing women in terms of roles in “terbiye” and its link to civilization and proper behavior, he nonetheless situates women’s educational role primarily in the domestic space.<sup>325</sup> In October, 1909, following a conference to discuss girls’ education, Yusuf and his supporters began construction on a school, with a female instructor, Maryam Donabed, appointed, her salary paid through communal donation, and thirty female students.<sup>326</sup> The program continued for one year, but faced continued problems securing Donabed’s promised wage, until the activities of the better organized Armenian “Miyasiyal” Society for Armenian Unity (Miyasiyal Enikorotyon Hotoyis) established a similar program in the city and could offer Donabed a better salary. Another effort had restarted the process, and sixty children were identified as potential students with two teachers selected. Missing from this effort, it appears, was support from the church itself.

Returning to *al-Hikma*, Hanna Dolabani best represents a concerted effort to provide both spiritual guidance and national history education to his students. This synthesis of religious and

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Mart Shimuni is an important female martyr saint whose narrative resembles whose martyrdom narrative closely resembles that of the mother and seven sons put to death in 2 Maccabees, and to whom a large number of churches are dedicated.

<sup>325</sup> Ashur Yusuf, “The Suryani Women’s Mort Shmuni Organization in Harput,” *Murshid Athuriyon*, 3 no. 3, February, 1912, 38.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

communal historical heritage in education is demonstrated is a series of entries under the title *min kul shajara aymaq* (“From Every Tree, Fruit”). Described by Dolabani as “a collection of advice and wisdom extracted from sayings of those well-known among the forefathers,” it draws upon a variety of sources from the Syriac Christian tradition. This project can be seen as an explicit example of what Smith refers to as the “quarry” of the past, the “return by the intelligentsia to a living past, a past that was no mere ‘quarry’ for antiquarian research but that could be derived from the sentiments and traditions of the people.”<sup>327</sup> As one might expect, the collection’s first quote is by Saint Ephrem: “he who boasts of his own strength is distanced from the aid of God; the proud, they boast of God.”<sup>328</sup> The entire collection presents quotations drawn from 44 individuals, with the most frequent being Saint Ephrem and John Chrysostom, with 13 each, followed by Jacob of Serug (11), Saint Isaac the Syrian (8), Ahudemme and Saint Basilios (7), and Philoxenos of Mabbug (6). Other figures referenced include multiple figures associated with both the Syriac and Coptic Christian traditions, such as Saint Mark the Ascetic (3) and Saint Pimen (2), but the use of sources clearly demonstrates Dolabani’s desire to use the community’s Christian past as the reservoir from which to educate its present, in a systematic, literate, and morally guided fashion. Dolabani avoids engaging in any explicit Christian communal partisanship. As noted in Chapter 1, what little polemical language appears in *al-Hikma* focuses on the Syriac Catholic Church, manifested most directly in the series of articles about the return of deposed Abdulmesih to the “bosom of his mother church,” and Catholic attempts to have this return deemed a kidnapping in the eyes of the local government. Dolabani instead writes of Saint

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<sup>327</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, (Reno: Univ. of Nevada Press, 2013), 64.

<sup>328</sup> Hanna Dolabani, “From Every Tree, Fruit,” *al-Hikma*, 1 no. 9, 1 and 14 December, 1913, 119.

Ambrose's statement that "Christian brotherhood is greater than brotherhood by blood."<sup>329</sup> Communal identity must be rooted in Christian virtue, but the meanings of these are to be informed by the Church's intellectual heritage. Dolabani, who would survive the Assyrian Genocide, then became instructor at the "Taw-Mim-Semkath" School in Adana serving orphans and the poor, on which he reflected "no matter how beautiful castles are, they will never equal the beauty of this school."<sup>330</sup>

### **Naum Faiq and the Politics of Reform**

The church also intervened at times to interfere with the activities of Suryani intellectuals pursuing more meaningful teaching opportunities elsewhere. This is best exemplified in an exchange between the nationalist luminary Naum Faiq and the Patriarchate. As introduced previously, Naum Faiq – educator, Orthodox deacon, and editor of *Kawkab Madnhō* – sought meaningful educational reforms as a central component of revitalizing his beleaguered community. Faiq himself had traveled to Homs during the height of the Hamidian Massacres in Diyarbakir, escaping both the region's violence and seeking ways to serve the community outside of his home region. The church assigned him as a teacher in a school in Homs, and, although lost in the archival record, seemingly expressed concern about his performance. A response by Faiq in September of 1896 expresses his deep sadness and frustration at the school's operation. He reports that "in the four months I have been working for the education of the community's children," he has been "afflicted by weakness of heart" and that he is unable to

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<sup>329</sup> Hanna Dolabani, "From Every Tree, Fruit," *al-Hikma*, 1 no. 23, 1 and 14 June, 1914, 339.

<sup>330</sup> Naures Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora*, (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011), 290.

continue teaching at the school.<sup>331</sup> Although he does not specify the nature of this “weakness of heart,” after his resignation he traveled to Palestine and Lebanon, where he eventually served briefly in some educational capacity at a Maronite monastery, an act which drew direct admonition from the Patriarchate. Faiq’s telling response to this admonition sheds light on his greater concerns of the community, and he expresses himself in characteristically eloquent language peppered with poignant religious references. He opens the letter writing “Regarding the admonition from Your Excellency, which arrived, in Ottoman,” with reference to the letter’s language likely an indication of his frustration of Ottoman as the Patriarchate’s language of communication.<sup>332</sup> Faiq clarifies the “weakness of heart” as the reason for departing Homs, confessing that fear and anxiety stemming from the trauma of “the episodes that occurred among us,” the massacres in Diyarbakir, had prevented him from sleeping.<sup>333</sup> Fearing a total mental and physical breakdown, he traveled to Jerusalem to make pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulcher, and received Jerusalem bishop Matran Abdullah’s assistance.

Matran Abdullah arranged for Faiq to travel to the Syriac Catholic monastery Deir al-Sharfet, where he believed Faiq would find meaningful and suitable work. For Patriarchate Abdulmesih it was unacceptable for such an esteemed figure to be serving the Catholic community. According to him, the only motivation Faiq could have for such an activity was a desire to convert to Catholicism. Faiq vehemently defends against this charge in a letter to the Patriarch, writing “I swear to God Almighty entirely that I have not had any consideration of

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<sup>331</sup> The school is referred to only as “medrese”. “Letter from al-Muallim Naum Faiq,” HBS Uncatalogued, 10 Eylul 1896.

<sup>332</sup> Faiq’s letter is written in Garshuni Arabic. “Letter from Naum bin Iliyas who is Called Deacon[Shammas],” 27 Ayar [May] 1897, HBS Uncatalogued.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

changing denominations.”<sup>334</sup> Rather, his search for employment reflected a commitment to education as well as a broadly defined understanding of the boundaries of his community. Faiq admits that his decision was “not well thought out” but was done in his “dedication to wisdom,” and later states that he is driven by a desire to aid the “poor and orphans who seek educational and spiritual benefit.”<sup>335</sup> Still, he deferentially proclaims his repentance, “that his transgression be in the great sea” of the Patriarch’s benevolence, writing in Classical Syriac the phrase “let a single teardrop not be cause for the greater sea to be disturbed.”<sup>336</sup>

### *Intibāh Cemiyetleri*

This combination of apprehension towards Protestant schools, and Patriarchate’s unwillingness to listen to public demands for education, much of it nationalist in tone, led to the creation of networks of the *Intibāh Cemiyetleri* (Awakening Councils), dedicated to the promotion of national identity, and mobilization centered around organization and advocacy for education. Naum Faiq and other Syriac Orthodox and Protestant notables established *Intibāh* (Syr. *ʿĪrūthō*, Eng. Awakening) in 1908, first in Diyarbakir, with branches quickly developing throughout the community, such as in Mardin, Harput, Adana, and Urfa.<sup>337</sup> According to an article later written in exile by Faiq, his intended goal was threefold: to unify the various political bodies and subgroups of the Assyrian community, to establish a national sentiment of Assyrians independent of church affiliation, and to establish a series of schools not under direct control of

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> The word denotes awakening into consciousness, here awakening from the *ghaflet* (mental sleep) afflicting the community.

the church.<sup>338</sup> By 1910, Intibāh had grown to 14 branches, including one established in New Jersey in 1909. Membership in these committees, which, in the case of Mardin numbered 300 individuals, included most of the primary advocates of Assyrian Nationalism within the West Syrian community, such as Faiq and Ashur Yusuf, but also included some clergy, such as Matran Abdalnur, serving as bishop of Harput, and future patriarch Ephrem Barsoum. The Ottoman government granted its approval of the organization in 1911 after its submission of a *nizâmnâme* (charter) to the governor of Diyarbakir.<sup>339</sup> In its report to the Interior Ministry, the governor's office states that the "*Intibâh-i İlmi*" is an organization belonging to the Syriac Orthodox millet, indicating its understanding that it served the educational advancement of that group, with no mention of its particular ideological goals.

In direct relations between the Patriarchate and Intibāh, the church demonstrated a growing acceptance of the vulnerabilities created by the contemporary education system, and begrudgingly acknowledged the usefulness of Intibāh to remedy this risk. An early letter from the Patriarchate to the "Committee for the Awakening of Knowledge [*Intibâh-i İlmi*]" notes that the church has not appointed any clerics as direct representatives, and acknowledges that the committee is "downtrodden at the isolation of the Patriarch," but asserts that it is a consequence of the church's internal administration.<sup>340</sup> However, the Patriarchate reported its hope that the Intibāh Committee would see fit to publish a Bible for use in their proposed high schools.

On the same day, the Patriarchate sent a letter to Matran Elias Shakir, the church's willing enforcer of educational boundaries in Diyarbakir and Mardin. The Patriarchal secretary

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<sup>338</sup> Naum Faiq, *Beth Nahrain*, 3 no. 5, New York: 1918.

<sup>339</sup> DH.ID.00126.10.2. 1 Şubat 1326 [14 February, 1911].

<sup>340</sup> "Letter to the Intibah Committee," 27 Mart, 1909, CFMM 877/6v. The Patriarch was conducting international travel throughout his early tenure.

wrote that aghas from Tur Abdin had reported the imprisonment of local clergy to them, and informs the Matran of a formal complaint made against him by the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, two unfortunately common topics in such letters.<sup>341</sup> After this warning, the Patriarchate reports its optimism about the Intibāh Committee, particularly its hope for establishing a printing press. The committee in Mosul received a similar letter, praising its work in collecting money to establish a printing press in Diyarbakir, estimated to cost a total of forty lira.<sup>342</sup> The creation of schools, however, is treated as problematic in their view, drawing on external and foreign influences rather than the clear guidance of the mother church. The Patriarch warns “their knowledge/studies are not those of the fear of God and of pure faith. Do not outstretch your hand out to the expatriates in a manner in opposition to the commands of our church... for if were a dirham to fall into a jar of milk, it would surely spoil it.”<sup>343</sup> What is needed instead, according to the church, are secondary schools under ecclesiastical authority. Writing to the *Suyrani Millet Meclis* [Suryani Communal Council] in Diyarbakir, the church states their interest in the activities of the Intibāh, and their general support, but asks to be kept abreast of its activities and on the status of its *mazbata*, an indication of the church’s apprehensions about being able to control the organization.<sup>344</sup>

The church also sought to assert clergy as assigned mediators between itself and the Intibāh committees, seeing its Assyrian nationalist undertones as a threat. Matran Antun Abdulnur, then in Mosul, received a warning about Intibāh activities. As will be discussed in

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> “Letter to the Intibah Committee in Mosul,” 3 Nisan, 1909, CFMM 877/7r.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> “Letter to the Suryani Millet Meclis of Diyarbakir,” 18 Nisan, 1909, CFMM 877/8v. The church had by this point internalized the government’s use of *mazbatas* as formal declarations of allegiance.

Chapter 3, Abdunur was highly involved in contemporary Assyrian Nationalist periodicals, contributing articles to *Kawkab Madnahā* and *Murşid Athuriyon*, and was repeatedly chastised by the Patriarchate for these efforts and for his association with Ashur Yusuf.<sup>345</sup> Responding to an unspecified complaint from the Matran that had eventually made its way to Istanbul, and then to the Patriarch's ear, this letter reminds him that "we now do not block you from anything [that is] due to you," and reminds him that his status and privileges can easily be removed. After warning him of the efforts of the "hypocrite" Hanna Barsoum, who "curses the community with his actions," he is then told to keep the church informed of the Intibāh's status and activities.

In Diyarbakir, the Patriarchate informed Matran Elias Shakir of its elation at the Intibāh's efforts to establish a printing press, stating that is highly important for presses to be maintained and its willingness to assist, having received word from a priest in Beirut on his efforts to secure one from London.<sup>346</sup> In its communication with community leadership in Diyarbakir, the Patriarchate self-congratulatorily mentions meeting with King Edward and the receipt of a medal, thus reminding them of the Patriarchate's esteemed status. It claims that some members of the Intibāh Committee are unwilling to submit their "minor *mazbata*," reflecting the Patriarchate's continued suspicion of the organization and requests clarification be sent to Egypt to coincide with the Patriarch's travels therein.

As Intibāh's activities gradually took greater hold among the community the Patriarchate continued to seek influence in its educational activities, with particular concern for its work in Tur Abdin. The Patriarchate sometimes adopted a softer tone, reminding itself of Intibāh's usefulness for satisfying the community's demands, but, in one 1910 letter asks for the

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<sup>345</sup> "Letter to Matran Abdunur," 19 Nisan [April], 1909, CFMM 877/27v. The letter begins by noting that Abdunur had attempted communication with the Patriarch in India.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 10r, 19 Ayar [May] 1909.

publication and inclusion of prayer books within Intibāh's activities.<sup>347</sup> To continue such reassurances, and remind the Intibāh of the church's importance, the Patriarchate wrote a letter in 1911 to the Mardin Intibāh branch with such language. Stating "we received your requests for the improvement of some of the clergy, and the lasting establishment of schools" the Patriarchate promises to follow through, and their commitment to this, declaring "we will depart from this land only after Judgement Day."<sup>348</sup>

### ***Intibah's Ideological Position***

A letter from the "Intibāh Committee of Diyarbakir" to the Suryani Millet Meclis, penned by Naum Faiq, outlines the debates over nomenclature, future, and communal identity central to Intibāh's activities.<sup>349</sup> Placed in the context of the Second Constitutional Era and its spirit of "freedom of equality and brotherhood to the whole of the different peoples and nations (*millet*)" of the Empire, Faiq advocates for the same zeal to be applied to schools, the printing press, language promotion, and "teaching the ancient history of the Suryani and the history of our race."<sup>350</sup> The letter announces the creation of the Diyarbakir branch, the organization's first, as September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1908, with its primary purpose being the creation of a new school to "clear the community from the dangers of ignorance and carelessness." The teaching faculty of this school are to be taken from members of the Syriac Orthodox community, "newly trained" in modern subjects, and likely all products of the Protestant missionary education system. The core problem

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<sup>347</sup> "Letter to the Intibah Committee in Mardin," 25 Kanun al-Awwal [December] 1910, CFMM 877/16r.

<sup>348</sup> "Letter to the Intibah Committee in Mardin," 14 Shubat [February] 1911, CFMM 877/35v.

<sup>349</sup> "Copy of a Letter That Was Delivered by the Intibah Committee in Diyarbakir to the Members of the Suryani Millet Meclis in the City of Harput," 19 Teshrin-i Evvel 1324 (1 November 1908).

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

facing the community, according to Faiq, is ignorance of both ancient history and contemporary sciences, which should form the basis of communal education, along with overreliance on the church to solve the Suryani's problems.

While other societies have constructed schools and universities, printing presses, and are literate in their nations' languages, the Suryani "have slept in the tyranny of ignorance, and the pitch blackness of carelessness."<sup>351</sup> This situation is exacerbated by even the community's nomenclature. The official name of the Syriac Orthodox Church's community, in the eyes of the government and its internal administration, was the "Suryani Qadim" or "Ancient Suryani," or "Syriac Orthodox" with which Faiq takes issue. He writes to his co-nationalists:

If we take the name of "Syriac Orthodox," we are passing through our time with a worn-out name, as if it has no destiny at all within these new conditions and the shifts occurring within the world. We are as such eradicating both our future and the future of our nation's children.<sup>352</sup>

The problem, he believed, was rooted within the millet system's synecdoche in which the church hierarchy, which pursues its own often selfish interests, is the only means through which they are expected to operate. He writes, "What are we waiting for... our Patriarch? Our bishops? Our priests? Begone... they do not heal the nation's wounds, rather, they take its money and rob it... they do no other work but to look out for their own personal benefit."<sup>353</sup> Rather than "fastening a rope to the religious fathers" the community should put their faith in the Intibāh to revitalize the nation.

The nationalist body of the community remained frustrated by the church's inadequate efforts in the following years. By 1913, both the Intibāh Committee and the Syriac Orthodox

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

Millet Meclis had become more openly impatient with the lack of meaningful educational advancement. This is evidenced, both in the publicly critical language found in *Murshid Athuriyon*, but also in a private letter sent to Patriarch Abdullah in December, 1913. In it the *Intibah* Central Committee, signatories alongside the Millet Meclis, tell the Patriarch that they are no longer able to “hold back from that which we must say,” which, although not in vitriolic language, reminds the Patriarch that the well-being of the community, and guiding it through these necessary changes, are ultimately the Patriarch’s responsibilities.<sup>354</sup> For, as they warn him, “if the community is to continue upon this same path, then it is inevitable... that we would relinquish ourselves entirely.”<sup>355</sup> This reform, like elsewhere, it presented as a reinvigoration of the community and reestablishing its past educational prowess. However, the threat embedded within this letter is a willingness to detach the advancement of the community from the guidance of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate.

### **Kurdish Nationalism and Education**

Education advocates within the Kurdish nationalist movement oriented their discourses around similar language, but, in the case of those in exile, took a far more confrontational tone within their Kurdish-language writings. As discussed in Chapter 1, Kurdish-language journalism emerged in 1898 with the publication of *Kurdistan*, a full ten years prior to comparable Assyrian publications produced within the Ottoman Empire. In this journal, the journal’s editors, two exiled members of the Bedirxan dynasty, immediately approach the issue of education both in abstract terms of national revival, but, unlike their Assyrian counterparts as addressing an

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<sup>354</sup> “Letter to Patriarch Abdullah from the Intibah Committee and Suryani Millet Meclis,” December, 1913, MPA-K05-24/48-003.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*

immediate military need. The journal *Kurdistan* (1898-1902) opening article, written in Kurdish, immediately jumps into discussion of the religious and nationalist obligation to promote education. In it, editor Miqdad Midhat Bedirxan begins by thanking God who “created us Muslims, and gave us knowledge and acumen.”<sup>356</sup> The Muslim world, he says, is awaking by the creation of schools, libraries, and journals. However, although the Kurds although a “nation [qewm] great in love of God and charity... with right and strong religion, and ancient,” they are in their current state “neither educated nor wealthy.”<sup>357</sup> With this admonishment, he then introduces a central theme related to education: the existential threat posed by Russia, stating that with their current ignorance “whatever happens in the world, about their neighbor Russia [Moscow], what it will do, they do not know.”<sup>358</sup> The journal’s purpose, he states, is to remedy these shortcomings found among the Kurds, by discussing “the value of science and knowledge” in Kurdish, and to report news of the world such as “whenever there is a conflict, whatever the great nations do, how they fight, how they trade.”<sup>359</sup> Education is then placed in a context of statecraft and defense, a topic to which the journal repeatedly returns, with the identity-building aspects initially treated as a secondary concern.

Resistance to the threat of Russia is also presented as a religious obligation, reflecting the underlying religious aspect of this initial wave of Kurdish nationalism. Declaring that his readers are obligated to “fight in the path of God, and fight the enemies of religion,” he reminds them that “the enemy of your religion is your neighbor Russia” who is forcibly converting Muslims as

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<sup>356</sup> Miqdad Midhat Bedirxan, “B-ism Allah al-rahmān al-rahīm,” *Kurdistan*, 1 no. 1, (Cairo), 9 Nisan 1314 [21 April, 1898], 1.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 1

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 2

it expands, and that it ultimately aims to control Kurdistan.<sup>360</sup> If the Kurds were to be “educated, prosperous in trade and production, and wealthy” then Russia would pose little threat in the end.<sup>361</sup> However, if the Kurds “are solely shepherds and farmers, in a short time Kurdistan will be ruined.” The Kurds’ generosity and bravery too will be of little use according to the Miqdad Bedirxan. Although the Kurds possess some weapons, “without schools a man cannot produce, nor put them to use.” He offers the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) as an example of what the Kurds might achieve. The Japanese were able to defeat a Chinese force ten times their size through industrialization and education which had enabled them to produce, trade for and train in use of modern weapons, something to be emulated by Kurds.<sup>362</sup> Elsewhere, the victory of the United States over Spain is presented as another example of the inherent link between education and military power.<sup>363</sup>

The journal’s first article also introduces the theme of responsibility for national awakening, placing it firmly in the hands of the religious and socio-political elite. Embedded within this discourse is an underlying critique by the Bedirxan brothers, who considered themselves the rightful inheritors of the mantle of Kurdish leadership, and thus address the community broadly despite significant sub-divisions. Invoking the hadith “the ulema are the inheritors of the prophets,” the author exhorts the ulema to seek this knowledge, and for the mîrs and aghas of Kurdish society to support a broad educational effort, chastising them by saying “oh mîrs and brothers, until now who has given heed to this command of the Prophet... why do you

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>363</sup> “Fadhiyet al-Ilm” *Kurdistan*, 1 no. 4, 21 Mayis 1314 [2 June, 1898], 2.

not read these hadiths to the mirs and aghas, why do you not read Arabic newspapers to know what is happening in the world?”<sup>364</sup>

This discourse places the interests of Kurdish elite at odds with their religious obligations and duties to their nation that must benefit those beyond tribal elite. The use of the *Mekteb-I Aşiret-I Humayun*, the tribal schools attended by scions of pro-government leaders, exemplifies this in the eyes of these author, who laments that only “children of the tribes,” meaning of tribal leaders, attend, and later become integrated into the state bureaucratic apparatus. Chiding the elite that allow this, he warns “Oh mirs and aghas, the sins of your children are upon your necks,” and that opening a series of village schools would put them back on the “path of God.”<sup>365</sup> This argument is repeated in editorial pieces in subsequent volumes, in which additional hadith are added connecting religious obligation to provide education with religious duty to love your homeland.<sup>366</sup> In fact, according to him, God will “ask [them] about the destitution and ruin of the Kurmanc,” for the same thread of ignorance in which Kurds are ignorant of their own language and history, they are additionally ignorant of religious obligations a sin “which will be upon all of our necks.”<sup>367</sup>

This messaging quickly resonated with *Kurdistan*’s readers. In the third issue of the journal a reader from Damascus stated his elation at seeing its first issue, which was consumed and appreciated by his community. Stating that the “advice and information was pleasant to our ears,” and he and his fellow readers felt motivated to help contribute to “skilled education, to save [Kurds] from working as porters,” promising that they “will gather money together and

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>366</sup> Miqdad Midhat Bedirxan, “B-ism Allah al-raḥmān al-raḥīm,” *Kurdistan*, 1 no. 2, 23 Nisan 1314, 1.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

make a school for our children.”<sup>368</sup> This focus on education as a direct means of alleviating material conditions, rather than primarily as a tool for identity formation, marks some contrast with both Assyrian nationalist language on education, and later changes within Kurdish nationalism’s approach to the same issue.

Whereas Assyrian nationalists of the Syriac Orthodox community discussed Protestant schools as their rival, and the Patriarchate as the source from where reform can emerge, Kurdish nationalists focused their frustration directly at the state. There still was, however, overlap between Kurdish and Assyrian discourses on nation and education in criticism of missionary schools. An article in the journal *Kurdistan* discusses Jesuits as representing unregulated control of educational institutions, but not necessarily as a rival that will draw in Kurdish students en masse. According to Abdurrahman Bedirxan, their existence points to a deeper problem: that their very continued operation within the empire demonstrates its weakness and ineptitude.<sup>369</sup>

Much of this criticism of the state argues that the Abdülhamid regime was failing in its mutual obligations between state and citizen, and that Kurds, who satisfied their military duties, were being denied any state investment in local educational institution. For the authors of *Kurdistan*, this represented either the state’s unwillingness to fulfil its mutual obligations or its policies to keep Kurdish communities in a weakened political position. This topic is first introduced embedded within an article by Abdurrahman Bedirxan criticizing Sultan Abdülhamid’s inner circle is explicit discussion of the unequal status of Kurds in the Ottoman Empire, treated the lowest among its Muslim communities. He builds upon this frustration to lament how other ethnic groups of the empire are writing books in their mother tongues, but that

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<sup>368</sup> N.H., “Teqrîz Ji Şamê Hatiye,” *Kurdistan*, 1 no. 3, 7 Mayis 1314 [19 May, 1898]: 3-4.

<sup>369</sup> Miqdad Midhat Bedirxan, “Kurdistanê de Esasa Nifaqê”, 4 no. 30, 1 Mart 1318 [14 March, 1902]: 2-4.

the state has offered no means to cultivate this among Kurds. It is the responsibility of leaders, he contends in a follow-up article, to write directly to the Sultan and request the construction of schools and medreses in their villages, and if the Sultan and his advisors fail to listen, he would appoint a representative from his family to raise it with him directly.<sup>370</sup>

This willingness to apply direct pressure, or even threaten rebellion is discussed as a means others have had to resort to for achieving these goals. The Albanians, he avers, “were, like you, without schools and medreses. They came to their senses and wrote to the Sultan, who opened schools and medreses for them, and they sent their children to them.”<sup>371</sup> The means of convincing the government was from appeal to religious obligation, or Muslim brotherhood, but rather directly through threats. For, “the government did not listen to them, and when the Albanians saw nothing would come of it... they wrote to the Sultan saying that if he did not help them, “however many qaymaqams, muteserrifs, and other men you send here, we will drive them from our homeland, and, if they do not leave, we will kill them,” a threat he claims caused necessary fear.<sup>372</sup> Although this strategy could be impeded by Abdülhamid’s inner circle, as “those around the Sultan do not love the Kurds,” he encourages his readers that they may still have some luck, but that “you must work diligently, until you can develop your own homeland.”

The idea of unfair treatment within the empire resonated with some of the journal’s audience. Mullah Salih Cizîrî, one of the journal’s readers, offers his own explanation for this marginal status in a letter sent to the journal. This issue stems from the empire’s reliance on state-loyal Kurds as its means of controlling the Eastern Provinces. The mullah explains that the

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<sup>370</sup> “al-Muminun Ikhwatan,” *Kurdistan* 1 no. 7, 23 Teşrin-i Evvel 1314 [4 November, 1898].

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

context for understanding the Kurds' mistreatment by the government is rooted in the state's manipulation of Kurds as their agents of oppression against Armenians. According to him "we know their aim, it is that we should remain always in a state of barbarity, that we should fight against all Armenians." This effort, encouraged by the Sultan's "mitirb" advisors, he believes, necessitates that the government not allow Kurds to become educated, lest they advance and unify and become less pliable to the government's unjust demands.<sup>373</sup>

Abdurrahman Bedirxan, in another discussion on the topic of the ways in which Kurds are treated as barbaric, draws the national epic *Mem û Zîn* to strengthen his argument, and thus employing what is, perhaps from the figure of Salah al-Din, the most important symbol of the early Kurdish nationalist movement. He quotes poet Ehmedî Xanî, who himself understood his 17<sup>th</sup>-century literary version of *Mem û Zîn* as a unique written production in Kurdish. "Enwaî milel xwedan kitêb in; Kurmanc tenê di bêhesêb in" ("All sorts of nations/peoples possess books; the Kurds alone are of no account").<sup>374</sup> The quotation reinforces the idea that the Kurds have long failed to realize the level of achievement that should be due to them, and that the challenges facing the current Kurdish nationalist struggle are a continuation of the same as those facing the Kurdish "nation" of Ehmedî Xanî two hundred years previously.

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<sup>373</sup> The journal's editors often refer to the Sultan's advisors with this term, whose literal Arabic meaning is musician, but in this context is used as a derogatory term for the Romani. Mela Salih Cizîrî, "A Letter from a Kurdish Member of the Ulema from Mardin." *Kurdistan*, 2 no. 14, 7 Nisan 1315 [18 April, 1899].

<sup>374</sup> Bedirxan omits the preceding two lines of the stanza, which translate to "So that the people will not have said that the Kurds; are ignorant and without origin and foundation." Miqdad Midhat Bedirxan, *Kurdistan*, 1 no. 6, 28 Eylûl 1314 [10 October, 1898], 3. Ehmedî Xanî's 1692 *Mem û Zîn* was written at a time in which court poets in Kurdistan did in fact compose in their own language. However, efforts by Ehmedî Xanî and others such as Melayê Cizîrî to create written, literary Kurdish were a response to the cultural pressure of Ottoman Turkish in elite society. Cf., Martin van Bruinessen, "Ehmede Xanî's Mem û Zîn and Its Role in the Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism," in Abbas Vali, (ed.), *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2003): 40-57. The paucity of Kurdish poetry lamented by Bedirxan reflects attitudes such as that of Alexandre Jaba in the mid-19th century who recorded only eight authors who had written in Kurdish before the 19th century, a number that has greatly expanded through subsequent research. Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, 22.

The interpretation of Ehmedî Xanî's literary version of *Mem û Zîn* as a nationalist epic represents, of course, a claim of the idea of nationhood existing at the time of its creation. As explored by Abbas Vali, Kurdish nationalist historians asserting a primordialist Kurdish nation drew upon Xanî to assert two points: "that the idea of Kurdish nationalism is "indigenous," having existed since the early seventeenth century" and that the movement's aims were to establish a "national state" as opposed to Turkish and Persian pre-modern territorial states, across which the Kurdish nation was divided.<sup>375</sup> Xanî's written version of the epic poem was also printed in serial form throughout *Kurdistan*'s run. Likewise, the esteemed Kurdish poet Hacî Qadirî Koyî (d. 1897), receives a veneration in the journal's third issue that connects him to Ehmedî Xanî's "nationalist" vision. His praise includes appreciation for his "writing many odes and poems in Kurmanji concerning education" even though his native dialect was Sorani, and the eulogy includes a poem written by Koyî as an appendix to his own edition of *Mem û Zîn*. This eulogy of Hacî Qadirî Koyî enables *Kurdistan* to connect a contemporary, presented as a nationalist poet, as building upon on a centuries-old nationalist project to which the nation's greatest intellects had contributed, but one that is neglected by the members of the nation.<sup>376</sup>

### **Said Nursi, Education, and the Limits of Religious Discourse**

Just as Assyrian figures Naum Faiq and Ashur Yusif were willing to directly confront the obstacles to educational reform, Said Nursî, then referred to as Said Kurdî, similarly worked to demand educational reforms from the authority preventing the awakening of his community. The extent to which he can be truly considered a Kurdish nationalist at any point of his life has been a

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<sup>375</sup> Abbas Vali, "Genealogies of the Kurds: Constructions of Nation and National Identity in Kurdish Historical Writing," in Vali, Abbas (2003): 79.

<sup>376</sup> "Alimek ji Sora Hebî", *Kurdistan*, 1 no. 3, 7 Mayis 1314 [19 May, 1898], 3.

subject for debate due to his own later attempts to distance himself from the early movement. In a 1952 issue of *Bergeh*, Said Nursi wrote, “Long ago they used to call me Said Kurdi. I am not a Kurdist (Ben Kürtçü değilim), an Islamist cannot be a nationalist. There is no distinction between Turk and Kurd.”<sup>377</sup> He elsewhere recounted the non-militaristic means he wished to achieve national advancement, and unwillingness to support military action against the Ottoman regime. Speaking of his refusal to support the 1914 Bitlis Rebellion, Said Nursî recounted that various religious zealots came to him: “Some among the commanders are acting as atheists, let us join up and rise up against them.”<sup>378</sup> He reports that he declared his lack of support, saying that while there are corrupt officers, it was not the army’s fault, and that “there are perhaps one hundred thousand saints (*evliya*)” among them, against whom he would not “raise up his sword.”<sup>379</sup> These accounts portray him in his own words as primarily an Islamist, but they also imply that his supposedly nationalist works were simply in broader service of the Ottoman Empire. While this portrayal does reflect a later shift in Said Nursi’s focus, it obscures his deep involvement in the main organizations of the early Kurdish nationalist movement and influence on its discourse, both before and after the First World War. However, like the non-separatist Assyrian nationalists, his emphasis on institutional autonomy and communal revival can still be understood as nationalist in nature.

In the immediate post-war period, Said Nursî frequented the publishing house of the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan (KTC), an organization founded in 1917 to promote Kurdish nationalism. Its cadre formed the representative body who explored potential Kurdish

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<sup>377</sup> Malmîsanij, *Said-i Nursi ve Kürt Sorunu* (Uppsala: Doz, 1991), 17.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*

independence backed by European powers. KTC member Arif Bey recounted a conversation with his fellow KTC member Mevlanzade Rifat after the armistice over how to approach the partitioning of Ottoman territory. Mevlanzade Rifat suggested taking the example of the newly founded Armenia to push for an independent Kurdistan, contending that while he was not “a traitor to the nation,” meaning the Ottoman Empire, he recognized the empire’s partitioning as an inevitability. He sought Said Nursî’s guidance for the appropriate path forward.<sup>380</sup> His response, in the form of a letter which Arif Bey held until its theft in 1926, argued that the best course forward was revival of the Ottoman Empire, rather than sectarian fragmentation.<sup>381</sup> Another response by Said Nursî to Abdülkadir, head of the KTC, reportedly affirmed that the Turkish nation now carries the banner of Islam, and thus is deserving of the rallied support of all Muslims, whom he states are more valuable than those “atheistic” Kurds who support national separatism.<sup>382</sup> Muhammad, son of the KTC head Abdülkadir, would himself testify to Nursî’s anti-separatist views at his own *Istiklâl Mahkemesi* (Independence Tribunal) trial in 1925.

Although Said Nursi’s later work assigns a singular mission and ideology throughout his life, his early efforts deeply influenced the early Kurdish nationalist movement’s ideology. Malmîsanij periodizes Said Nursi’s life in three phases: early life through 1926, from 1926-1949, and from 1949 until his death. In this earliest phase, his attitude manifested in contributions to contemporary journals and Kurdish nationalist organizations, such as his 1909 statement that “For fifteen years I have thought about this question [what is necessary for Kurds], and have found no answers to guarantee Kurdistan’s future aside from two points,” being national unity,

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 40.

and commitment to religious and technical education.<sup>383</sup> However, his commitment to the empire as a whole is reflected in his military service during the First World War, where, on the Caucasian Front, he was captured by the Russians, later escaping and returning to the Ottoman Empire in 1918.<sup>384</sup> This pre-1926 period, what Said later referred to as the “old Said,” ended first with disillusionment caused by the new secular Turkish Republic, and false accusations of his participation in the Sheikh Said Rebellion, which led to his exile in 1925. The second, “new Said,” was his life in exile, writing the *Risale-I Nûr*, his imprisonment in 1943, and rehabilitation following the 1950 election of the Demokrat Parti. The third phase of his life, the decade following rehabilitation, was marked by a growing audience for his religious teachings. His reflections during these later phases of his early life also asserted a purely religious focus to his work, rather than national advancement. This sentiment is reflected in a 1952 reflection discussing his work upon escape and return to the Ottoman Empire, asserting that in 1918 “I was occupied by nothing but providing lessons to my students on faith and the Qur`an... we had no purpose, no goal, other than saving our faith.”<sup>385</sup>

Said Nursi’s work prior to the war included the Kurdish nationalist movement’s most brazen efforts to achieve educational advancement, culminating in the attempt at creating the *Zehra* school in Bitlis. To achieve this, Said met with Sultan Mehmed, presenting himself not only as an individual advocate for education reform or of the Istanbul-based Kurdish elite, but as a representative of the desires of notables in the empire’s Kurdish hinterlands. According to Said,

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<sup>383</sup> Garo Sasuni, *Kürt Ulusal Haraketleri ve 15. YY’ Dan Günümüze Kadar Ermeni Kürt İlişkileri* trans. Zartaryan, Bedros and Memo Yetkin (Istanbul; Med Yayınevi, 1992), 152

<sup>384</sup> The biography penned by his nephew, Abdurrahman Nursî, also emphasizes that while much of his task was defending against Armenian forces, he was emphatic that none under his command would harm women or children. Ebdurahman Norsî, *Jiyana Mele Seîde Kurdî*, ed. Resûlan, Osman and Zeynelabdîn Zinar (Stockholm; Pencinar, 1996), 81.

<sup>385</sup> Malmîsanij, *Said-i Nursî*, 22.

this meeting was the outcome of a long journey assessing the education needs of Kurdish students, meeting with representatives of various tribes to discuss this topic and gain their support.<sup>386</sup> He presented his request to the sultan as one for “a university by the name of the Zehra Medrese, which would be a sister to Al-Azhar University, to be located in Bitlis, the heart of Kurdistan, and with two additional branches, one in Diyarbakir, and one in Van.”<sup>387</sup> In explaining the necessary conditions for the school’s foundation, Said demonstrated the central importance of Kurdish language education, explaining “Arabic is necessary (*wâjib*), Kurdish is lawful (*jàiz*), and Turkish is needed (*ihdiyâj*),” and that religious education will be taught alongside sciences, reflecting the central importance of Islam within Kurdish communal boundaries.<sup>388</sup>

The newfound freedoms of the Second Constitutional Era’s early stages offered Said Nursi a forum to express his goals and to reflect on the risk in which he placed himself by seeking change from the Abdülhamid regime. Said Nursi was deeply involved with the *Kürd Teaviin ve Terakkî Cemiyeti* (Society for Kurdish Cooperation and Advancement/KTTC) and its 1908 journal, the *Kürd Teaviin ve Terakkî Gazetesi* (KTTG). Said Nursi, who was at that time referred to as Said Kurdî, used the organization’s journal to communicate his well-developed, complex thoughts on the state of Kurdish society and the path for national reform. His views on national identity and education are outlined in a series of articles in which he reflects on his experiences as an advocate for Kurdish intellectual development under the Abdülhamid regime. The first of his entries, “What Do the Kurds Need?” explains how over fifteen years of work and

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 116.

reflection, Said Kurdî has reached two main conclusions as to “what can guarantee Kurdistan’s future:” the promotion of national unity, and the reconfiguration of a tribal-like society mobilized towards a hybrid of modernizing and religious aspirations.<sup>389</sup> “Those who are not soldiers in the tribes,” he believed, “should be made national soldiers like them,” seeing military service as “like an electric beam that creates a bond” between tribes, reconcile their aspirations into a single effort, letting them “produce the light of education and training, and the heating power of the Kurds.”<sup>390</sup> Despite possessing “four hundred thousand heroes and warriors,” the Kurds have long been manipulated into tribal infighting, which has kept them in a state of “nomadism and factionalism (‘*asabalık*.’” This internecine habit perpetuated the state of apprehensiveness towards any change in the status quo as a potential undermining of tribes’ control or authority. This non-nationalist thinking has, he writes, in turn given rise to four inaccurate views that are preventing national advancement.<sup>391</sup> These are: “Because these [educational techniques and curricula] have come from foreigners,” “Because there are aspects of education which ‘ordinary people, with superficial thought’ believe to be in opposition to Islam,” “Because they do not resemble the educational system of the medrese ‘which are known by Kurds to be the source of every virtue,’” and “because it has caused a crisis of faith in some students.”<sup>392</sup> Addressing these notables fears and opening the path to meaningful educational reform therefore required operating through an institution central to Kurdish society, the tribe.

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<sup>389</sup> Said-i Kurdî, “What Do the Kurds Need? [*Kurdler Neye Muhtac?*],” *KTTG*, 1 no. 2, 29 Teşrin-i Sani, 1324 [12 December, 1908], 13.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*

Working through the tribes and tribal regiments would enable efforts to teach throughout rural Kurdistan, and offer an official, government-sanctioned means to organize reform. In this context, Said Kurdî treats regular, government military service itself as a sort of advancement, in which the Kurds' virtues of bravery would continue to gather prestige for Kurdish society. It is maintenance of these "diamonds" of Kurdish qualities, including religious devotion, that are promoted as the bedrock of any meaningful advancement. In his other entries in the journal on education reform, Said Kurdî focused his attention on how to maintain this balance between religion and successful education reform. In two articles, he narrated his views of religion and education via discussions he claimed to have had while committed to a mental hospital, which occurred as a result of questioning Sultan Abdülhamid during their meeting. These two reported discussions include one with a hospital doctor and later with Security Minister Şefik Paşa after his release. In both he relates a confrontational tone, positioning himself as personal advocate for the Kurdish nation, and as learned man capable of recognizing both the intrinsic good of western education, as well as the religious failings of the Abdülhamid regime.

The journal's editors offer Said Kurdî's experiences at the mental hospital (*timarhâne*) with a preface stating that his unjust imprisonment resulted from his efforts to "present a plan to provide education (*ta'lim*) and training (*terbiye*) opportunities that Kurdistan lacked."<sup>393</sup> The narration begins with Said Kurdî declaring to the doctor that he will provide proof of his insanity as the doctor would understand such a category, with all of this evidence couched in his navigating the world as a true, virtuous Kurd. Where such Kurds to be evaluated against the "sensitive, civilized Istanbul scale," he says, most would be sent to an asylum. For, as he states, "what is valid morality in Kurdistan is courage, honor, devotion to religion, and direct speech,"

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<sup>393</sup> "Said-i Kurdî's Recollections from the Mental Asylum," *KTTG*, 1 no. 5, 20 Kanun-i Evvel, 1324 [2 January, 1909], 36.

not the “flattery that is called as courtesy among the civilized.”<sup>394</sup> Furthermore, he claims that his course clothing, which reflect his upbringing in the mountains of Kurdistan and love of his nation, and his genuine religious practice, a contrast to the indifference of Istanbulites, have been deemed as madness as they embody an authenticity absent in the ruling elite. As he reportedly stated, “if flattery, fawning, begging like a cat, and sacrificing public interest for self-interest are counted as the necessities of reason, I resign from such a mind.”<sup>395</sup> In his debate with the doctor over how to make manifest such true convictions, Said Kurdî discusses questions of pedagogy and religious revival. The medreses of Istanbul and their students, he believed, were locked within a system in which answers to any relevant concern are searched only in the Quran and religious text, without any accompanying discussion or debate, causing a lack of enthusiasm by students and an inability for them to see the benefits of integrating outside knowledge systems. This, in turn, left Istanbul’s medrese students more interested in food and entertainment than in theology.<sup>396</sup> Without a curriculum that develops students beyond rote memorization and unquestioned authority, education cannot be a source of rejuvenation for the Kurdish nation nor for broader Ottoman society.

Said Kurdî believed that coordination between the medrese system and the newly emerging secular schools would correct this problem, and offered a detailed course of action to the asylum doctor. The medrese system, he proclaimed, reflected the general condition of Islamic thought: “Islam, which constituted true civilization at the time of development, has not developed compared to the present.”<sup>397</sup> The reason for this, he believes, is the underlying tension

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

between three parties within education: the medrese, the tekke, and the modern school. The medreses and Sufi tekkes accuse the schools of “weak belief, due to superficial interpretations,” while the schools view others as “incomplete and unreliable because of their ignorance of new sciences.”<sup>398</sup> The underlying fault within the religious system, which must be corrected, is the development of the belief that *dhikr* has moved beyond worship of God to focus on commemoration of ordinary people, who themselves incorrectly deem things to be halal, and accuse anything out of their interpretation of religious practice as being *bid‘a* (heretical innovation). A solution would be to train teachers well-versed in both Islamic theology and modern sciences who will not only draw on his position of authority to assuage concerns over *bid‘a*, but will also implement modern pedagogical techniques of debate, inquiry, and open discussion. Clarifying, he explained “the religious figure must be both a research scholar to prove his argument, an inquisitive philosopher not to disturb the balance of the *sharī‘a*, and a persuasive rhetorician.”<sup>399</sup> He ended his discussion with praise and understanding of the doctor, but asserts that there is a divide between urbanite society and “a savage, that is, a free Kurd.”<sup>400</sup>

Said Kurdî’s hostility towards the Abdülhamid regime, and his defense as a righteous, reform-minded advocate for the Kurdish nation increases in his discussion with the Security Minister Şefik Paşa after his release from the asylum, an encounter relayed in the journal’s same issue. The conversation began with the minister relaying a message from Sultan Abdülhamid, who offered him a salary of one thousand kurush, later changed to twenty to thirty lira, an offer

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid 38.

he rejected, despite the minister's warning that refusing "would be very dangerous."<sup>401</sup> He claims his response to this threat was, "If I am executed, I will lie within the heart of a nation," and that his motivation is solely for the advancement of his state and community, which a rightly-guided figure does solely as a voluntary endeavor. The minister then clarified Said Kurdî's purpose, probing "your intent is to spread education and teaching in Kurdistan, this was the subject of your meeting with the ministries."<sup>402</sup> He positions his response as both a symbol of Kurdistan "the *meydan* of unlimited freedom," and solidarity with minoritized populations, as at his arrival to Istanbul "he fell into an Armenian's house in Şişli."<sup>403</sup> This is, of course, should as well be understood in the broader criticism of the Abdülhamid regime as not being in accordance with Islam due to its violence against those under its protection, and the use of this discourse at that time within Kurdish nationalism.

A letter submitted to members of parliament and later published in the *KTTG* transforms these views into political language. Showing "poverty to Europe in terms of judgement" by the Ottoman government, Said Kurdî warns, "is a great treason to the religion of Islam and harm to the life of the nation."<sup>404</sup> Asking rhetorically if "Omar, Harun [al-Rashid], [al-]Ma`mun, and the Umayyads of Andalusia developed through weakening their religion," he tells his readers that Islam's great contribution, ignored by tyrants, is its freedom, justice, law, and equality in worship.<sup>405</sup> Instead, "since our period of regression, spreading supra-shariah regulations... has

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<sup>401</sup> Said-i Kurdî, "My Discussion with the Security Minister Şefik Paşa in Detention Following the Mental Asylum During the Period of Tyranny," *KTTG*, 1 no. 5, 20 Kanun-i Evvel, 1324 [2 January, 1909], 38.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>404</sup> "Bediüzzaman Said-i Kurdî's Statement to Representatives," *KTTG*, 1 no. 4, 13 Kanun-i Evvel, 1324 [26 December, 1908], 28.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*

been its biggest cause.”<sup>406</sup> This process was aided by sycophants interpreting Islam as they pleased for their own advantage, those “ignorant religious friends... who perceive some parables as true... and tell them to others,” and, as elsewhere stated, those who reject the benefits of outside influences for unfounded fear of sinfulness. The once great Ottoman society, which “united Turan, the Aryan, and Semite... and set a barrier against disbelief, which is the destroyer of civilization” can be revived through acknowledgement of the beneficial aspects of modern science and education.<sup>407</sup> The rebirth of the empire will require scholars of the *sharī‘a* who are well trained enough to accurately determine what is permissible, and to separate speculation and superstition from the ways in which religious elite perceive these new elements. This more systematic approach will lead to adherence to true Islamic values, which will prevent the rise of another abusive tyrant, and help lead the Ottoman state towards advancement.

His audience is not intended as the broad Ottoman public, but is focused specifically on the participation of the Kurdish nation within it. The brave men of Kurdistan, he exhorts, maintained their freedom to whatever degree possible during the period of tyranny, and, hinting towards hope for reconciliation of Kurds, he writes “it is a necessity... of humanity to forgive the excess and deficiency of one who has shown these ardent feelings.”<sup>408</sup> For, he says, speaking as a Kurd, “our Kurds learned from the rich ore mines of battle,” and despite this bravery “they fear new education and training” for roughly the same four reasons presented elsewhere in his writings.<sup>409</sup> Said Kurdî enumerates these as: the believe that some stories and fables have been interpreted as true Islam and cause resistance to things seen as “*bid‘a*,” that “technical scholars”

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

fall “into the swamp of delusions and doubts” and reject their faith; that the medrese system must regain its status as meaningful education; and that there is rejected of “techniques that apparently come from foreigners.”<sup>410</sup> His recommendation to the Kurdish members of parliament is, as elsewhere, to have reform navigate through the Hamidiye Regiments and tribal hierarchies, apparently to channel their virtues of valor into zeal for reform. It is they who through military service can “caress their valor, teach the necessary techniques of civilization along with the religious sciences according to the abilities of Kurdish scholars under the name of the medrese.”<sup>411</sup> This will not only “resurrect the rotten medreses in Kurdistan,” but as well pull students away from competing outlets for education, assumedly schools that undermine their religious belief, likely meaning from missionary or state schools.

### ***Kürd Teavun ve Terakki Cemiyetleri***

Similar to the Assyrian *Intibah Cemiyetleri* of the Syriac Orthodox community, Kurdish nationalist groups established their own organization in the wave of new political freedoms stemming from the changes of 1908. *Kürd Teavün ve Terakkî Cemiyetleri* (Societies for the Assistance and Advancement of Kurds; hereafter *KTTC*). The *KTTC*, one of multiple Kurdish aid societies to emerge in 1908, represented a core of Kurdish intellectuals, and a broader web of Kurdish notables throughout the empire.<sup>412</sup> Scholarship has long debated whether the *KTTC* can truly be considered as the first Kurdish political organization.<sup>413</sup> By separating the concepts of Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish separatist nationalism, it is clear that the organization served

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> Malmîsanij, *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Gazetesi*, (Istanbul: Avesta, 1999), 11.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid. 9.

the advancement of an amorphous but solidifying Kurdish nation, albeit primarily in a broader context of being a participatory body of Ottoman society. Thus, in comparison to the Kurdish-language entries of the Bedirxan-led journal *Kurdistan*, the *KTTC* did not advocate for preparation towards a likely breakdown of the Ottoman order. Additionally, the journal and its backing organization must be understood in the brief optimism of the 1908 Second Constitutional Era.

The *KTTC*, also referred to as the “Kürt Kulübü” or “Kürt Teavün Kulübü,” was by 1908 headed by Sheikh Ubeydullah’s son, Abdülkadir. Although it officially announced its activities in 1908 with a statement by the Diyarbakir branch against Crete’s declaration of unity with Greece, it had developed from efforts in various cities throughout the Eastern Provinces.<sup>414</sup> It first emerged as one of multiple organizations centered around confrontation with the Abdülhamid regime, some of which organized tax protests, or other, smaller organizations involved in events such as armed uprisings in Bitlis and Van in 1907. The Istanbul branch of the *KTCC*, the organization’s first, was quickly established in 1908 largely by individuals returning to the capital from exile. As discussed by Malmîsanij, Abdülkadir’s central role reflected his growing symbolic importance among Kurdish residents of Istanbul. Returning from exile in Medina in 1908, his residence quickly became a focal point of the local community, reflected by a demonstration march for constitutional reform that began outside of Abdülkadir’s home.

The organization’s official founding was on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1908, with a meeting house established in Istanbul’s Vezneciler district.<sup>415</sup> In its inaugural meeting, leaders of the organization characterized its members as all “working in support of the brotherhood and

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 17.

partnership of all of the various peoples of the empire.”<sup>416</sup> In a later speech, Muş delegate Müftüzade added that the organization was especially committed towards strengthening bonds between Kurdish and Armenian communities, a theme often repeated by its members, and one that enabled distancing from the tribal leaders of the Hamidiye Cavalry. The KTTC also took active measures for economic programs to benefit Kurdish society, such as initial steps to create a banking service and foster commercial investment in Bitlis.<sup>417</sup> Its central organization goal, however, was to create networks of local branches throughout Kurdish regions of the empire, each possessing *sancak* and *kaza*-level subcommittees, with the organization and its journal serving to unify disparate Kurdish communities into a single national advancement effort. The organization did manage to quickly establish branches in Bitlis, Muş, Diyarbakir, Mosul, Erzurum, Erzurum’s Hınıs sancak, as well as one in Baghdad, with significant local differences regarding both sheer membership numbers as well as the class makeup of its participants.<sup>418</sup>

The KTTC Bitlis branch represented the single largest local KTTC office within Kurdistan, and was significantly larger organization than its local Armenian or CUP co-reformists, numbering 680 members, a number which has led to assumptions that it was involved in the 1914 Bitlis uprising, and thus manifested its aims into Kurdish rebellion.<sup>419</sup> Although this assumption is unproven, the organizational efforts in Bitlis, such as opening a factory, and the collection of ten thousand lira for the branch indicates participation beyond that of tribal leaders. Furthermore, as discussed by Lazarev, it even organized a paramilitary security organization to

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 46.

patrol the region.<sup>420</sup> As explored by Celîlê Celîl's research, the Bitlis branch's closing was a part of the collapse of the brief pluralism of the Second Constitutional Period.<sup>421</sup> The Bitlis branch of the CUP had sought to convince wealthy Kurds to switch allegiance to their own organization but had largely failed to do so. However, after the 31 March Incident in 1909, the CUP increasingly pressured KTTC members to abandon their organization, pressuring or convincing its wealthiest supporters to join, and forcing the KTTC Bitlis branch's closure in May of the same year.

The ease of the organization's fragmentation was due to competing aims and interests among its members. Garo Sasuni, in his extensive history of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement, places the KTTC in the context of three participating social classes in the movement present in 1908. The first – beys, sheikhs, and aghas – gained little from the reinstatement of the Ottoman Constitution. Instead, as can be considered in the context of the Hamidiye Cavalry, these changes risked the privileges they had gained under the Abdülhamid regime.<sup>422</sup> The second, representing government officials, pushed for the advancement of Kurdish society but as part of a CUP-influenced view of a renewed Ottoman society. The third being intellectuals marginalized or exiled by the regime, such as Sheikh Ubaydullah or Said Kurdî, represented a continued interest in either an independent or self-reliant Kurdish nation, thus continuing the sort of political language expressed in the Kurdish-language entries of the Bedirxan *Kürdistan* journal. In Sasuni's description of the initial elation of the Second Constitutional Period, the discourses of Unionist, Ottoman revivalism removed the impetus driving the core of the Kurdish nationalist

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<sup>420</sup> M. S. Lazarev, *Kypðckuï Bonpoc. (1891-1917)*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1972) in *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>421</sup> Celîlê Celîl, *Jiyana Rewşenbîrî û Siyasî ya Kurdan (Di Dawîya Sedsala 19'a û Destpêka Sedsala 20'a de)* (Uppsala: Weşanên Jîna Nû, 1985), 83.

<sup>422</sup> Garo Sasuni, *Kürt Ulusal Hareketleri ve 15. YY'dan Günümüze Ermeni İlişkileri* (Istanbul: Med Yayınları, 1992), 150.

movement, and is reflected in the “politically weak” language of the KTTC’s journal.<sup>423</sup>

However, by exploring in detail the language used within the journal, it is clear that its authors were engaged in a necessary step of national awakening, which, if not separatist or seeking independence, sought to broadly define the Kurdish nation to account for its existing hierarchies, to develop a sense of national history, and to explore the unique factors that differentiated Kurdish society from neighboring Muslim and non-Muslim societies.

The organization’s journal, *KTTG*, served alongside other newly emerging journals such as *Peyman* and *Şark ve Kürdistan* written with Kurdish audiences in mind. However, *KTTG*’s stronger focus on Kurdish language material reflected attempts to engage a non-Ottoman educated Kurdish literate society. Diyarbakir-based *Peyman*, for example, contained one Kurdish language article, itself a translation into Kurmanji of a statement celebrating the announcement of constitutional reform.<sup>424</sup> It is necessary to view the journal as engaged in a process of seeking the common bonds between a reified Kurdish nation, speaking often of essential Kurdish qualities, and of Kurdish history, society, and culture. The journal’s opening pages speak of the Kurdish people as those who “sought talent in valor, fame in steadfastness and endurance, and pride in aggression” within the Ottoman system, but in this new potential flourishing are left unprepared, “blindfolded and tongue-tied, living in tents in the countryside, destined to be robbed.”<sup>425</sup> The journal, and the KTTC, saw their mission as pushing Kurdish notables towards advancing their community to a status befitting their importance within the Ottoman Empire. Specifically, the KTTC announced to its readers that the purpose is “for the noble Kurdish

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>424</sup> Of particular interest is that the Kurdish translation of the article characterizes the Abdülhamid regime’s policy using the Mongol loanword “qamçûr,” a term often used to refer to unjust taxes levied by the government. “İmtiyâzât,” *Peyman*, 1 no. 12, 31 Ağustos 1325 [13 September, 1909], 3.

<sup>425</sup> *KTTG*, 1 no. 1, 22 Teshrin-i Sani, 1324 [5 December, 1908], 1.

people to develop according to modern needs through education, and, in accordance with the Constitution,” to “ensure civilized reconciling with other fellow citizens, particularly the Armenians.”<sup>426</sup> Further expanded within an “Open Statement” included with the first issue, and thus the first thing encountered by the reader, is an announcement that the “national committee” has declared an “economic war” against Austria in the form of “the most striking weapon,” an organized boycott of Austrian goods.<sup>427</sup> This refers to the efforts of Kurdish porters, operating in Istanbul, who organized a boycott against transportation of imports from or exports to Austria-Hungary. Said Kurdî, in the journal’s first Kurdish article, after speaking of the “three jewels of the Kurds” (Islam, humanity, nation) Lamented the same “forty thousand porters in Istanbul” as a sign of his nation’s poverty, and laments theirs and other Kurds’ illiteracy, and presents their status as impoverished migrant laborers as a symptom of the oppression the Kurds have suffered.<sup>428</sup> Such language indicates that the intended audience of the journal’s message of national awakening, and its self-understood role as representatives of the Kurdish community, includes both educated elites and the impoverished Kurdish migrant population of Istanbul.<sup>429</sup> It also provided a demonstration of the impact of Kurdish national mobilization, rallying Istanbul’s disparate Kurdish groups together and to demonstrate the community’s strength and commitment to the Ottoman state.

The organization’s *Beyânname* (formal announcement) further elucidates their aims.

Placing the KTCC within the spirit of reforms, it proclaims that they seek to “protect the

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>427</sup> “Âçık Sözler,” *KTTG*, 1 no. 1, 22 Teshrin-i Sani, 1324 [5 December, 1908], 9. The other notices in this include an apology for the hasty publication of the first issue, and a celebration of the election of Diyarbakir KTTC member Arif Pirincizâde and Urfa branch members Mahmud Nadim and Sheikh Safwat Bey to Parliament.

<sup>428</sup> “Kürdçe Lisanımız,” 1 no. 4, 13 Kanun-i Evvel, 1324 [26 December, 1908], 32.

<sup>429</sup> Rohat Alakom, *Eski İstanbul Kürtleri*, (Istanbul: Avesta Yayınları, 2017).

constitution from all manner of violation, and to protect the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, which depends on nationalist (*millî*) and religious will and determination.”<sup>430</sup>

Continuing this discussion of religious identity comes the KTCC’s position in opposition to the more secularist members of the CUP: “as associations exist and turn into political parties, the political path to be followed must not detract from the legitimacy of the supreme authority of the Islamic Caliphate and the great Ottoman Sultanate,” but, despite supporting a strong central Sultanate, the KTCC asserts that “provinces must be given broad authority.”<sup>431</sup> Again, to indicate that this is not a separatist organization, they reiterate that their aim is to improve the “glory and splendor” of the Ottoman state, and to follow suit behind the CUP’s efforts for the salvation of the homeland, and that the KTCC operates in line with the CUP’s published political program.

Although many of the publication’s authors were elite, Istanbul-based scions of Kurdish notables, the journal made arguments to solidify a broader sense of Kurdish identity across geographic and tribal sub-regions, thus asserting a sense of nation reflected by the participatory members of the organization. Furthermore, while noting Kurds’ dominance in the region of Kurdistan, the journal also situated Kurdish identity within both Ottomanism and among non-Kurdish neighbors. This attitude is demonstrated in calls to create local libraries separately as a means to bridge the gap between Kurdish village life and urban opportunities, while balancing the conservative religious preferences of local society. “Diyarbakirli” Mazharzade Mazhar writes that although high-quality schools are their ultimate goal, education reform is not possible without a cadre of local Kurdish instructors, and that the best way to achieve this is with the creation of village-based libraries. He estimates that this program will create a sufficiently

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

educated local cadre within five years.<sup>432</sup> The vision of a suitable educator for the nation's development is one who reflects their ambitions of proper "education, morality, intellectual, and social life," and without teachers with such characteristics, any schools would be "built on rotten foundations... collapsed by any small impact."<sup>433</sup> The factor necessitating private creation of village schools is a belief that the state-funded education system does not have enough books or other learning materials to provide free of charge to Kurds, of whom he states 80% are impoverished. These libraries would provide access to educational materials, although works should be "patriotic... but should avoid as much as possible praises written during the period of tyranny [Abdülhamid II]."<sup>434</sup> In the article's conclusion he also states this as a remedy for local violence, as "it should be known that libraries... are to be the most effective remedy towards the reduction of misery and murder" by channeling local youth and collective effort into developing the future generation.<sup>435</sup>

Discussions of educational reform were deeply tied to the linked questions of language and social status of Kurds. Writing for *KTTG*, Babanizade Ismail Hakki provides the most direct argument for the importance of Kurdish-language education as a priority, and offers an early indication of the fear of the Ottoman government's Turkish assimilation practices. Writing in an Ottoman language article entitled "Regarding Kurdish," he tells his readers that while "Kurds are on the same level of merit and virtue as other Ottoman peoples, perhaps even the most superior, in terms of civilization and urbanity [they] are among the lowest," whereas Greeks, Armenians, and Bulgarians had advanced past the Turkish community through private schools, creation of

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<sup>432</sup> Diyarbakirli Mazhar Mazharzade, "Kitaphâneler," *KTTG*, 1 no. 6, 28 Kanun-i Evvel, 1324 [4 January, 1909], 45.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*

history books, and high levels of education.<sup>436</sup> The issue is then to be considered in terms of status among other Muslim communities, a hierarchy in which Ismail Hakki believes Kurds hold little cultural capital.

Ismail Hakki finds the comparison between Kurds and Arabs unimportant, as Arabs hold an automatic level of prestige in the Muslim world. Arabs, he states, possess the “supreme, lofty” language of the Quran, “the united true Word of God that spread forth to Arabs, Persians, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, through its magnificent language expresses the hopes and final aims of all existence and happiness.”<sup>437</sup> This has enabled scientific development and education in Arabic, but there are still “unadvanced Arab peoples and tribes, so this fault is not the superior language’s, it must be tied to those who speak the language.” For other Muslims, however, it is an issue of the way language is structured into the Ottoman Empire. “If a Circassian, a Laz, a Kurd, or an Albanian possesses enthusiasm to study science and technologies, they are forced to learn Arabic or Turkish and foreign languages in order to study.”<sup>438</sup> This same education system has thus elevated Turkish, and with it the Turks to a status much higher than those of other Ottoman Muslims. This system helped lead to the status of the Kurds who have become “one of the Ottoman peoples deprived of language, muted and blocked from advancement.”<sup>439</sup> In this sentiment, Ismail Hakki attacks the illusion of Ottomanism within the government, continuing “if such blind persecution rusts such an important element of the Ottoman body,” Kurds, as well as Albanians, gain little benefit, for “power and authority is in education, and language and

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<sup>436</sup> Babanizade Ismail Hakki, “Kurdçeye Da’ir,” ed. Bozarlan, M. Emin, *Kürd Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (Uppsala, Sweden: Weşanxana Deng, 1998), 141.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 142.

education are connected.”<sup>440</sup> If too, “Ottomanism’s most important component, the Kurds,” are subjected to such discrimination, which continues under the new authority, “then too Ottomanism, God forbid, will fail.”<sup>441</sup>

Kurdish language, in this article, is identified as the core of Kurdish identity and the core of Kurdish perseverance. Despite whatever tyranny and oppression the Kurds have suffered, and despite whatever impact this has had on Kurdish-language intellectual advancement, Kurdish has continued to be spoken “for thousands of years,” and that despite whatever attempts had been made by “Iranians, Greeks, Arabs, Tatars, or Turks” it has continued to spread, rather than die out.<sup>442</sup> Moving forward, he says, Kurds must push for Kurdish language education, as a Kurdish child from a village, raised in his mother tongue, loses years of education in the process of learning the foreign language of Turkish in order to receive an education, a disadvantage that must be addressed. The solution is not assimilation into Turkish, Arabic, or Persian communities, but rather creation of a localized, parallel educational system that enables Kurdish children to transition directly from Kurdish-speaking households to Kurdish language-based education, a system he believes non-Muslims have successfully long practiced.

Regarding who is responsible for such activity, Ismail Hakki and the *KTTC* write that Kurds must maintain a strong command of their language, then publish a suitable grammar book and dictionary, then move on to creating national history books, and then put to writing Kurdish oral poetry, folktales and stories. With this foundation, that can then be shared and taught across the community, “the bird of development and progress will open its wings” to the Kurds.<sup>443</sup> This

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<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

<sup>443</sup> An Arabic-Kurdish grammar book was long in use in Kurdish medreses. Ibid., 143.

pragmatic vision again brings to mind the continued absence of the Ezîdîs from these discussions. Although he is asserting an identity centered upon language, going so far as to say that language and education are “the security (*selamet*) of a nation’s foundation” it is still with Kurds as a broader Muslim community, and thus the rich Kurmanji oral tradition of the Ezidis, or their symbolic importance letter used by nationalists as preservers of a purely Kurdish culture, bears no importance on Ismail Hakki’s argument.

The *KTTG* journal offered room for debate on the role of education and reform. Member Hamdi Süleyman rejected Ismail Hakki’s call for primary focus on Kurdish education as both restrictive for Kurdish advancement and as deeply impractical and unrealistic, tying his call to action being a bridging of the urban-rural/urban-tribal divides. By recognizing the contemporary possibilities of an educated, urbanized and Turkish-literate Kurdish society, he rejects the idealization of rural Kurdish life. It is also a rejection of Ismail Hakki’s call elsewhere for maintaining the unity of Kurds of the Ottoman and Iranian world through primary emphasis on a renaissance of the Kurdish language to cross political borders.<sup>444</sup> Süleyman’s vision, which he positions as “in line with the opinion of Bediuzzaman Molla Said-I Kurdî,” wishes for local improvements in village life, along with integration of Kurds within the military and military-oriented education, a call that echoes *Kurdistan*’s situating of education within aims of military prowess, arms production, and self-sufficiency. In a later entry, Hamdi Süleyman criticizes the elites’ focus on urban development, saying that in “provincial, sanjak, and district centers... there is already education and secondary schools.”<sup>445</sup> Achieving the correct approach also requires a middle ground between Ismail Hakki’s linguistic nationalism and those who have

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<sup>444</sup> “Kurds’ Geographical and Political Situation,” *KTTG*, 1 no. 4, 13 Kanun-i Evvel 1324 [26 December, 1908], 25.

<sup>445</sup> Erzincanlı Hamdi Süleyman, “Kurdîstân’da Maârifin Tarz-i Tensîq ve İhyası” *KTTG*, 1 no. 9, 10 Kanun-i Sani 1324 [23 January, 1909]: 60.

deemed Kurdish an impractical component of national advancement. Kurds who had moved from villages to towns and cities had become bilingual, whereas, he writes, those who remained have preserved Kurdish monolingualism while simultaneously suffering the most severely during the “period of tyranny” under Abdülhamid.<sup>446</sup> This places rural Kurdish society not only as the most purely Kurdish, but more importantly as the sector of society most deserving of assistance, and for whom assistance should be focused. He agrees with Hakki that a necessary first step is the creation of educational materials for the Kurdish language, such as a proper grammar, dictionary, and national history. These should then be used to systematize and bolster the Kurdish language *alongside* Turkish in the educational settings of Kurdistan, a system which he compares to that of Greek and Armenian education systems that maintain cultural identity while preparing students for full entry into the Ottoman system.

This interplay between urban and rural dissimilarities also contains the long-standing, underlying tension between urban elite and the leaders of the Hamidiyye units, extending beyond criticisms of religious transgression and abuse of Christians frequently leveled in the journal *Kürdistan*. Here, in the context of the reinstated Ottoman Constitution, KTTC authors could discuss Hamidiyye leaders as obstacles to the social transformation which they believed was now underway. These criticisms at times took the form of notifying the reading public of tribal leaders’ excesses. The journal’s third volume singles out Abdülkerim, leader of the Miran, “a murderer who has inflicted millions in damages to the state treasury, dared to kill many, and who continues his customary atrocities.”<sup>447</sup> The particular charges against him were not related to murder, but rather that he and his son-in-law had pilfered a total of three million kuruş from state

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> “Internal News,” *KKTG*, 1 no. 3., 6 Kanun-i Evvel, 1324 [16 December, 1908], in Bozarlan, *Kürd Teaviin Terakkî Gazetesi*, 159.

funds. Abdülkerim had reportedly faced arrest for this, but was aided by the fact that “local officers hesitated about taming this most important figure.”<sup>448</sup> The journal, in announcing these misdeeds, positions itself and the KTTC as worthy of respect, and as reasonable supporters of the new state government. This claim to respectability is bolstered by their declaration that they themselves were the ones who brought these crimes to the attention of the state, writing “the Committee previously notified the Bab-i Ali,” and that, after his escape from justice, they wrote to the Ministries of the Interior, War, Justice, and Finance to demand action.

The KTTC turned its attention towards the notorious Ibrahim Pasha, head of the Millî Confederation. The KTTC announced that Ibrahim and his tribe had sold stolen livestock in Mardin and Siverek, earning a total of 750,000 kuruş. In a sarcastic tone, the editorial states “the wealth that a great desert leader and his tribe have accumulated is only this amount!” and that they also continuously gain income from wool trade using stolen sheep.<sup>449</sup> These direct accusations, leveled against some of the most powerful tribal leaders of Kurdistan, reflect the KTTC’s attempts to create an image of a backwards, rural Kurdish society dominated by abusive figures against a new model of Kurdish society defined by possibilities offered by the end of Abdülhamid’s tyranny.

Senior figures within the KTTC linked this tension between a new order of progress-minded, largely urbanized elite and the old order of the government-aligned Hamidiye Cavalry tribes and debates over the potential, shape, and implementation of education under the newly liberated system. One such figure, the Bitlis-born writer, linguist, and Motkî tribe member Xayal

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> “Millî Ibrahim,” *KTTG*, 1 no. 4., 13 Kanun-i Evvel, 1324 [23 December, 1908], in Bozarslan, 203.

Xayalî wrote a lengthy essay on this issue entitled “The Homeland and Kurds’ Unity.”<sup>450</sup> In this essay, which he translates paragraph-by-paragraph from Kurdish to Turkish to engage the maximum audience, Xayalî characterizes Kurdistan as a land of bravery and bloodshed, its “garden made up of the blood of martyrs, the honor of brave souls its hyacinths and basil.”<sup>451</sup> A land he describes as once filled with a mix of daring warriors and as a paradise-like environment was “beset all at once by tyranny, which killed your children, destroyed every part of you, and left no trace of joy and happiness” has now become a “place of ruin, a shelter for owls and snakes, because of today’s tyranny.”<sup>452</sup> Like other Kurdish nationalist authors the degeneration of the nation and homeland is not set against an intellectual, political, or economic Golden Age, such as the Assyrians’ use of Late Antique scholarly production. Instead it is a degeneration in which the core attributes of the nation – such as bravery, practicality, and religious observance – are presented as having fallen to corruption, with bravery now a part of a vicious cycle of internecine conflict and manipulation by the government. However, as Xayalî is quick to point out, “these disasters... have occurred because of our ignorance” which enabled tyrannical governments to trick them, in doing so “teaching the lessons of killing and plundering... burning our own houses... for the desire of those Pharaohs and Shaddads.”<sup>453</sup> While the children of Kurdistan’s various oppressors have gained luxurious lives from these evils, the Kurds are now beset by hunger and poverty, which, Xayalî indicates, the Kurds could suffer through if necessary. This situation has caused by Kurds being deprived of reading and writing, and of

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<sup>450</sup> “Kürdçe Lisanımız, Weten û Îttîfaqa Kurmanca,” *KTTG*, 1 no. 8, 10 Kanun-i Sani, 1324 [26 January, 1909], 69.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> Shaddad is a reference to the legendary Arabian king and tyrant Shaddad, thought to be associated with the king Âd and the People of Iram mentioned in the Qur’an (Qur’an, 89: 6-7). *Ibid.*

advancements in commerce and agriculture. However, the continuous infighting has killed off many of Kurdistan's brave men, created orphans and widows, and in the final aspect of this humiliation, the tyrants have "made [Kurds] to look like bandits, and incapable in the eyes of the world."<sup>454</sup>

Despite all of their suffering, Kurds maintained their fundamental qualities of "piety, valor, generosity, and superiority." As Xayalî reminds his reader, there has not been a single major Ottoman conflict in which Kurdish cavalry did not shed their blood, and never shied away from a fight. However, it is this great value placed on fighting, as if for fighting's sake, that Xayalî feels is a large obstacle to realizing Kurdish national advancement within the new Ottoman regime. He compares the Kurds to another martial nation, the Albanians, whom he praises for "abandoning their centuries-old feuds, showing each other their self-worth and innate valor through extending the hand of brotherhood," enabling them to refocus that valor on defending their nation.<sup>455</sup> Xayalî's call to reconciliation is not presented as in service of separatist nationalism, but rather to become full participants in the possibilities of the Second Constitutional Era, and to shift attention from fighting to education, creating a science-educated new generation of Kurdish children, who, he states, "do not deserve the shame of ignorance."<sup>456</sup> This process of reconciliation falls upon the shoulders of sheikhs and Kurdish leaders, whom he calls to "let go of old traditions that need to be rejected" and to reconcile among the individuals of the Kurdish nation, reinforcing this command as a religious duty to "do good to your own as Allah has done good to you."<sup>457</sup> This call for an end to tribal and other Kurdish-infighting is thus

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 71.

also a call to Kurdish leaders to engage with these new possibilities made possible through the reinstatement of the Ottoman Constitution, and is also a call by these urban Kurdish intellectuals to the real leaders of local society in Kurdistan, sheikhs and tribal authorities, to consider their grievances in light of the greater Ottoman and Kurdish nations.

The KTTC did, however, celebrate activities that they viewed as uniting previously warring Kurdish tribes, the better of which they viewed as using this opportunity to escape the tyrannical system of the Abdülhamid regime. The KTTC published multiple letters from tribal representatives, as well as from Christian representatives of Northern Kurdistan. One letter, co-signed by Kurdish representatives from Nusaybin and Aznavur, by another Arab leader, and by Heverkî tribal representative Aziz Halil from the powerful Haco family laments the cycle of violence in which their region found itself, caused by “even the smallest and most ordinary incident,” with this violence then being exploited by the government to justify its unjust practices.<sup>458</sup> The authors of this letter state that this mistreatment by the government, “caused many of us to retreat to the mountains, to stay away from the government,” a statement in line with the Heverkî’s antagonistic relationship with the state.<sup>459</sup> They therefore declare their willingness to submit to the government, mediated through the local *muteserrif*, and to hand over weapons in exchange for proper recognition of their individual rights.<sup>460</sup> Similarly, leaders of the Harunan and Reşkotan tribes declared in a joint letter that, after discussions in Kurdish and Turkish with Siirt’s administrator Süleyman Faik, they were convinced of the benefit and veracity of the new constitutional system, pledging “we would sacrifice our precious lives for the

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<sup>458</sup> “From Midyat: 24 Kanun-i Evvel [1]324”, *KTTC*, 1 vol. 7, 3 Kanun-i Sani, 1324 [16 January, 1909], 68.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter Four of this dissertation discusses the ongoing conflict between the Heverkî and Dekşurî tribes before and after this period.

protection of the provisions of the constitution.”<sup>461</sup> Although the letter’s authors do not state it explicitly, the journal added an editorial stating that the region of Siirt suffered similar abuses from the government.

The journal continues the theme of declaring the new, government-abiding nature of tribal leaders by printing another letter by Hüseyin, “Leader of the Entire Haydaran Tribe, and Hamidiyye Brigadier General [Mirliva].”<sup>462</sup> According to the letter, the periodical *Iqdam* published an article accusing Hüseyin of “burning the Adilcevaz Kaymakam” Said Bey with kerosine while he slept in his house, and then on a separate occasion stabbing to death the Erciş Deputy Governor Rağıp Bey. Declaring his intention to file a lawsuit against the accusatory periodical, he claims that he had long been in Istanbul, and that another individual, currently imprisoned in Van, had killed the Adilcevaz official, and that a soldier had been arrested for the murder of the Deputy Governor. Such space dedicated to rehabilitating the image of Hamidiye and non-Hamidiye tribal leaders promotes an optimistic view of the new possibilities of the period, reconciliation from the period of Abdülhamid regime, as well as allowing the KTTTC to assert itself as a representative of all components of the Kurdish nation.

## **Conclusion**

In the years following the Hamidian Massacres of 1894-1896, Assyrian and Kurdish religious officials and intellectuals reflected deeply on their communities’ current states and prospects for the future. In these crucial years between 1896 and 1908, these emerging nationalist movements developed the foundations for what would become the core discourses of

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<sup>461</sup> “From Siirt: 18 Aralık [1]324,” *KTTG*, 1 vol. 7, 3 Kanun-i Sani, 1324 [16 January, 1909], 68.

<sup>462</sup> “Letter to the Kürd İttihad ve Teavün Club” *KTTG*, 1 vol. 7, 3 Kanun-i Sani, 1324 [16 January, 1909], 69.

identity and national mission. In both cases, they recognized education rights and reform as the most useful and realistic areas for seeking to improve their situation. This also opened pathways for criticizing the institutions seen as obstacles. For the Assyrian nationalists, and Syriac Orthodox community more broadly, the Syriac Orthodox Church itself became both target of criticism and the center of change. For Kurds, the institutionalization of tribal hierarchies through the Hamidiye Regiments became a point of contention.

### **Chapter Three: Communal Identity and Aspiration in Late Ottoman Assyrian and Kurdish Publications**

In 1909 newly relaxed restrictions on publishing enabled a wave of Assyrian and Kurdish periodicals in the Ottoman Empire. In these, representatives of these communities provided space for debates over various strands within these emergent nationalist movements. As discussed in the previous chapter, advocacy for education provided a salient focus for more concrete formulation of nation and its historical, linguistic, and social character and boundary. This chapter continues this discussion, engaging now on how these nationalists used a new forum to communicate these ideas to the public. Specifically, it explores which symbols and national characteristics were chosen for their resonance with the audiences of these journals, and how these symbols were employed to address debates over communal boundary, identity, gender, heritage, and the role of religion in the national awakening. This chapter ultimately argues that the key divide between these two communities was the way that religious identity formed their respective discourses. For Assyrian nationalists, to the memory of the ancient Assyrians in many ways surpassed Christian symbols in importance. These arguments enabled discussion of a clear national Golden Age and allowed for arguments of indigeneity in the region. In contrast, Kurdish nationalism's approach was firmly bound by the central importance of Islamic identity and proper Muslim practice as a foundational component of identity. As this chapter demonstrates, their claim to the territory was treated as a given based both on contemporary political power and by virtue of being Muslims, making arguments of indigeneity unimportant.

To illuminate these debates, this chapter continuous exploration of the body of Assyrian/Suryani and Kurdish periodicals consumed within the Ottoman Empire. The principal

Assyrian periodicals I have consulted are as follows: *Murshid Athuriyon* (*Guide of the Assyrians*, Harput, 1909-1915), *Kawkab Madnhā* (*Star of the East*, Diyarbakir, 1910-12) and *al-Hikma*, (*Wisdom*, Deyrulzafaran Monastery, 1913-1914). For Kurdish nationalism, the publications reviewed are: *Kurdistan* (Cairo; Folkstone, London; Geneva, 1898-1902), *Kürd Teavun ve Terakki Gazetesi* (Istanbul, 1908-1909), *Rojî Kurd* (Istanbul, 1913-1914) and *Hetawî Kurd* (Istanbul, 1913-1914).<sup>463</sup> Through close examination of related entries from the entire run of these journals, this chapter seeks to offer a comparative approach to how these nationalist writers addressed questions of historical past, present conditions, and national purpose through the particular contours of their own communities.

### **Ethno-Symbolism and National Purpose**

This chapter seeks to understand this rapid process in both Assyrian and Kurdish communities in relation to what Anthony Smith refers to as the nationalism's collective mission, which brings out the nation as "not merely an object of contemplation and imagination" but organizes these conceptions into a collective will to achieve nationalist goals.<sup>464</sup> Study of these movements provide a particularly useful case study for understanding the processes behind the early development of nationalist movements. Both communities provide challenges to many of the major theories of nationalism, as neither of these movements was developed by state or economic elites (Hobsbawm), as a product of modernity, industrialization, or labor demands (Gellner), and neither represented widely literate societies, significant markets for print capitalism, or regional groups whose identity coalesced around economic and administrative ties

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<sup>463</sup> Like in the previous chapter, the Kurdish journals chosen for this chapter focus on those with significant portions written in Kurmanji, and thus targeting a Kurdish audience in Southeast Anatolia.

<sup>464</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2003), 22.

and entities (Anderson). This chapter, as others, does not assert that the ideas being promoted by these figures were accepted by major portion of their target audiences. Instead, through an ethno-symbolist approach, it seeks to demonstrate the processes through which these figures identified and communicated essential qualities, histories, and communal boundaries. Thus, this chapter examines these debates not only in regards to the boundaries of the conceptual nation, but more specifically, how underlying “ties, symbols, traditions, myths and memories” shape the language of national action, and, more specifically, how the image of a glorious national past is presented as in the service of this endeavor.<sup>465</sup> Through these efforts, nationalist intellectuals not only sought to offer didactic material to their audiences, but, more importantly wished to promote a conceptualization that places both the ancient and contemporary nation in a single narrative. Furthermore, an underlying ambiguity is the extent to which Ottoman political structures constrain or even define the saliency of boundaries in which nation and the audience for calls to mobilization reside. Specific to the Assyrians, these authors’ discussions of national future are not grounded in a pursuit of political autonomy, but rather reflect a future grounded in the context of the Ottoman political structure and the realities of their precarity. In the context of Kurdish Nationalism, however, these journals present a much more apprehensive or frustrated tone with the state, while maintaining the importance of recognition of the caliphate’s authority.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate how fostering national identity still functioned as a means for achieving communal advancement within this context, as well as the presence of competing claims of national nomenclature that still referenced an often-overlapping national past. Thus, in understanding nationalism according to Smith as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining *autonomy*, unity and identity on behalf of a population,” this autonomy

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<sup>465</sup> Anthony D. Smith, “Ethnic Election and National Destiny: Some Religious Origins of Nationalist Ideals,” *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 5, no. 3, 1999, 332.

can be understood, in the examples under review, as limited to an expression in terms of institutional self-reliance.<sup>466</sup> Instead, these debates should be understood as limited in this context to national identity, and its accompanying use of symbols and history, separate from the political movement of nationalism.

### **The Syriac Orthodox Community**

As a result of Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms and the creation of new non-Muslim *millet*s and Protestant missionary activity, questions of conversion and hierarchical authority emerged as central concerns of church leadership. During the *Tanzimat* era, however, the power of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate also underwent a process of consolidation, including the reunification of the Patriarchates of Mardin and Tur Abdin in 1839, and, as the *millet* system expanded, growing independence in its relations with the Ottoman government from under the Armenian Patriarchate.<sup>467</sup> This tension is as well attested in these periodicals, reflected in an article from *Star of the East* which often expresses frustration over attempts by the Armenian Orthodox Church to infringe on Süryani church property.<sup>468</sup> However, direct correspondence between the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Ottoman Porte indicates a largely functional if not nominal independent *millet*. Additionally, despite the tone of optimism demonstrated towards the government after the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, the period under review (1909-1914) must be understood in the context of the Hamidian Massacres, which led to the deaths of thousands of the Süryani community, and impacted attempts at development by the vulnerable Süryani

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<sup>466</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant and Republic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2008).

<sup>467</sup> William Taylor, *Narratives of Identity* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 75.

<sup>468</sup> As a reminder, the term Suryani is used to refer to the Syriac Orthodox community itself, as this is the ethnonym the majority employed, and Assyrian as the community as imagined by nationalists.

community. Continued harassment and communal violence created an urgency in uniting and advancing the community, be it for churches as their specific millets, or for nationalist intellectuals as an Assyrian nation as broadly defined as feasible.

### **Assyrian Periodicals**

Although Syriac and Neo-Aramaic journalism among Syriac Christians of Persia began in 1849, with the publication of *Zahrira dBahra (Rays of Light)* by the Congregationalist mission in Urmiah, it would not begin among Ottoman Syriac Christians for another six decades. As argued in the first and second chapter of this dissertation, the Assyrian nationalist movement did not coalesce into a concerted effort until the aftermath of the Hamidian Massacres (1894-1896) and attempts to gain control over the community's education vis-à-vis Protestant missionary and Armenian dominated schools. Debates over education continue into these periodicals, primarily related to promoting the idea of the intellectual decline of the church and the need for elites to facilitate the construction of schools through both political action and fundraising in order to achieve the nation's "*Intibah*" (awakening). The topic of nomenclature of the community is another central theme, and one related to the question of whether these works can truly be considered nationalist literature. Scholarship has explored these debates over nationalism and national identity in detail as expressed within the Ottoman Süryani community. The work of Trigona-Harany, whose research focused on Ottoman-language entries in *Kawkab Madnhā* and *Murshid Athuriyon*, argues that journal editors Naum Faiq and Ashur Yusuf operated through a context of optimism and accompanying Ottomanism which developed following the 1908 Young Turk Revolution.<sup>469</sup> This chapter builds upon work on these journals in three ways: first, by

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<sup>469</sup> Benjamin Trigona-Harany, *The Ottoman Süryani from 1908-1914* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009).

injecting Arabic-language articles and the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate's official voice into these debates as manifested in *al-Hikma*, which was not included in such scholarship, it indicates the underlying tension between competing visions of communal identity. Second, it demonstrates that the church was actively involved in suppressing non-ecclesiastically controlled identity narratives, based on anxieties of the integrity of the Syriac Orthodox Church and the danger of state violence which nationalist ideologies created. Third, by shifting focus to the subtleties of how the national past was imagined and used discursively to convey a sense of communal identity and purpose, it asserts that pre-Christian Assyrian symbols were necessary tools to fully address the complex social issues facing the community. By comparison of similar topics with Kurdish nationalist writers, the chapter demonstrates the ways in which this flexibility provided deeper opportunity for answers to contemporary challenges,

In 1909, Ashur Yusuf (1858-1915) began publishing the Ottoman Empire's first Syriac Christian journal entitled *Murshid Athuriyon* (Guide of the Assyrians). Yusuf, a Protestant of Süryani background, was born in Harput in 1858 and was a product of the American missionary educational system, having attended or taught at schools in Harput and Izmir.<sup>470</sup> While writing his journal he served as instructor at the region's premier American Protestant missionary school, Harput's Euphrates College, and his journal, written in lithographic Ottoman Garshuni, was printed with the missionaries' printing press.<sup>471</sup> As indicated by the journal's title, and as will be illustrated in later examples, Yusuf's view of the community was shaped in part by "Assyrian" identity. Work by Sargon Donabed, Shamiran Mako and Benjamin Trigona-Harany have discussed the influence of the Assyrian identity movement within Harput and other Süryani

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<sup>470</sup> Ashur Yusuf, "Will Anyone Help Us for Education and Training," *Murshid Athuriyon*, 4 no.1, June, 1912.

<sup>471</sup> William McGrew, *Educating Across Cultures: Anatolia College in Turkey and Greece* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 74.

communities of the region.<sup>472</sup> Thus, as will hopefully be made evident, the discourse of this differs significantly from the Syriac Orthodox Church's official positions as evidenced in its own journal *al-Hikma*.

The second periodical reviewed is *Kawkab Madnhā* (*Star of the East*), was first published in 1910 by Naum Faiq. Faiq was born in 1868 in Diyarbakir and educated in a secondary school established by the Syriac Orthodox Brothers Association, where he studied Syriac, Arabic, Turkish, and French along with music, natural sciences, and mathematics.<sup>473</sup> He also served as a deacon at the Saint Mary Syriac Orthodox Church in Diyarbakir, and, like Yusuf, worked as a schoolteacher. In 1910, he began his twenty-year career in Assyrian journalism with the publication of *Kawkab Madnhā*, which continued for two years until his emigration to the United States due to riots against Christians in Diyarbakir resulting from the Ottoman-Italian War.<sup>474</sup> After moving to New Jersey, he edited or wrote for a series of Süryani journals such as *Intibah*, *Beth Nahrain* and *Huyodo*. Although he continued his role as a central figure in the promotion of Assyrian communal identity while in the United States, this chapter focuses only on discussions within the Ottoman Süryani community between 1909 and 1914. This periodical was written primarily in Ottoman Garshuni, but also included articles in Arabic, Classical Syriac, and Kurmanji Kurdish. The periodical quickly identifies its ecumenical breadth in its first issue,

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<sup>472</sup> Trigona-Harany discusses that even Armenian's linguistic dominance may have obscured any difference between "Asuri" and "Suryani," and Donabed and Mako discuss how a physical distance from the historical Assyrian heartland fostered "symbolic attachment to their ancient past rather than to an immediate visible material one which the people living in the vicinity of Nineveh could do with greater ease." Trigona-Harany, *The Ottoman Suryani*, and Donabed, Sargon George and Shamiran Mako, "Ethno-Cultural and Religious Identity of Syriac Orthodox Christians," *Chronos*, no 19, 2009: 71-113.

<sup>473</sup> Cikki, Murat Fuat, *Naum Faiq ve Süryani Ronesansi* (Istanbul: Belge Yayınevi, 2004), 21.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*

evidenced by its reference to “our Süryani Catholic brothers.”<sup>475</sup> Due to Naum Faiq’s emigration to America, allowing him to escape the Seyfo (Assyrian Genocide) which led to the deaths of similar figures such as Ashur Yusuf, this journal is the first public effort in Naum Fauq’s subsequently continuous efforts for the development Assyrian nationalist thought.

The third periodical under review, *al-Hikma (Wisdom)* was the official journal of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate. It began publication at the Patriarchal See of Deyrulzafran, Mardin in 1913 through a printing press overseen by future Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem I Barsoum.<sup>476</sup> The publication ceased after its first year due to the outbreak of the First World War, and later resumed publication in the 1920s in Jerusalem. Its first edition lists its director as Hanna al-Qas, and its editor as Mikha`il Hikmet Chuqqi, with other editorial staff including the famous scholar and future Bishop of Mardin, Hanna Dolabani. The periodical is written in Arabic and Syriac using proper typeface.<sup>477</sup> The journal’s introductory article states its purpose as serving to combat ignorance and to promote the advancement of the Süryani, but places this in the context of its primary role of serving the Syriac Orthodox Church.<sup>478</sup>

As this chapter addresses the topic of national identity and periodicals, it is necessary to address questions of its audience and circulation. In the case of all three of these periodicals there are no clear subscription numbers provided, although an overall impression of their readership

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<sup>475</sup> Naum Faiq, “I’tidâr,” *Star of the East*, 1 no. 1, 16 Temmuz [July], 1910.

<sup>476</sup> Ahmet Taşğın and Robert Langer, “The Establishment of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate Press,” in *Historical Aspects of Printing and Publishing in Languages of the Middle East*, ed. Roper, Geoffrey (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014).

<sup>477</sup> Ashur Yusuf mentions the usefulness of *al-Hikma* for reaching Arabic-speaking Süryani, saying “the esteemed *Al-Hikma* has come into existence, published in Arabic with Arabic letters and arranged by Mikha`il Hikmet Çikki Efendi in Mardin at Deyrulzafran’s printing press. We hope that which it contains will be very helpful for Arab Süryani.” “Two New Periodicals for the Süryani,” *Murshid-i Athuriyon* 5 no. 9 (August, 1913).

<sup>478</sup> “Opening,” *al-Hikma*, 1 no.1, August, 1913.

can be understood by letters published within their issues. Additionally, due to the pervasive challenge of education, literacy rates were also low outside of the educated elites, and the choice of language (Ottoman and Arabic Garshuni) also limited access. *Al-Hikma*'s use of Arabic language and typeface likely offered a more easily accessible format for readers. However, submissions and letters from both the Ottoman Empire and North and South America indicated the wide circulation of these journals, and editors often called for its literate subscribers to read it aloud to those around them.<sup>479</sup>

### **Discussion of the Degenerated State of the Assyrian Nation**

Authors throughout these periodicals uniformly present a narrative of the community's degradation, in which the Süryani are locked in state of ignorance or "mental sleep" from which they must awake. Alleviating this state of ignorance is thus presented as the necessary step to reclaiming glories of their ancient past as well as building a productive future. One of many such examples is found in an article entitled "Until When?" written by Yaqub Warda for *al-Hikma* in 1914. Warda prods his audience by challenging their pride: "For how do you improve the nation and the intellect of its sons if it is bound with the rigid chains of ignorance?"<sup>480</sup> Two words in particular constantly resurface across these periodicals in describing the community's pathetic state, their Ottoman pronunciations being *cehâlet* [ignorance, Arabic *jahāla* ) and *ghaflet* [mental sleep, Arabic *ghaflah*]. The severity of this situation is also tied directly to recent historical events. In one article in *Guide of the Assyrians*, Ashur Yusuf describes the situation of the community by relating a story of Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, reflecting the broad cultural

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<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> 'Abd al-Karīm Ya'qūb Warda, "Until When?" *al-Hikma*, 1 no. 15, January, 1914, 219.

reservoir from which symbols of the past could be drawn to illuminate the present. The caliph, while wandering in disguise at night to survey the condition of Medina's inhabitants, encountered an elderly woman who was boiling a pot in front of a group of crying children. When asked what the cause of their sadness was, the woman informed them it was due to their hunger, and that the pot she was cooking was filled only with water and pebbles as a way to placate them with the illusion of food.<sup>481</sup> Yusuf uses this story to evoke the plight of his community, brought to further disaster under the Abdülhamid regime, whose children's cry "for schools, the press and knowledge" are denied, connecting such misery with the hundreds of orphans left by the Hamidian Massacres. This reference to Caliph 'Umar therefore places his call to action within the context of this recent trauma underlying the immediacy of this concern, namely that aid must not be illusory and must adequately care for the destitute of the community and for its mental advancement.

Each of the three journals *Murshid Athuriyon*, *Kawkab Madnā*, and *al-Hikma* journal, recognizing the destitute situation, calls for a "national awakening" (*intibâh*), contrasting the current state of the Assyrian community with its golden age, the glories of which it should seek to regain. Although Faiq and Yusuf are highly critical of the ignorance of clergy, all three journals recognize the miserable condition of their community, building upon a focus on education to create a more elaborate image of reform. The visions of Ashur Yusuf and Naum Faiq on the one side, and the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate on the other, diverged over whether this golden age is found solely within Syriac Christian history, and if one should think of them as a nation it should be known as the Suryani, with only passing concern with the ancient past. For those seeking national history in the ancient past, the vision was of fostering a national identity

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<sup>481</sup> Ashur Yusuf, "Our Schools: An Introduction," *Murshid Athuriyon*, 2 no.1, June, 1910.

descended from the Assyrians, or, as some argued, the Aramaeans.<sup>482</sup> Thus, these authors draw upon elements of heritage from both within the Syriac Christian tradition as well as from a pre-Christian ancient national past. Often, the emphasis of Syriac Christian tradition as a basis of national pride centers on the Syriac literary tradition, the most widely available corpus of source material available to these intellectuals.

This discourse is expressed not only in terms of aspiration, and often through comparison to “civilized nations,” but is also tied directly to a narrative of historical decline of the community. The impassioned pleas of the community’s reformers are reflected in the following statement by Isa Toma in his article for *al-Hikma* entitled “Our Past and Current State”:

Does it suffice us to say “we were, and we were and we were?” Do we create humans with the knowledge of our fathers and ancestors, the bleeding affliction of our eyes and hearts for what we are confronting between our past and present? But tears fall from the highest peaks of glory and majesty, and break in the depths of humiliation. Is it permissible for one who is characterized by enthusiasm and rigor to wait idly by and look with indifference to his nation’s state of misery? Is it fitting for us to walk in the dark ways of ignorance and the people of dark gloom after we have walked in the paths illuminated by schools and knowledge?<sup>483</sup>

This disconnect between the ancient past and contemporary situation builds a space in which authors express the specifics of connection to their community’s cultural heritage.

Another author from *al-Hikma* argues that despite their current situation, “the ancient Süryani community is rich in its great physical and literary heritage, laudable efforts it possesses in great quantity, in the fame of its intellectuals and historians, a fame great in accordance with its history.”<sup>484</sup> But, as authors throughout these publications lament, this celebrated ancient

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<sup>482</sup> The nomenclature debate between Aramaean and Assyrian identity continues, with the former the stated position of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

<sup>483</sup> No information could be located about the author’s biography. `Isa Toma, “Our Past and Current State,” *Al-Hikma*, 1 no. 16, March, 1914, 229.

<sup>484</sup> `Ibn al-`ibri “Glimpse of the Nation,” *Al-Hikma*, 153, 1 no 11, January, 1914.

heritage, both material and literary, has either fallen into disuse, or the community has become unaware of its own intellectual past. Yaqub Warda, a Syriac Orthodox Church member contributing from Hama expresses his great displeasure at the community's ignorance of its former glory, writing in an article for *al-Hikma*:

[To] these histories of yours, oh Syriacs, turn and look, how many intrepid men has it established for you, who have committed themselves and spirit upon the development of your nation? How many important heroes has it fostered for you, who shook the country with their mettle and steadfastness? How many lights are in the heavens of our nation, the famed intellectuals, the grand heroes who awoke the nation into the heights of splendor and prosperity?"<sup>485</sup>

Part of the humiliation the community was suffering stems from the irony that their own heritage remains unknown to them but is familiar and celebrated by those outside of the community. One author in *Kawkab Madnahā*, the priest 'Abd al-Masīḥ from Viranşehir, west of Mardin, notes that that the illustrious authors of the Syriac Christian past were celebrated as a valuable source of knowledge by non-Assyrians. Although their own Syriac Christian descendants have lost awareness and reverence for their tradition's great scholars, academics of "Europe and America" now enjoy these works in a way unavailable to these luminaries' own community. He gives specific mention of the great figures of the Syriac Christian tradition who, ignored by their progeny, now stimulate the minds of Europeans "Because all of their own libraries are adorned by Saint Ephrem the Syrian, and Saint Yaqub of Nisibis, Malphono al-Sarugi and Dionisius al-Telmahri, and Musa ibn al-Hajar, and Mikail the Great, and Dionisius ibn al-Salibi, and Gregorius ibn al-'Ibri (Bar Hebraeus) and other great figures from the Syriac Church, their sayings and works, which enrich all sects."<sup>486</sup> By discussing these central figures of

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<sup>485</sup> 'Abd al-Karīm Ya'qūb Warda, "Until When," *al-Hikma*, 1 no. 15, 14 Adhar, 1914, 220.

<sup>486</sup> 'Abd al-Masīḥ "On the Ignorance Which Has Settled Upon the Suryani," *Kawkab Madnhā*, 1. No. 23, May, 1911, 4.

early and medieval Syriac writers, the priest is criticizing his community's ignorance and additionally reminding them that the modern Assyrians possess a widely recognized intellectual history in which they should take great pride.

This same article also illustrates how these calls to past and present began carrying varied discourses over communal identity and nomenclature, such as whether to identify the nation as Aramaean, Assyrian, or simply as Süryani. Father 'Abd al-Masīḥ uses various terms of his community, even within a single sentence: "Oh, *Süryani* notables, fathers, and brothers, and the body of the *Assyrians*, is it enough that we live in this terrible state and miserable situation?"<sup>487</sup> Elsewhere he refers to the community with another title; "Rise oh [Prophet] Jeremiah... and aid the *Aramean* people! Come of prophet of the nations, and lament over your disciples. Behold how they have forgotten your prayers."<sup>488</sup> This call is followed by others that ground reform-minded messaging within the Syriac Christian tradition, including an appeal for the famous 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar Bar Hebraeus to "give us your exalted voice and pen."<sup>489</sup> As noted, the influence of the Assyrian identity movement was present in these regions and resonated as a point of reference to the journal's audience. However, this statement reveals either the fluidity of such communal identity markers and the various categories through which their audiences were understood to view communal identity, or the unimportance of nomenclature within such a destitute situation.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>490</sup> Although this chapter does not address discussions of territorial correlations to these discussions, Father 'Abd al-Masīḥ's article describes it in the following statement: "Come, let us look at the land of Syria and Mesopotamia and Nineveh towards the outermost eastern border, and to Tur Abdin, and alongside the border of the Armenian region... There we will see the traces of our fathers and ancestors in the monasteries and churches... and witness the situation of their sons." Ibid, 4.

Further examination of ‘Abd al-Masīḥ’s demonstrates his attitude that nomenclature was of secondary importance to working to locate and edify the community of the correct golden age. This pride however, should be grounded in the ancient community’s intellectual and cultural production, with no mention given to Assyrian or Aramaean martial history. Elevating these cultural elements will provide the means to eliminate the darkness of *ghafla*, an attitude reflected by ‘Abd al-Masīḥ presenting the following admonition after citing Romans 3:12 (“The night has approached its end, and day approaches, so let us cast off everything that belongs to darkness and equip ourselves for the light”):

Do you have hopes of who we are? Are we not the sons of the Süryani people (*ummaḥ*), the progeny of the Aramean nation, which was famous for science and art, by means of its intellectuals and its skilled workers? Who drew together the world in its collection east and west... with their books, their precious knowledge, and with their felicity, and their eloquence, and their eloquent expressions? And oh, how nations sang their poems and verses, their hymns and their authors. However, we have already fallen under oppressive poverty, free of the benefits of their knowledge. But because the wilderness of ignorance has overcome us, and we are like both the wolf upon the sheep and the falcon upon the sparrow...<sup>491</sup>

Even the condition of Süryani material heritage is tied to this deterioration and lack of appreciation by its true inheritors. An author in *al-Hikma* identified as Ibn al-`Ibri “Bar Hebraeus” asserts a disconnect between material heritage and the present as well as their greater appreciation outside of the community, an acknowledgement of artistic and literary value unappreciated by the descendants of its creators. The author’s choice of pseudonym, Ibn al-`Ibri is a deliberate appropriation of the name of the most famous Intellectual of the medieval West Syriac world. “Ibn al-`Ibri” writes:

In those churches are ancient artifacts and paintings, equal to the most famous contents of the exhibitions in England and America, but we do not value them now, as we do not know anything about them. And in their [Europeans’ and Americans’] libraries are huge collections of books and manuscripts, decorated like those European and American texts

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<sup>491</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

shown to the literary world, the abilities of their authors, the ingenuity of their creators, which is unique in the religious esteem of their producers... [which although] Western scientists search for by the thousands... we do not realize any of their benefits.<sup>492</sup>

As we see in the writing of Ashur Yusuf, the editor of *Murshid Athuriyon*, the Assyrians could also become a point of pride from non-religious cultural and material heritage. Yusuf routinely publishes transcriptions of Syriac engravings and their historical context in his journal, but writes with great enthusiasm in one article about ancient non-religious heritage. He published an article in his journal on the continued use of the *kelek*, a river-ferry whose name is of Aramaic origin. He connects it to the Assyrians' great past and still-present legacy, boasting that "this relic of the times of the Assyrians has remained for a period of 4 thousand years."<sup>493</sup> This serves as a reminder to his readers of the myriad ways in which their ancient heritage is preserved in the region's contemporary environment, and to his audience that they, like the *kelek*, have been continuously present in the region four thousands of years.

The authors within these three journals all established a clear narrative of decline but were faced with the nationalist questions of who will be responsible for reform, what that reform should entail, and how it could be achieved. Coupled with this acknowledgement of the need for reform is a call towards fostering broad national zeal. It is important to note that in each of these periodicals, the process of creating zeal is broadly understood to include coordination between the church and various strata of the laity. Naum Faiq, Ashur Yusuf, their contributors and the contributors of *al-Hikma* call upon members of the community to raise funds for promoting the construction of schools, the training of teachers, the building of libraries and universally state

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<sup>492</sup> Ibn al-'Ibri, "Glimpse of the Nation" *Al-Hikma*, 1. No. 12, January, 1914.

<sup>493</sup> Ashur Yusuf, "History of the *Kelek*," *Murshid Athuriyon*, 1 no. 2, February, 1909. This word also exists as a loan word in Kurmanji to designate such a river ferry.

that these shortages must be solved internally. Ashur Yusuf, in his article “Will Anyone Else Help us in Education and Training,” advocates for the importance of communal solidarity in pursuit of these goals. While the community has “well-wishing partners for us acquiring education and training” the Patriarch and individual members nation itself should commit to building a sense of national pride wherever possible, expending resources and fostering feelings of commitment, “burning desire” and efforts towards education.<sup>494</sup> In the Patriarchate’s journal *al-Hikma*, contributors also routinely call upon wealthy members of the community to provide funds for reforms, with statements such as “In the Suryani sect, [there are] many who possess wealth and riches, who speak proudly of their wealth and echo their riches and abundance. And many of them are those of fame and respect, dignitaries, people of importance, whose dress is a robe of glory and prominence, proud of their status and qualities... However, despite that, they do not benefit the sect.”<sup>495</sup> The “robe of glory” [ثوب المجد] mentioned by Ibn al-‘Ibri is a perhaps a symbol used to emphasize his point through imagery drawing on early Syriac literature. Sebastian Brock describes the use of the image of the “Robe of Glory” or “Robe of Light” as a common motif in the early Christian era.<sup>496</sup> Prominent in Saint Ephrem’s writings as a marker of salvation, this symbol underscores the religious nature of the community’s improvement.

Like their Kurdish counterparts, Assyrian nationalist writers sought contemporary examples that might offer solutions for the difficulty of creating a communal body willing to take on these challenges. Naum Faiq, for example, compares the situation of Assyrians to that of “France, England, Germany and every civilized state” who have implemented mandatory

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<sup>494</sup> Ashur Yusuf, “Will Anyone Else Help Us for Education and Training?” *Murshid Authuriyon*, 4 no. 1, June, 1912.

<sup>495</sup> Ibn al-‘Ibri, “Glimpse of the Nation,” 153.

<sup>496</sup> Thanks to Joel Walker for pointing out this connection. Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 86.

education, or of the rapid development of Japan as a model.<sup>497</sup> Ilyās Yāso, a teacher from Diyarbakir who contributed to *Kawkab Madnhā*, even states his admiration of Napoleon, who prepared a “new generation for service to the nation and homeland,” overcoming a century ago the issues faced by the Assyrians of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>498</sup>

Although all parties see value in resurrecting both the spirit and knowledge of ancient Syriac Christian heritage, the issue of how women will participate in this national awakening demonstrates the greater ability to answer such questions using the pre-Christian Assyrian past, including sensitive questions such as the advancement of women in Assyrian society. In his article “Whom Should We Await for the Nation’s Development,” Ashur Yusuf declares that “the amount of women who have seen education and training is insufficient,” and thus indicates the broad mobilization he envisions for his community. He uses as a reference Europe and America, in which women work in factory production, rising into management positions, but also entering into the ranks of scientists.<sup>499</sup> This emphasis on broad mobilization of education within his community is framed not only by its potential for economic benefit, but rather is part of the general decline of the community from the golden age of the “heavenly homeland,” which after years of misfortune as succumbed to a “beastly state.”<sup>500</sup> Yusuf therefore asks that a special fund be developed specifically for creating girls’ schools, continuing the Mart Shmuni project which he had been involved with since 1908 discussed in Chapter Two.

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<sup>497</sup> Naum Faiq, “Literature and Education,” *Kawkab Madnhā*, 1 no, 13, 31 Kanun al-Awwal, 1910.

<sup>498</sup> Elias Yaso, “Knowledge and Ignorance,” *Kawkab Madnhā*, 1 no 14, Kanun al-Thani, 1911.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> Ashur Yusuf, “From Whom Should We Await Our Nation’s Development,” *Murshid Athuriyon*, 1. No. 7, August, 1909, 128 and “For Women Among Women,” *Murshid Athuriyon*, vol 1. No 10, November, 1909, 134.

Naum Faiq, in his discussions regarding the advancement of women, brings forth two powerful examples to argue in favor of it, one from Syriac Christian heritage, and one from the Assyrian past. In his article “Literature and Education,” he asserts that women must also be included within the new education regime and expanded workforce to ensure the nation’s success. He clarifies the necessity of arguing against the conservative reactionaries in the community who criticize this plan and tell him “our girls study, and what will they become? If they acquire management of the household then it is enough.”<sup>501</sup> Faiq wishes to expand the opportunities available for women into new sectors that would grow through communal advancement. Although he and other authors discuss the importance of women serving as moral educators in the home in the context of *terbiye*, or education in terms of ensuring a child’s proper upbringing, he asserts that this function and other potential opportunities for women will be facilitated by proper education. To support this statement, he uses the history of the greatest figure of Syriac Christianity, Saint Ephrem, as a guiding example:

At one time in Urfa, Saint Ephrem... had women instructed in women’s schools, for the purpose of learning to recite various religious melodies, and by serving in this role, they gave much happiness to the Suryani. But every generation from that time until now, because of not paying sufficient mind, today, it has reached a point where not only girls’, but also boys’ schools are absent. <sup>502</sup>

This example was inadequate in providing real answers to this issue, and so Fauq later continued this debate through complex, two-part article drawing further back upon the nation’s history to assert a historical precedent for the participation and leadership of women in Assyrian society. In the opening article of an issue of *Kawkab Madnhā*, Faiq provides an extensive, although mythologized account of the Assyrian general Shamiram (Semiramis), a figure based

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<sup>501</sup> Naum Faiq, “Literature and Education,” *Kawkav Madnhā*, 1. No. 13, 18, April, 1910.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

on Queen Shammuramat (850-798 BCE) of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.<sup>503</sup> The historical figure of Shammuramat was the wife of king Shamshi-Adad V (d. 811 BCE), who historians had believed served regent for the first five years of the rule of her young son Adad-nirari III (810-783 BCE), although this belief is attributed by Amélie Kuhrt to a misreading of source material.<sup>504</sup> Although not as regent, she likely served in some unusual capacity, which helped foster the legend of Semiramis as a mythologized account of her life. The ancient Greeks passed down stories about this figure, including a claim that she had led a military campaign against India, and her legend was well known by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century pioneers of Assyrian archaeology.<sup>505</sup>

Faiq engages with Shamiram/Semiramis's history in its mythologized form. Describing her as an exemplary Assyrian, this series is divided into the history of her life, and the important lessons which she offers to contemporary Assyrian men and women. Shamiram is described as the wife of Ninus, the legendary founder of the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. Although wife of a powerful figure, the value of her input was not fully recognized until she took over and successfully conducted the siege of Balkh, demonstrating a military prowess beyond that of the male Assyrian generals. Upon becoming queen, she began a construction campaign throughout Mesopotamia and the Levant, and Faiq credits her with bringing the ancient Assyrians to their zenith. In this portion he imagines a speech by Shamiram to reflect his attitude towards her as a model of reform:

I came into the world as a woman, but am considered a spouse of a great man. I ruled Ninus's lands. No Assyrian before me had ever laid eyes upon the sea, but with the expansion of Assyria, through my efforts, I have brought it to see the four seas. I have conquered and settled wherever I saw fit, but not in unnecessary lands, and I have

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<sup>503</sup> Naum Faiq, "Shamīrām," *Kawkab Madnhā*, 2 no.8, 16 Kanun al-Awwal, 1911, 1.

<sup>504</sup> Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East: C. 3000-330 B.C.* (Routledge, 1995), 491.

<sup>505</sup> Mogens Trolle Larsen, *The Conquest of Assyria: Excavations in an Antique Land 1840-1860* (Routledge, 1994), 117.

cultivated barren lands, and done the impossible in building one thousand forts, and in building roads through the wilderness.<sup>506</sup>

Faiq more directly asserts these connections in the entry's conclusion, presenting an etymological analysis of her name and connecting it to “ܫܡ ܪܝܡ/shem râm” (esteemed name), as she once served as representative of the “true human virtues” that are shared by both men and women of good character. His readers must take pride in her character, for, as he writes, “we Süryani are the descendants of this remarkable woman” who offers a heroic model of virtue, wisdom, respectability, and “zeal for the nation.” Faiq asks his audience, that in community's ignorance now juxtaposed against such a figure, “are we ourselves not the reason for our shame and timidity?”<sup>507</sup> Connecting the nation's weak state to ignorance of its own its history, he emphasizes the importance of constructing schools and printing books to educate the community about its glorious past.

This sentiment, of the danger of ignorance of Assyrian history, is perhaps most critically demonstrated through the following statement by Ashur Yusuf. According to him, awareness of this history will foster a means of engaging questions of communal identity, even regarding that of “Assyrianness” among the clergy. He writes of the impact of this ignorance:

[A]t the moment, if you were asking a few basic questions about local history, geography and language, you would not receive a satisfying answer, as there is no knowledge regarding things like this. A few times I have encountered clergy I have asked this question in hopes of finding a satisfying answer: Now, are the living Süryani Assyrians? Or are they called Suryani? If it's Assyrian, why are they called Süryani? If Süryani, where sits the issue of the Kingdom of Nineveh? But it is unfortunate, I have yet to receive a persuasive answer.<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> Naum Faiq, “Shamirâm,” *Kawkab Madnho*, 2 no. 8, 16 December, 1911.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>508</sup> Ashur Yusuf, “Means of Education,” *Murshid Athuriyon*, 1 no. 1, June, 1914.

Another important step in this historical linkage is establishing a historical Assyrian identity, as broadly defined as possible, from which the contemporary subgroups had split. In an article entitled “Mental Advancement” in the journal’s third issue, Naum Faiq states the lack of importance in squabbling over nomenclature, arguing that the lack of unity stems from the community’s ignorance of its own history.<sup>509</sup> “Those Suryani who do not rely on this truth bring such [destitute] conditions to our community. Let it be known under the name Assyrian, or Aramaean, Jacobite, and from one race deliver those of ignorance unto our five: Suryani, Nestori, Chaldean, Syriac Catholic and Maronite.”<sup>510</sup> Faiq’s vision for the imagined nation bridges denominational divides and instead centers on the idea of an Assyrian community defined by its Syriac heritage. Such a definition is echoed by Ashur Yusuf, who sees the political necessity of such an Assyrian nation. In an article entitled “Let Us Possess Our Rights,” he compares the fragmented millets to the true national identity of unified Syriac Christians under an Assyrian identity. Yusuf strongly believed that that such an arrangement would give them more political power and parliamentary representation than the Armenians, underlining the immediate benefits such unity could provide within the Ottoman Empire.<sup>511</sup>

As discourses of national history developed within the journals *Kawkab Madnhā* and *Murshid Athuriyon*, their discussions on these topics became more assertive, and increasingly emphasized proper historical methodology to carefully construct their national histories. The often-disorganized manner of antiquities trade and archaeology provided a foil for the discussion of correct methods of historical analysis. This also included debate over who should be seen as

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<sup>509</sup> Naum Faiq, “Mental Advancement,” *Kawkab Madnhā*, 1 no. 3, 15 Augustos, 1910, 1.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> Ashur Yusuf, *Murshid Athuriyon*, “Let Us Possess Our Rights” 4 no. 2, 15 Teshrin-i Sani, 1912, 1.

the curators of national knowledge. Within the Assyrian movement, much of this rested on the extent to which the community needed to extend its public historical literacy beyond control of the church, or deference to the claims of its clergy. An April, 1911 article in the Diyarbakir-based Suryani journal *Şifuro (Praise)* reported a story on the discovery of an ancient stone in Harran which bears evidence to the community's presence four thousand, eight hundred years prior.<sup>512</sup> The stone, which is claimed to depict an Assyrian man and woman on its two sides, also contains an inscription which author Bashar Hilmi believed could be deciphered by local Syriac Orthodox clergy. The stone also contained the image of an egg, which the article passingly mentions as an Assyrian or Suryani motif. According to Hilmi a local stonemason who recognized the relic's value stole it to sell to the French, curtailing any opportunity for a systematic deciphering of the inscription. In a period of ongoing archaeological discovery, a claim by the Assyrian nationalist elements of the Suryani community could help lay claim to indigeneity in the region of Urfa and thus outside of the Nineveh region, in which the excavations of Assur and the ancient city of Nineveh had contributed such a great deal to Assyrian national identity.

Ashur Yusuf published a detailed critique of Hilmi's claims in his journal *Murshid Athuriyon*, in which he expounds upon the importance of the community's literacy of its own history. Rather than accepting the stone outright as evidence of Assyrian continuity, Yusuf uses this example to frame the community's historical shifts. Yusuf first clarifies that contemporary writing was conducted in cuneiform, not in written Syriac, lamenting "I wonder if in Urfa is there any Suryani priest at all who can read cuneiform?"<sup>513</sup> Yusuf explains the timeline of

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<sup>512</sup> Bishar Hilmi, "Appearance of an Ancient Relic," *Şifuro*, 11 Nisan, 1911.

<sup>513</sup> Yusuf, Ashur, [Title Illegible], *Murshid Athuriyon*, 2 vol. 5, 1911. 11.

writing systems briefly, and then states that the community's knowledge of the far ancient past is so limited as to make discerning the genders or identities of the stone's figures unreliable. The community's reliance on its clergy as the interpreters of the community's history is hobbled by their inabilities, and Yusuf asserts that lay-intellectuals such as the Suryani Intibah Cemiyetleri should be the points of contact for such public debates.<sup>514</sup>

Although Yusuf and his fellow Assyrian nationalists accepted a narrative of historical continuity to an ancient past, even years into attempts by him and others to delineate this community to his audience proved challenging. His readers, much like many contemporary Syriac Orthodox Christians, found themselves seemingly having to choose between the church-sanctioned Aramaean identity-narrative, or the lay-intellectual Assyrian identity-narrative. Again, the title of Yusuf's journal, *Murshid Athuriyon (Guide of the Assyrians)*, clarified his position to its readers. This confusion and tension was also amplified by the at times interchangeability of Assyrian and Suryani, and the etymological connection between the latter and Syria. As stated previously, Yusuf, much like Naum Faiq, worked upon a definition of Assyrian that should strive to include all parts of the Syriac Christian community on the Middle East: Syriac Orthodox and Catholic, the Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, Maronites, and Protestants who converted from these communities. Nomenclature was often treated as a matter of expediency, with Assyrian being a term understood by outsiders that links the present community to the past. An [ date ] article entitled "The Land of Assyria, Syria, and the Suryani" seeks to clarify this confusion through historical and linguistic analysis. Yusuf had posed these questions to a Maronite contact, whose answers he has edited into a multi-page entry.

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

The entry asserts that the Assyrians' historical homeland should be thought of as the Assyrian Empire's late 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE borders, thus including Mesopotamia, as well as Syria, Mount Lebanon and northern Palestine. The reader is reminded of history of the Assyrian Empire as the supreme regional power, and its control over Syria was only part of its holdings, not the location of its origin. The author states that the community's appellation comes from the use of the term Syria by the Greeks to refer to the land of the Aramaeans, and confusion comes from the perspective of the ancient Greeks' lack of familiarity with the region.<sup>515</sup> However, more significant is that, according to the author, the Aramaeans were absorbed into the Assyrian Empire, but their language, Aramaic, was linked to the Greek placename of Syria, the language thus becoming Suryani, and the people associated with it the same.<sup>516</sup>

### **The Church's Response to These Debates**

Aside from its public positions later reflected in *al-Hikmah*, the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate took internal steps to control nationalist discourse, both in distancing itself from Assyrian identity, but also to criticize and discredit figures such as Ashur Yusuf who were promoting Assyrian nationalism. It also worked to control participation of clergy in nationalist periodicals, such as chastising a senior member of the clergy for his involvement with *Murshid Athuriyon*. In July, 1909, the Patriarch sent a letter to Metropolitan Abdunur, the bishop presiding over Harput, discussing various administrative concerns. It opens with the brief order that "Ashur [Yusuf] and his followers are forbidden from entering into the affairs of our church

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<sup>515</sup> Ashur Yusuf, "Land of Assyria, Syria and the Suryani," *Murşid Aturiyon*, 3 no. 3, March, 1913.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

and its beliefs.”<sup>517</sup> Then, after stating that he recently met with and received an award from King Edward VII, he implies that the importance of his ongoing diplomatic work to benefit the Syriac Orthodox millet is threatened by the risk of social fragmentation in the homeland. In March, 1910 the Patriarch again writes to Abdunur stating that he heard news of the “convulsions among your party,” and that some were being led to change denominations as a result of this disorder.<sup>518</sup> In another letter sent the same day to the deacon Istefan in Harput, the Patriarch demands a response on the local situation, and blames the “Protestant Ashur” as the reason for discord, and wants him forbidden from teaching in the church.

Matran Abdunur, however, made the mistake of running afoul of the Patriarch through his efforts to reform the community. The Patriarchate’s scathing letter to the bishop admonishes him, demanding “how many times have you been advised to stay silent regarding the government, and to change your thoughts on that which the public rejects” and that “now it is necessary for you to inform us how many among you, and how many affiliated with you among the *aymaq* speak of Ashur.”<sup>519</sup> The Patriarch’s frustration with Abdunur increased upon receiving word that he was willingly contributing to Ashur Yusuf’s publication. Having received a copy of an article Abdunur had wrote about on the community’s history, an effort applauded by Naum Faiq, the Patriarch specifically warns him to cease his behavior. Abdunur’s article submitted to *Murshid Athuriyon* stated that he had previously opposed the activity of the Suryani Intibah Committee in Harput. However, he had changed his mind and was now officially recognizing them and offering support of their activities, and therefore wrote an official

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<sup>517</sup> “Letter to Matran Abdunur,” 17 Temmuz [July], 1909, CFMM 000877/12r.

<sup>518</sup> “Letter to Matran Abdunur,” 25 Mart [March] 1910, CFMM 000877/18r.

<sup>519</sup> This could also be translated as “... how many affiliated with you among the public speak of Assyria.” 16 May 1910, CFMM 000877/20r.

statement for the journal to clarify his position in allowing those who work for the betterment of the community to use church spaces.<sup>520</sup> According to the Patriarch, writing for such a periodical with his own name “is not appropriate for the rank of [a Metropolitan]” so he must “abandon such activities entirely,” and if he does not cease such work then he must “cease [his] metropolitanship” and identifies who would replace him.<sup>521</sup> Another letter repeats to Abdunur that Ashur is not considered honorable or upright in the view of the church.<sup>522</sup>

Although it would eventually take three years to come to fruition, the Patriarchate began its own effort to create a controlled publication forum to reach the public in 1910. In July the Patriarch wrote to Hanna Chuqqi, supervisor of the printing press at Deyrulzafaran, asking if he could organize a publication in the name of the monastery. In 1913, after receiving a new printing press, the church established the Deyrulzafaran Press, and began publishing theological texts, collections of religious poetry, and then its own journal, *al-Hikma*. Unlike *Murshid Athuriyon and Kawkab Madnhā*, whose authors wrote in Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Syriac, and even Kurdish, *al-Hikma* is almost entirely in Arabic, indicating an intended audience of educated Syriac Orthodox Christians spanning Southeast Anatolia, Iraq, and the Levant as well as the diaspora. *Al-Hikma*'s attitude towards the foundation of the community differs significantly from that of *Murshid Athuriyon* and *Kawkab Madnho*. The church, when discussing language of identity refers to the community as Suryani and of Aramaean origin, but gives little to no importance to the pre-Christian past. For the Patriarchate, the foundation of Suryani identity is found within their early religious figures, and uses symbols of the Christian past to bind the

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<sup>520</sup> Abdunur, *Murshid Athuriyon*, 2 no. 8, August 1910.

<sup>521</sup> “Letter to Matran Abdunur,” 30 September 1910, CFMM 000877/27v.

<sup>522</sup> “Letter to Matran Abdunur,” 15 June 1911, CFMM 000877/39v.

integrity of the community and to model its rejuvenation and moral guidance under the Church's religious and educational authority. Thus, whereas figures such as Naum Faiq and Ashur Yusuf sought answers for the community's ills both within its Christian history and before, the church itself limited its imagined golden age to the intellectual heavyweights of the early history of Christianity, and presented moral rejuvenation as the solution to contemporary problems.

For the Patriarchate's journal *al-Hikma*, the concern for the community's history is to use it as a guide to build a moral society alongside the Syriac Orthodox *millet's* rejuvenation. Although questions of morals and proper Christian education underlie discussions of the foundations of education, editors and contributors to *al-Hikma* discuss the importance of history education for fostering communal zeal and identity. One article, for example, advocating the equal importance of building both libraries and schools, asserts that students should avoid reading books or stories which may corrupt morals. The unnamed author makes a curious point about this, specifically telling his audience that youth should not read "short stories of Firuz Shah or Bani Hilal," a reference to the biographies of Firuz Shah Tughlag (1309-1388) and the famous Arab epic poem *Sīrat Bani Hilāl*, a story of a Bedouin tribe's migration from Arabia to North Africa. For the unnamed author of this article, reading the history of another group is a distraction from students' intended purpose, and this lack of communal and religious zeal is itself a moral failing. Instead, students should focus their reading on communal history, for "it invigorates one towards strengthening their nations... developed nations have advanced through knowing their ancient history."<sup>523</sup>

The first issue of *al-Hikma* firmly establishes three main themes: vocal support for the Ottoman government and desire to maintain good standing; the Suryani as an ethno-religious

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<sup>523</sup> Author not indicated, "al-Muṭāla'a," *al-Hikma*, 1 no 17, April, 1914.

community; and the central role of the Syriac Christian tradition in remedying their ills. The first editorial, entitled “Boasting of Fathers and Grandfathers,” appears immediately after the journal’s introductory essay. Its first paragraph contends that one of the most severe illnesses plaguing the “East” is “the disease of prideful bragging about one’s ancestors... for it sows laziness and apathy in the soul and discourages honesty and work.”<sup>524</sup> This pride, demonstrated most strongly among the Arabs and Suryani, shares similarities in celebrating the “rejuvenation of the world with science, literature, and books,” and thus not without merit. This pride, however, stems from not properly engaging with these luminaries of the past, whose works now sit in Europe and America. These ancestors who are to be studied and emulated, the reader is reminded, “are those of your Orthodox denomination.” But that simply bragging of their existence will not bring back their glories. The contemporary Suryani, who are “lying on the rug of laziness,” are doing nothing to improve their lot. The article continues with a series of admonishments comparing the Suryani to an ill patient finding peace of mind in the mere existence of past healthier days.

The editors of *al-Hikma* routinely demonstrate a diplomatic tone when speaking negatively about topics unrelated to the ignorance of the community or of the machinations of the Catholic Church. In this article the editor, clearly criticizing the Assyrian Nationalist journals of Ashur Yusuf, and perhaps Naum Faiq, decries that “we see that some of our newspapers strike the chord of prideful boasting, and our poets focus their poems on this subject, lamenting about our miserable condition,” criticizing their writings as a useless endeavor for actually helping the Suryani.<sup>525</sup> What is needed instead of such boasts of the past are for these writers to publish

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<sup>524</sup> “al-Tafâkhr bi-laba` wa-lajdad,” *al-Hikma*, 1 no. 1, 14 Ab, 1914: 6.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

articles that address the social and moral issues of the nation. Rather than focusing on figures such as Shamiram, the journal created a series of didactic articles related to the writings and biographies of prominent theologians of the Syriac Christian tradition. These articles, entitled “From Every Tree, Fruit,” were written by then monk and future Metropolitan Hanna Dolabani, one of the senior luminaries of the 20<sup>th</sup> century church. This series provides quotes from a wide range of Church Fathers and luminaries of the Syriac Christian tradition on topics such as theology, piety, and morality. It is important to note that Dolabani was not an opponent of Assyrian Nationalism, and maintained communication with Naum Faiq, but whose role as both publisher, Syriac Orthodox theology instructor, and encyclopedic command of the Syriac Christian tradition coincided with this project.

The clearest indication of *al-Hikma*’s focus on boundary making against Catholics is the great celebratory language surrounding episodes of returning clergy.<sup>526</sup> These articles note the return “to the bosom of the church,” of for example an ex-bishop named Iyawanis. Their return from the Catholic Church to the Syriac Orthodox Church is compared to the dove returning to Noah’s Ark (Gen. 9:8). The most significant of these events was the return of the previously deposed Patriarch Abdulmesih (r. 1895-1908), who was removed from his position under vague circumstances and then traveled to India.<sup>527</sup> In July, 1914, the editors published their great elation that the ex-patriarch, who had joined the Catholic Church in an attempt to regain status, had “returned to the bosom of his mother, the Syriac Orthodox Church,” and would reside at the Patriarchal See of Deyrulzafaran. The following issue states that the Syrian Catholic Bishop of

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<sup>526</sup> “Community News,” *al-Hikma*, 1 no. 16, 30 Adar [March], 1914, 239.

<sup>527</sup> The reason for his being removed remains controversial. His reign began within weeks of the 1895 massacres of his community in the city of Diyarbakir, to which he traveled to convince the government to gain the Suryani’s protection. The trauma of this event severely impacted his health and may have led to alcoholism and unstable behavior. For the Ottoman government’s perspective see BOA DH.TMIK 214.4.

Mardin, Ignace Gabriel I Tappouni, had attempted to bring Abdulmesih back in person. In the journal's final issue, it concludes this story by accusing the Catholic bishop of having lied to local government officials and claiming that the Syriac Orthodox Church had kidnapped the ex-patriarch, and that an official delegation traveled to the monastery to determine the veracity of this claim.

These discourses of history and communal past in the Late Ottoman Süryani community engaged various understandings of national identity, at times at odds with one another. The Syriac Orthodox Church, embedded within the political-religious millet system, treated attempts by figures such as Ashur Yusuf as threatening both the church and the community's well-being, and saw no advantage in such discourses, focusing instead on denominational boundaries and moral-religious guidance as part of the community's rejuvenation.

### **Kurdish Journalism**

Contemporary Kurdish journalism, while similarly addressing questions of identity and national purpose, incorporated criticism of the state of the state, political mobilization, and a unified religious identity as a cornerstone of national identity. Scholarship on these journals has often debated the extent to which they can be considered as advocating Kurdish Nationalism, or if the desire to remain subjects of the caliphate reflected a commitment to the Ottoman state and its institutions. Deniz Ekici's extensive discourse analysis of the journals *Kurdistan*, *Roji Kurd* and *Hetawi Kurd* demonstrates that arguments against their nationalist nature stems largely from overreliance on Ottoman-language entries in these journals due to the Kurdish-language illiteracy of many scholars of the subject.<sup>528</sup> An even cursory reading of Kurdish-language

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<sup>528</sup> Deniz Ekici, *Kurdish Identity, Islamism, and Ottomanism: the Making of a Nation in Kurdish Journalistic Discourse (1898-1914)* (London: Lexington Books, 2021).

articles and commentaries in *Kurdistan* displays a more assertive nationalist tone and more derogatory language against the figures surrounding Abdulhamid.

For Kurdish nationalists, like their Assyrian counterparts, the contemporary community, perceived to be in as in a state of destitution was framed in opposition to a golden age, requiring construction of a narrative of historical past and communication to the public. Similarly as well, as discussed in Chapter Two, education serves as one of the most common themes in these journals, some of which were the products of organizations whose mission statements center upon education reform. However, while Suryani lay-intellectuals could easily draw upon readily available pre-Christian symbols as a means to bridge denominational subdivisions in search of an ethno-historic nationalism, Kurdish nationalist intellectuals were largely indifferent to promotion of pre-Islamic identity foundation. Central to assertions of true Kurdishness and the virtues of the Kurdish nation were discussions of proper religious observance, used both to distance Kurdish representatives from the Hamidian Massacres, and then to assert a unique national identity reflective of their uncorrupted, Shāfi‘ī Islam.<sup>529</sup>

Recent scholarship on the topic of Kurdish religious nationalism has demonstrated the ways in which assertions of Kurdish religiosity were used by nationalist intellectuals to support claims to represent the Kurdish community. Klein (2010) discusses the ways in which the Bedirxan family, the self-appointed custodians of the Kurdish nationalist movement, used religious rhetoric to distance themselves from the Hamidian Cavalry. This rhetoric focused largely on religious obligations to protect Christians. However, as argued in Chapter One of this dissertation, broad analysis of the newspaper *Kurdistan* indicates a popular understanding within Kurdish elite not aligned with the government that the combination of abuse of Christians and

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<sup>529</sup> Kamal Soleimani, *Islam and Competing Nationalisms in the Middle East, 1876-1926* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

the indifference of Sultan Abdulhamid posed a real existential threat by readily offering a *casus belli* for a Russian invasion.

### ***Kurdistan***

As discussed in the first chapter, the journal *Kurdistan* (1898-1902), first published in Cairo and later in Europe, marked the beginning of Kurdish journalism. The journal's first issue immediately engages with symbols of national history and connects them to the theme of proper religious behavior and Muslim leadership, with the first articles framing calls for education as religious duties, and discussing the importance of seeing the community as part of the Muslim ummah. The first editor, Miqdad Midhet Bedirxan, introduces himself as the son of Bedirxan of Botan, reminding them of his prestige, and discusses his family as descendants of the famed 7<sup>th</sup> century Muslim general Khalid ibn al-Walid.<sup>530</sup> The first national symbol employed in this journal is serial of the epic poem *Mem û Zîn* printed in installments between issues two and thirty of the journal. The journal begins the first entry by reminding the readers of the history of Ahmedi Xani's written version of the text, dated to 1695, and describes it as "a story of love between two youths, from which a great deal of purpose, deep emotion, and wisdom emerges."<sup>531</sup> The choice of publishing this poem serves multiple utilitarian and ideological purposes. First, this poem exists throughout the region's oral tradition, with documented versions in the variety of Kurdistan's communities, including versions in Surayt/Turoyo, Armenian, and Arabic, and this familiarity may have been a useful point of interest for readers.<sup>532</sup> Additionally,

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<sup>530</sup> Miqdad Midhat Bedirxan, "Bi-smi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm," *Kurdistan*, 1 no. 1, 9 Nisan 1314 [21 April, 1898], 1.

<sup>531</sup> "Mem û Zin," *Kurdistan*, 1 no. 2, 9 Nisan 1314, 23 Nisan 1314 [5 May, 1898], 4.

<sup>532</sup> On the many oral and written versions of *Mem û Zîn* in Kurdish, Armenian, Arabic, and Turoyo along with its folkloristic and linguistic characteristics, see Michael Chyet, *And a Thornbush Sprang Up Between Them: Studies on Mem u Zin, a Kurdish Romance*, (Doctoral Dissertation: University of California, Berkeley, 1991).

it holds immense symbolic value to Kurds, serving as the national epic of the Kurds, and the common interpretation that in its written version the failed love of the lovers Mem and Zin, whose tragic end was caused by the villain Beko, represents the division of the Kurdish nation. In addition to centering Mem û Zîn as a symbol of the nation, the journal turns its attention towards what it sees as the paramount symbol of its glorious past, *Şalāḥ al-Dīn* Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb (Saladin), who is examined at multiple points as a figure of immense importance to Kurdishness and Kurdish nationalism. An article, “Selahedînê Eyûbî,” seeks to assert him as both a model of Kurdishness and of Islamic political and military authority. Introducing him as a Kurd from the Rawadid tribe, and at multiple points restating his Kurdish origin, the article states the long-lasting physical influence he has had on the Middle East, and his renown among Muslims and non-Muslims, mentioning a speech given in his honor at his tomb by the Emperor of Germany.<sup>533</sup> In addition to his foreign recognition, Saladin’s importance to Kurds is also connected to his legacy, the Ayyubids, whom the author asserts reigned over the current areas of Cizre, Diyarbakir and Mosul, clearly a juxtaposition between a historical state located in the Kurdish heartland and the condition of the modern Kurdish community. This theme also sets up the implied comparison between the well-respected and just Saladin and the tyrant Sultan Abdulhamid. The entry ends with the call to action, “I pray to God that among the Kurds, two or three men like this sultan are born, so that they will save not just Kurds but all Muslims!”<sup>534</sup>

Other figures from the history of Islam are also utilized to critique the present situation. In a scathing article criticizing Sultan Abdulhamid and his rule, the author Abdurrahman Bedirxan, relates a story about the reign of Caliph Ali ibn Abu Talib, who at night in his official

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<sup>533</sup> Miqdad Midhat Bedirxan, “Salâhidînê Eyûbî, *Kurdistan*, 1 no. 15., 22 Nisan 1315 [4 May, 1899], 3.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

chambers extinguished a candle immediately after concluding state discussions, as he “cannot expend the property of the state in personal matters.”<sup>535</sup> These two models of a just Muslim ruler thus provide a model for criticism of both the destitution of the Kurdish nation, and to question the legitimacy of the Sultan.

As the journal continues, its editors, Miqdad Midhat and Abdurrahman Bedirxan, begin to use it to narrate a clearly defined national homeland and to draw upon ancient history, albeit for different aims than their Assyrian counterparts. In an Ottoman Turkish language article entitled “Kurds and Kurdistan,” the editors tell their readers that the Kurdish nation exists like an “unknown genius whose brilliance remains overlooked.” Despite Kurds’ innate qualities of “intelligence, insight, bravery and industriousness, “their names are rarely encountered in world history,” with the world “unaware of the general state of this noble people.”<sup>536</sup> The author states that their homeland, or “lands of the nation’s primordial circulation” is composed of the regions of Erzurum, Diyarbakir, Mosul, Ardalán, Kermanshah, the Lower Zab, Bitlis, Batman and Lake Van, firmly placing their center in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, rather than limiting it to the Zagros Mountains. Details of their origins, however, are not found in ancient Kurdish sources themselves, but rather from ancient Assyrian and Chaldean archaeological sources. The article then presents the theory that Kurds are the descendants of the Kardouchoi, an argument that later gained greater prominence in Kurdish nationalist ideology seeking to establish direct lineage to region’s ancient past, and thus a claim of indigeneity. For Mikdad Midhat Bedirxan’s purposes, however, this name shows the inherent qualities of the Kurds, saying that the word “Kardu”

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<sup>535</sup> Miqdad Midhat Bedirxan, [Untitled], *Kurdistan*, 1 no. 16, 24 Temmuz [5 August, 1899], 1315.

<sup>536</sup> Miqdad Midhat Bedirxan, “Kurdler ve Kurdistan,” *Kurdistan*, 2 no. 24, 19 Auđustos 1316 [1 September, 1900] in M. Emîn Bozarşlan, *Kurdistan: Rojnama Kurđi ya Peşîn* (Uppsala: Weşanxana Deng, 1991), 431.

means “hero” or “valiant one,” and that “this is proof of the innate valiant nature” of the Kurdish nation.<sup>537</sup>

Just as Assyrians, who felt they had little control over their material and intellectual history, had to rely on outside voices to support their claims, here Kurdish nationalist writers are also showing the necessity to rely on European scholarship as well as indicating the sense of validation gained from it. The author quotes foreign researchers’ praise of the beauty of the Kurdish people, stated to be “the same level as ancient Greece,” and, quotes Austen Henry Layard, the groundbreaking archaeologist of Assyria as attesting to the Kurds’ ancient presence in the region, evidenced by how “the Kurds invented... the ‘kelek’” which, “has not undergone any change for many centuries.”<sup>538</sup> This reference, made as well by Ashur Yusuf, indicates the ways in which claims to ownership of Kurdistan’s material culture are complicated by the long, shared histories of the region’s inhabitants.

### ***Kürd Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi***

Following the cessation of *Kurdistan* in 1902, it would take until 1908 when, like the Assyrians, the relaxation of publishing restrictions enabled new outlets for Kurdish nationalists to communicate their ideologies. Some journals such as Diyarbakir-based *Peyman*, and *Amid-I Sevda*, and Istanbul-based *Serbestî* included contributions from figures affiliated with the Kurdish nationalist movement. However, the scope of this chapter is to focus primarily on Kurdish-language journals, which indicate a more selective target audience.<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 426.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid.

<sup>539</sup> *Peyman*, for example, contains one Kurdish-language article, which is a lengthy celebration of the removal of Sultan Abdulhamid and the discussion of the hardships he has placed upon Ottoman society. The article is also

*Kürd Teavün ve Terakkî Gazetesi*, the journal of the *KTTC* discussed in Chapter Two, consists of nine issues published between December, 1908 and January, 1909. Compared to its predecessor *Kurdistan*, this journal more strongly focuses on language as a core of Kurdish national identity, coupled alongside Islam, displaying the Kurds as one nation among the Muslim ummah. The journal contains an Ottoman language and Kurdish language section, the latter entitled “Our Kurdish Language,” with articles in Kurmanji and in the Sorani dialect of Baban.<sup>540</sup> A multi-issue series of articles by Said Nursi entitled, “The Advice of Bediuzzaman Mollah Said Kurdi,” provide clear statements of the religious foundation of Kurdish national identity, and the ways in which non-Muslim Kurdish-speaking communities were excluded, primarily relating to the question of whether the Ezîdîs could be considered part of the Kurdish nation. He writes that the three “jewels” of Kurdish society are “Islam, for which the blood of thousands upon thousands of [our] martyrs has been given,” the second being humanity, and the third the strength of the Kurdish nation.<sup>541</sup> The jewels are opposed to the “three enemies:” poverty, illiteracy “evidenced by how thousands cannot even read a single newspaper,” and disunity, allowing “the government, in its cruelty, to oppress us.”<sup>542</sup> Various authors express optimism in the possibilities of the post-Abdulhamid government, one author stating “until now, those tyrannical administrators had been set upon us... but thank God, freedom has come, a freedom like Mount Qaf, descending before all destruction.”<sup>543</sup> The “choking” oppression of the

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translated into Ottoman. The Kurdish article describes the Sultan’s taxes as a “qamçûr,” a Mongolian loan-word in Kurdish meaning a heavy animal tax. The Ottoman article does not translate this term.

<sup>540</sup> Baban is the region of modern-day Suleymaniyya and Kirkuk.

<sup>541</sup> Said-i Kurdi, “Bediuzzaman Mullah Said-i Kurdi’nin Nasayihî,” *Kürd Teavün ve Terakkî Gazetesi [KTTG]*, 1 no. 1, 22 Teshrin-i Sani, 1324 [5 December, 1908], 7.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid.

<sup>543</sup> Seyyah Ehmed Shewqi, “Ey Gelî Kurdan,” *KTTG*, 1 no. 1, 22 Teshrin-i Sani, 1324 [5 December, 1908], 7.

Abdulhamid regime is described as having corrupted the religious core of Kurdish national identity, pressuring Kurds into disunity and activities forbidden in religious law, giving rise to a “beastly name placed upon the Kurds.”<sup>544</sup>

This commitment to Islam becomes a central theme of Kurdish virtue and history, often set against the un-Islamic abuses of the Abdulhamid regime. In an article extolling the homeland, author Seyyah Ahmad Shawqi, writing from Van, celebrates the commitment to the nation shown by the journal’s organization in Istanbul, stating “they embody the name of the ancestors of the Kurmanc... how many martyrs have Kurdish ancestors given for Kurdistan, and each of those martyrs was an Iskender.”<sup>545</sup> The article calls on the current generation to exhibit the same zeal, but that the new regime will respect their effort, saying “are you not men? Yes, you are, you are chivalrous... and know the Constitution says nothing against the shariah, today is a day of truth when all can work for their religion, their nation, and their homeland.”<sup>546</sup>

The question of who participates in the Kurdish nation is thus defined by self-identity and with Islam as a boundary-making binary category. This attitude is further reinforced in an editorial that specifies “the name of our nation [millet] is the Kurmanj. The Kurmanj are all one... our memleket is the Ottoman state, and we are Ottoman subjects. Turk, Kurmanj, Filleh, Jew, Ezidi, Nesturi [Church of the East], blessed as one group in the land of the Ottomans, together as one. Our name, and that of others, is not ‘Ottoman,’ but our memleket is the Ottoman memleket.”<sup>547</sup> Two points are significant about this statement: first, that a distinction is made of the Kurdish-speaking Ezidis as a separate nation, and second, that a plurality of national

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<sup>544</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>545</sup> Seyyah Ehmed Shewqi, “Geli Welatiya” *KTTG*, 1 no. 3, 6 Kanun-i Evvel, 1324 [19 December, 1908], 16.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> Author Unspecified, “Kurdçe Lisanımız,” *KTTG*, 1 no. 4, 13 Kanun-i Evvel [26 December, 1908], 1324, 29.

identities is treated as the basis of an ideal Ottoman state, rather than an Ottoman national identity.<sup>548</sup>

### ***Rojî Kurd***

The Istanbul-based members of the *Hevi Cemiyeti* continued forming these ideas into a more cohesive idea of identity and national past, present, and future, presenting them in their journal *Rojî Kurd (Kurdish Sun)*. The journal's first issue, the cover of which is a depiction of Saladin, devotes a great deal of attention towards identifying national history and communal boundary. The inaugural issue's first article addresses these themes, stating that the Kurds have entered into a "total amnesia" of their own history, and in doing so have denied themselves both their rightful pride and future. This amnesia is placed against the need for national pride, It will promote education, and remove the Kurds from their destitution, for, "a nation that does not possess its true and full history is like a nation that never lived."<sup>549</sup> According to the author Abdullah Cevdet (1869-1932), a former member of the CUP who split with it in 1902 for its Turkish nationalist attitudes, "a nation's ideal for its future is in its past," but, according to him, this history must be written by the members of the nation who can form it into a meaningful national narrative and understanding of its Golden Age. Aside from Şeref-i Bitlisî's *Şerefname*, according to Cevdet, "we [Kurds] should all together admit that we do not possess a single

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<sup>548</sup> Ezidis were treated as a separate community by Kurdish nationalists until the 1920s, sparked in part by the necessity of Ezidi support in uprisings organized by the *Xoybûn* organization, and in a move away from ethno-religious identity towards an ethno-linguistic identity. CF Sims, "Claiming the Ezidis," 2020. The division of Christian is also notable: the Arabic-origin word "Filleh" is used to denote all Christians, but a division is made between Filleh and "Nestorians"/Assyrians. Please see introduction of this dissertation for further discussion of this phenomenon.

<sup>549</sup> Abdullah Cevdet, "Bir Hitab," *Rojî Kurd*, 1 no. 1. 6 Haziran 1329 [19 June, 1913], 3.

history book.”<sup>550</sup> This raises the question of which symbols would thus resonate among the broad Kurdish population.

Elsewhere in *Rojî Kurd* discussions occur about the Kurds’ ancient past. Most direct is a clear narrative linking Kurds to Assyrians offered by the author Xezal in an article entitled “The Age of Our Forefathers, The Present, and the Future.”<sup>551</sup> In it he connects the Kurds to another Broze Age people, the ancient Assyrians, a claim contradicted by other authors who make clear that religion sets the meaningful boundary of their communal identity. Unlike the narrative presented in *Kurdistan*, this theory is mostly concerned with questions of how to reconcile contemporary interfaith relations, and to identify the influence of external forces upon the trajectory of Kurdish history. The article opens by imploring its readers that “the most necessary thing of all is that we know of the time of our ancestors... those great figures who are unknown become dead... and is up to us alone that in a few years we are not killed as well.”<sup>552</sup> Xezal, believing the foundation of the national awakening is deep awareness by youth of the past, “we and the people of people of the Kurmanc will learn it.” He describes the genesis of the Kurds as the following: “We Kurds, and the Christians [Fileh] together go back to the time of the Assyrians. The Assyrians were a grand, powerful empire so much so that none could rise up against it, in the same manner today that some might say of Europe.” Thus, at its pre-emergence, the symbol of Assyria as a native and powerful state is, ironically, juxtaposed against the present. Still, “however long a man lives, in the end is death, just like a state,” giving no additional historical detail of the Assyrian Empire. The meaningful change occurred as follows:

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<sup>550</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>551</sup> Xezal, “Dema Kalê Me Çaxa Me Dema Tê,” *Rojî Kurd*, 1 no. 1. 6 Haziran 1329 [19 June, 1913], 26.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid.

At that time the Prophet Isa came to the world, and the Christians and Kurmanc did not yet split; after Isa, the Companions of the Prophet taught the religion of Muhammad to the Assyrians. Some from Assyria went up the mountains with them... and are called Kurmanc, and some stayed and are called Fileh.<sup>553</sup>

The subtext of this, of course, is that religious change created meaningful communal divisions. However, it also serves as a cautionary tale, for whatever virtue this has created through Islam, it is recognized as creating cultural and linguistic assimilation of what became the Kurmanc in the past, and a neglect of the literary qualities of Kurdish. In the journal's final issue, Silemani Ebdulkerim, who used the penname Kurdî, penned an article in Sorani entitled "The Origin and Generations of Kurds," parts from Xezal's argument, instead asserting an Aryan origin of Kurds, relaying that this is based on scholarship developing in Europe.<sup>554</sup> This narrative did appear to hold much influence at the time, but is related in a post-WWI article in the journal *Jîn*, which analyzes the "national myths, based on real events" within Kurdish history.<sup>555</sup> This later article proposes a theory based on European scholarship that the Kurds are to be considered Japhetite, descendants of Noah's son Japheth, or as Aryan, but not as Semites or Turanians, all of which a presented linguistic and racial categories, with Semites including the Assyrians. The author also discounts purported claims in European scholarship that Kurds have the physical characteristics of the ancient Assyrians, characterizing such work as a "strange science" that overlooks the mixing of the peoples of the region over time, a statement seemingly in contradiction with the interest in the Aryan origin narrative.

Even if discussions on the boundaries of the community through discourses of religious identity facilitated meaningful national boundary making, these authors recognized the scarcity

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>554</sup> Said-i Kurdî, "Êsl û Neslî Kurd," *Rojî Kurd*, 1 no. 4, 30 Ağustos 1329 [12 September, 1913], 18.

<sup>555</sup> Kurdiyê Bitlîsî, "Kürdler İranlı Değil Midir?" *Jîn*, 1 No. 18, 8 Mayıs 1335, [8 May, 1919], 1.

of historical sources upon which they could rely, and the ways in which this causes others to discount the Kurds' history. The Kurdish concern of being seen as a people without a history was, according to these journals, an insult leveled against them by opponents. A powerful defense against these claims had appeared in *Kurd Teaviin ve Terakkî Gazetesi*'s final issue. In a particularly colorful Ottoman Turkish-language rebuttal, an author identified as "Ahmed, one of Şerefhan's Children in Bitlis," responded to an article in the Thessalonica-based journal *Kalendar*.<sup>556</sup> Hilmi Efendi, the author of the *Kalendar* article, claimed to have spent five years in Bitlis as a government official, and offered his opinions regarding Kurdish practice of Islam, Kurdish society, and Kurdish history. Regarding religion, Hilmi claimed that Kurds only follow a ritualistic form of Islam, with little understanding of the shariah, broadly only understanding that "alcohol is the root of all evil," and criticizing their strange interpretation of proscribed duties. Although no detail is provided, Hilmi took issue with particular practices in the region of Mutki regarding circumcision and cleanliness. It is likely this is a reference to the practice of *kirve* or *kirîvatî* (Ar. قربية), a circumcision ritual in which a young child is circumcised over the knee of their *kirîv*, establishing kinship between the two families, a custom integral to local social relations.<sup>557</sup> Hilmi also states that religious authority is limited to a few Qadiri and Naqshbandi sheikhs in the countryside, whose popularity he apparently considers a reflection of the Kurds' lack of urbane, sophisticated, and orthodox Islam. Ahmed rejects these claims entirely, but offers little detail aside from stating the piety of the Kurds, comparing them to corrupt government officials such as Hilmi.

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<sup>556</sup> The author's name is a reference to Şerefhan Bitlisî, author of the *Şerefname*. Ahmad, of the Sons of Şeref Han, "Waraqâ," *KTTG*, 1 no. 9, 17 Kanun-i Sani, 1324 [30 January, 1909], 83.

<sup>557</sup> This practice is often used to bind communities across religious boundaries in which intermarriage would not be socially permissible.

Hilmi's second accusation is that the Kurds are by their nature prone to banditry and lawlessness. Ahmed counters this claim by arguing that, although many Kurds are deemed bandits, it is a logical response to the tyranny of government officials, who "would torture you, and burn down your house for the theft of a sheep."<sup>558</sup> For Ahmed this reflects a greater problem, that Kurds are treated as second-class by central officials, and have had no recourse but violence to solve any grievances with the government. He declares "damn the officials who harm our homeland [watan] and destroy the nation's *namus*," or honor.

Ahmed's most extensive critique is against Hilmi's "incorrect and disrespectful" claims about Kurdish history. Hilmi writes, while living in Bitlis, he was shown "a historical work named *Şerefhan* which explained the so-called historical situation of the Kurds. It is saddening that even Hilmi Effendi could not understand how far off he was from historical conditions."<sup>559</sup> Hilmi's claim clearly refers to the *Şerefname*, the late 16th-century Persian-language chronicle attributed to Şerefhan Bitlisî (1543-1604). Ahmed cannot hold back his outrage at this, but in his rebuke makes clear that the *Şerefname*, considered the first chronicle dedicated to the history of the Kurds, was not to be seen as a useful historical source, but rather biographies of famous Kurds better served such a purpose. First, he claims that there is no text called the 'Şerefhan,' but rather that is "a person, one of the old rulers buried in Bitlis," and that furthermore the author was simply a member of the same noble house. Additionally, "there is not a single word about the history of the Kurds, it is a book that presents biographies of rulers as legendary stories."<sup>560</sup> Showing the extent to which this struck a nerve, he continues "[Hilmi] was not satisfied with

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<sup>558</sup> Ibid.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

insults towards the people of Kurdistan, so he spoke out against the very tomb of the respectable Şerefhan.”<sup>561</sup> He continues, “if Hilmi Efendi had been concerned to know historical facts, he would have seen the social and historical conditions of the Kurds from another source, from the life of the great Saladin, an eternal source of pride for the Kurds... or from the valor and social values Kurds show in Evliya Çelebi’s *Seyahatname*.”<sup>562</sup> Again, Saladin is used as an example of true Kurdishness, and Ahmed’s writing also indicates the challenges of narrating Kurdish history at the time using Kurdish-origin sources.

Another indication of the sparsity of a symbolic reserve is the discussion of the role of women in society and within the Kurdish nationalist movement, which, although a central point Kurdish nationalism today, received little attention early on. As discussed previously, Assyrian nationalists who were at odds with conservative elements found little of immediate value from within Syriac Christian history on this topic, but could reach back to a mythologized Assyrian golden age to draw upon Shamiram as a representative of women in the communal past and a proscriptive model for national future. In the case of Kurdish periodicals, women are often discussed in terms of national honor as real or potential victims of government oppression or of Russian invasion. Although the post-war Istanbul-based *Kürd Kadınlar Teali Cemiyeti* (Kurdish Society for the Advancement of Women) sought to raise the status of Kurdish women, little direct attention to this topic is presented within these periodicals, in a manner similar to other national movements of the period.<sup>563</sup> One source from the late 1920s, an era of a beginning

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<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

<sup>563</sup> Some have mistakenly pointed to the existence of a post-war journal entitled *Jîn* as an indication of an established feminist discourse in Kurdish nationalism, a claim which indicates the ongoing challenges of Kurdish-language literacy in the field of Kurdish Studies, as this claim confuses the word *jîn* (woman) and *jîn* (life). For more information on the *Kürd Kadınları Teâli Cemiyeti* see Rohat Alakom, *Kürd Kadınları Teâli Cemiyeti*, (Istanbul: Avesta, 2019).

paradigm shift in Kurdish Nationalism, is a short story centered on female characters. This 1927 short story, by Celadet Ali Bedirxan is entitled “Ber Tevna Mehfüre” (At the Weaver’s Loom) and was later published in the journal *Hawar*. Written shortly after the failed Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925, it presents a family of a woman whose agha husband was killed in the war, leaving her, her two daughters and son impoverished and forcing them to flee to an unnamed Turkish city. There, the daughters come to realize the importance of enduring extreme physical hardships to earn money in order to send their brother to school, so that he and other educated men will finally lead the Kurds to victory against their oppressors. The immediacy of the impending crisis, and the extreme violence facing the community give this story a tone of urgency and expediency.

Within *Rojî Kurd* is an article dedicated entirely this topic, entitled “The Topic of Women Among the Kurds.”<sup>564</sup> The author, Erganî Madenli frames the issue of women in Kurdistan as one of identifying their unique qualities vis-a-vis other communities, their role within Kurdish social life, and their purpose in the improvement of the Kurdish nation. The article begins with overtures to the “grand and pleasing strides” that women have made in Europe, America, and Japan in the workforce and in education, proclaiming “there are thinkers who call our age the ‘century of the woman.’”<sup>565</sup> For the Kurds, the topic is also “important and difficult, needing serious inquiry and discussion,” and begins by framing the lives of Kurdish women in rural and domestic spaces. Women throughout the Ottoman Empire, it states, are suffering from a “deplorable material and moral condition,” being the “victims of the ignorant pride of men” and “whose souls are under the influence of jinns, fairtales, and incomprehensible

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<sup>564</sup> Erganî Madenli, “Kürdlerde Kadın Meselesi,” *Rojî Kurd*, 1 no. 4, 30 Ağustos 1329 [12 September, 1913]: 10-12.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid.

superstitions.”<sup>566</sup> However, using using rural Kurdish women as his model for proper female Kurdishness he states, “the place of women in peasant life... is pleasing. Women are venerated among the Kurds.”<sup>567</sup> Comparing these women to other communities, he states “cowardice and excessive fussiness, a distinctive feature of women [of the Ottoman Empire], are rare in Kurdish women, who, although they are ignorant, possess strong character” and work in village agriculture and trade in local towns, “at a level close to that of men.”<sup>568</sup> Central to this discourse is the role of women as symbols of a community’s honor. He writes “if there is an attack on any woman of a village, the whole village will fight for sake of the single woman,” and states Kurdish traditional wearing of the hijab is suitable, that “Kurdish women will not be imprisoned in thick and tiring sacks.” However, these qualities have deteriorated, along with Kurdish “original character,” in urban populations, and he treats these as the focus of necessary reform. <sup>569</sup>

Madenî recognizes that improvements are necessary for the betterment of the Kurdish nation, and that “Kurdish youth should take into account that nations’ progress is proportionate to the status of their women.”<sup>570</sup> However, similar to the more conservative discourses in Assyrian Nationalism, the education of women is seen as useful for improving the household, both with women being able to assert themselves in issues of marriage and household management, but perhaps primarily for administering instilling *terbiye* to their children. As stated, “mothers with intelligence and understanding are as necessary to societies as food.”<sup>571</sup>

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<sup>566</sup> Ibid.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid. 12.

Unlike the discussions by Naum Faiq, which relied on Syriac Christian history and Assyrian legendary history, Madenî relies on an idealized contemporary rural Kurdish womanhood as a model for emulation and improvement, with symbolic value given to a discourse of urban degeneration of Kurdishness, rather than historical degeneration.

### ***Hetawî Kurd***

The final pre-war periodical reviewed is *Hetawî Kurd*, another 1913-1914 publication by the same Istanbul-based Hêvî Cemiyeti student organization that produced *Rojî Kurd*. Like its predecessors, its primary concerns are the promotion of education and religious values, with an increased emphasis on pressuring Kurdish notables to fund these efforts. Additionally, a central theme is the existential risk of European occupation of Kurdistan, and thus an emphasis on promoting cordial Muslim-Christian relations, which, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, was discursively linked to religious obligation. Similar to the Assyrian-origin narrative in *Rojî Kurd*, an article in the journal's second issue presents another historical narrative of indigeneity between Kurds and their consanguineous (“*ırkdaşımız olan*”) Armenians.<sup>572</sup> In this particular narration, Mevlanizade Rifat, who had in 1913 authored a collection of Kurdish *gotinên peşîyan* (idioms) as a symbol of Kurdish culture states “it is known, the Kurds and Armenians are descendants of the same ethnicity [kavim], the Urdu-Urartu,” whose lands stretched from Palestine to Rawanduz. Once sharing tradition, language and literature, the communities split when Armenians accepted Christianity.<sup>573</sup> The purpose of this entry is not to present a historical claim of indigeneity, but rather to discuss how their

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<sup>572</sup> Mevlanizade Rifat, “Muhterem ‘Hetawî Kurd’ Gazete Müessislerine,” 1 no. 2. 21 Teşrin-i Sani 1329 [4 December, 1913].

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

separate paths have now ended with Armenians in a further state of national advancement. It is again, often secondary to the more central discussion of Kurdish-Armenian relations, that other bits of narratives of an ancient Kurdish past emerge, with another example being the mention of “Kurds being seen in Xenophon,” almost certainly a reference to the group known as the Kardouchoi, which has come to be an important reference in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kurdish nationalism.<sup>574</sup>

Although these ancient histories are presented mostly in terms of Armenian or Assyrian-Kurdish connections, authors had identified the fundamental tragedy of Kurdish history is as being the partition of Kurdish society between the Ottoman and Safavid Empire beginning in 921 AH (1514-1515 CE), since which Kurds have shed continuously shed their heroic blood for the benefit of their respective state, but at the expense of a unified homeland. For, “however more brilliant and glorious the Kurdish past was, thus so are they oppressed, with the very blood of all with conscience and decency sobbing in misery.”<sup>575</sup> The inherent qualities of Kurdishness; its bravery, its intellectual contribution to Islam, and its faith are all for naught in this system. The underlying irony for one author who analyzes this history, Babê Naco, is that this essential Kurdishness is supposedly recognized and admired outside of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>576</sup> Much of this he claims is due to the translation of the Şerefname into French and German from Kurmanji and Sorani copies, with a Kurdish-language manuscript of the text held at the British Library, thus making outsiders aware of a past of which the contemporary Kurdish community has been made ignorant. This ignorance has led to a lack of understanding by Kurds of the fundamental

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<sup>574</sup> Babê Naco, “Fa`atabiru Yauli-l Esbar,” *Hetaw-i Kurd*, 1 no. 2, 21 Teshrin-i Sani, 1329 [4 December, 1913], 3. Connections to these ancient communities are presented in a variety of influential sources, such as Cegerxwîn’s poem “Ez Kime?” as well as in the textbook *Dergûşa Nasnameyê (The Cradle of Identity)*, a text developed by the Kurdish Institute of Istanbul for young Kurdish-language speakers.

<sup>575</sup> M.X., Babê Naco, “Erbab-I Hamiyet ve Himmete,” *Hetawi Kurd*, 1 No. 4, 30 Mart 1330 [12 April, 1914], 2.

<sup>576</sup> Chapter One of this dissertation explores in greater depth how Kurdish students in pre-war Europe understood that Kurds, if known at all, were seen negatively due to the Hamidian Massacres being blamed on Kurds.

aspects of their history and community, such as the nation's subgroups, their dialects, and Kurdistan's geographical boundaries. Drawing upon information provided in the *Şerefname*, the text mentioned by his *Hevi Cemiyeti* co-member as not of historical use, he lists the Kurdish nation as composed of the Kurmanc, Goran, Kelhurî, Lur, and Zaza or Milli, each with a corresponding region and dialect.<sup>577</sup> The use of the *Şerefname* as the guiding text for national awareness reflects Babê Naco's focus on the periodization of the deterioration of the Kurdish nation as beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the period of the text's creation, and, of course, the division which nationalist narratives understand Ahmedi Xani's version of Mem û Zîn to refer.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter sought to demonstrate the process through which advocates for nascent Assyrian and Kurdish nationalist movements communicated their discourses of national origin, boundary, qualities, and national purpose. Through a focus on the symbols incorporated into this process, it indicates the underlying pull between potential cornerstones of these identity movements in relation to contemporary religious identity and the ancient past. The intent of this chapter was to illustrate the ways in which solutions for contemporary problems could be found in a neatly defined national past, and how these ideas reflect questions of communal boundary, and, at times, political expediency. As Assyrian nationalists and the Syriac Orthodox Church sought to foster an identity connected with an ancient past, some found symbols in the pre-Christian history of the Assyrian Empire, drawing upon symbols to instill a sense of historical might and indigeneity. The Patriarchate, however, firmly grounded its narrative of identity in the early Christian period, drawing upon Late Antique and Medieval Syriac Christian writers to help

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<sup>577</sup> The idea of of Zazakî/Dimlî as a dialect of Kurdish, or the Zaza being Kurds, is still a topic highly contested by some members of the Zaza community.

inform its audience towards a morally rejuvenated society. Their Kurdish counterparts felt little need to engage in deep arguments over indigeneity due to their Muslim status and drew upon symbols from the past to argue for their own nation's historicity, their literary heritage, and figures that embodied the virtues of Kurdish society. As will be explored in the following chapter, the case study of inter-tribal relations in Tur Abdin before, during, and after the First World War indicates the complex, multi-layered ways in which identity functioned among these communities. This tumultuous and violent history, marked by intricate networks of allegiances and obligations, brings to question the extent to which these arguments were intelligible to nationalists' intended audiences.

## Chapter Four: Tribal Relations in Tur Abdin

This chapter focuses on the local history of Tur Abdin, and more specifically, the regions of Tur Abdin dominated by two tribal confederations, the Heverkan and the Dekşurî. By viewing the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the First World War and Armenian and Assyrian Genocides through this lens, it demonstrates how tribe offered a primary identity through which other factors, such as *millet* or religion, could at times become secondary. In its most positive manifestation, this tribal identity and accompanying solidarities enabled the survival of a significant portion of Tur Abdin's Christian population through the efforts of Christian, Muslim and Ezidi coordinated efforts to resist the Ottoman military its auxiliaries. As part of this milieu, the members of this community also negotiated a complex network of inter-family competition, which, in the case of the Suryani, served as another barrier to the church's authority, or as another means through which that authority was filtered.

Focusing on the Heverkan and Dekşurî also offers important points of inquiry, examining the hinterlands and how the primary institution therein, the tribe, reacted to the period's upheavals. Rather than the urban elite circles of the Bedirxan, Cemilpaşazade or Pirinçizade families, focusing on the Heverkan, whose leader held important sway over the post-war Kurdish nationalist movement, examines how these shifts occurred as a reaction to local state abuse, competition, and exile. With the emergence of the major figures of Haco Aga, Êlikê Bate, Çelebi Agha and Şemun Hanne Haydo from within the Heverkan's leadership it also explores figures who maintain a central presence in how this period is understood in historiography and tradition. Furthermore, in exploring this period through their relationships with the neighboring Dekşurî, itself partially led by the Syriac Orthodox Safar family of Midyat, this chapter demonstrates how Christians could themselves incorporate or manipulate the church to their advantage. By

examining these communities, this chapter demonstrates the ways in which obligations and allegiances, religion, village, as well as relations with the government influenced identity and the actions of these groups. Furthermore, it shows that, rather than simply passive victims of the region's violence, the Suryani community at times held significant power, equal to or rivaling that of their tribes' respective Kurdish leaders. By locating the narrative from urban centers of Mardin, Diyarbakir or Istanbul, it also illuminates the lives of communities on the peripheries of the nascent Kurdish and Assyrian nationalist movements.

This chapter's geographic focus centers on the regions of Tur Abdin, the heartland of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire, and Kerboran (modern Dargeçit), located to the northeast of Midyat, Tur Abdin's urban center. Histories of the region include works produced within Syriac communities. Most of these sources produced during the past century focus on the violence of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the *Seyfo*, or Assyrian Genocide, of the First World War. An important work on the region's history from the church's perspective is Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem Barsoum's *History of Tur Abdin*.<sup>578</sup> A recent historical novel, Kemal Yalçın's *Şemun Hanne Haydo* draws upon primary sources, secondary literature, and interviews with descendants of central figures to depict an engaging history of the life of the region's most senior Christian figure of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a work which was well received by the Suryani.<sup>579</sup>

Two major contributions to the study of the region both historical and contemporary are Nezîrê Cibo's *Havêrkan Sultanları* (2010) and Altan Tan's *Turabdin'den Berriyê'ye* (2011).<sup>580</sup> Cibo's work, a history of the Heverkan tribal confederation during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries,

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<sup>578</sup> Ighnâtyūs Afrām I, and Matti. Moosa, *The history of Tur Abdin* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008).

<sup>579</sup> Kemal Yalçın, *Süryani Halk Kahramanı: Şemun Hanne Haydo* (Istanbul: Birzamanlar Yayıncılık, 2020).

<sup>580</sup> Nezîrê Cibo, *Havêrkan Sultanları: Kürt Tarihinden Bir Kesit*, (Istanbul: Komal, 2010); Altan Tan, *Turabdin'den Berriyê'ye: Aşiretler, Dinler, Diller, Kültürler* (Istanbul: Nûbihar, 2011).

offers valuable empirical data on region's events and how they established relationships between the Turkish Republic. Other recent works have focused on the history of the *Seyfo*, which in some works (Gaunt, 2008), present both the lachrymose history of the period, as well as moments of defense and aid. However, a tendency to present moments of joint resistance may obscure the local reality, in which various communities lived within a network of obligations and allegiances, albeit ones in which Muslim tribes and personalities who dominated them risked fewer repercussions or gained significant advantage from the state in transgressing them. Still, the Heverkan have received due notoriety as the greatest defenders of Christian communities, both within historiography of the region and within a multitude of songs and oral histories recounting the bravery of its leaders Êlikê Bate, Haco Agha and the Christian Şemun Hanne Haydo.

Intertwined with local concepts of identity, communal mobilization and social relations is the tribe, a focus of inquiry requiring careful consideration, but one centrally relevant to the non-urban Suryani, Kurdish, Êzîdî and Arab populations of Late Ottoman Tur Abdin. The tribe, as a social unit, is approached at times as centered on binds of biological and social connectivity, which itself is complicated by the openly multi-ethnic composition of the Heverkan and Dekşûrî confederations and their respective tribal sub-units. Second, tribes have often been treated as a given and integral unit of analysis in the study of both Kurdistan and the Middle East more broadly. Recent work by Ahmad Mohammadpour and Kamal Soleimani has investigated this in the context of Middle East Studies, with them stating that the tribe, while a category of analysis in major contemporary work, is also an analysis with a colonial legacy, which views tribes as a given of Middle Eastern societies, or “a personal characteristic that some anthropologists have

even called the DNA of Middle Eastern people.”<sup>581</sup> Although the subfield of African Studies views the tribe as a form of inquiry replete with colonial modes of knowledge, the authors state that Kurdish Studies has not yet moved beyond this fascination, with tribes and tribalism serving as the central social element through which the rest of modern Kurdish political life is understood, and as a narrative element in understanding the failures of Kurdish nationalism.<sup>582</sup> As explored in previous chapters, Kurdish and Assyrian nationalist intellectuals based in the urban centers of Diyarbakir and Istanbul lived outside of tribal systems. Kurdish intellectuals directly engaged with the idea of the tribe as a place for reform but acknowledged its integral role in Kurdish society. This chapter shows the complexity of this role.

As explored in Chapter One of this dissertation, the Ottoman government’s governance of the Eastern Provinces largely centered upon collaboration with tribal structures, as manifested in the Hamidiye Cavalry and massacres of the mid-1890s. This relationship also created a system of patronage in which the scions of Kurdish authorities would receive education through the Ottoman Tribal Schools, government positions and other sources of prestige and wealth. During the early Turkish Republic, the government continued a policy of forced cooperation by Kurdish tribes with the state, suppressing and deporting those who refused. This latter phenomenon is central to the history of the Heverkan, with continued debate existing regarding the collaboration of Haco Agha with the government during the Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925. However, two main elements are central to this chapter’s inquiry: the unique circumstances of the relationship between tribes and the government in Late Ottoman Tur Abdin, and the broader question of the place of tribe, and with it historical memory of the tribe and processes of national awakening

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<sup>581</sup> Ahmad Mohammadpour and Kamal Soleimani, “Interrogating the Tribal: the Aporia of ‘Tribalism’ in the Sociological Study of the Middle East,” *British Journal of Sociology* 70(5), 2019: 1799-1824, 1801.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid*, 1806.

within the various populations of the region. The events of this period, the means through which Ottoman officials engaged with local populations, and the dynamics of social relations were expressed through the institution of the tribe. Although a Heverkan-Dekşurî rivalry is present in historical memory, this chapter also demonstrates that “tribalism” itself was not a driving force of the region’s dynamics, but that these external pressures were by necessity negotiated through existing tribal structures that became more deeply entrenched after the expulsion of Botani Kurdish tribes.

The late nineteenth century Suryani community of Tur Abdin were influenced by a number of family and tribal relations, particularly the dominance of the influential Safar family, and the triangular relations between the Heverkan, Dekşurî and the state. For example, in a local election in Midyat, in which the Safar family maneuvered for representation of the Suryani community, all local politics was understood by the local Ottoman official through his application of two categories: Heverki and Dekşurî.<sup>583</sup> The first of these two still existent groups, the Heverkan, was a mixed Kurdish Muslim, Syriac Christian and Êzîdî confederation of twenty-two sub-tribes centered to the south and east of Midyat. The Heverkan were part of the emirate of Botan from the 17<sup>th</sup> through the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century after the defeat of the Bedirxan Rebellion in 1847. The confederation was first ruled by Mala [“house of”] Shaikha and then by Mala Eli Remo, which represented the head of the member Erebiyan tribe.<sup>584</sup> This was then supplemented by the authority of Mala Osman, who resided in the village of Mzizah, and from which the central figures of Hajo Agha, Êlikê Bate and Çelebi Agha emerged. Historian Altan Tan presents

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<sup>583</sup> “Letter to the Patriarch from Dawūd Ilyo Dawūd,” 8 Nisan 1299 [20 April, 1880], MPA K05-994. Despite Safar’s claims of authority, the author lists collected votes for the administrative council (idare meclisi) election, with Hanna Safar receiving 78, fewer than other listed Christians such as Ismail Wardi (101) and Melki `Isa (93).

<sup>584</sup> Van Bruinessen, Martin, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structure of Kurdistan* (London; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992), 101.

multiple folk theories on the origin of the name Heverkan, such as an origin in the Kurdish *hevîr* (dough), or from an encounter where an agha described himself as a *hevûrî* (billy-goat) or as a reference to the Hurrians.<sup>585</sup> The name's more likely origin, and one that reflects the movement of groups in and out of Êzîdîsm, is that it originates with the Êzîdî Hevêrî tribe of the region between Cizre and Shingal (Sinjar).

The Dekşurî, to whom Botanis were foreign occupiers, were composed of five sub-tribes and are centered in the region of Gercüş north of Midyat. The confederation formed in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Folk etymologies connect their name to *şûr* [sword], originating after the murder of a notable of Gercüş with phrases such as “Dengê Şûr” [sound of a sword] or “Şûrê xwe değişkir” [they changed their sword]. Like the Heverkan, their numbers included Syriac Christians and Êzîdîs, as well as Mhelmi Arabs. Unlike the Heverkan, their relationship with the government was historically close, beginning with the suppression of the Bedirxan Rebellion and continuing through the Ottoman period and into the Turkish Republic. However, some of these events included Dekşurî Christians fighting against Heverkan Christians and must be understood in terms of local relations. Furthermore, the participation of senior Dekşurî figures within government offices reinforces the narrative of state-Dekşurî collaboration.<sup>586</sup>

The history of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Tur Abdin, the predominant branch of Christianity present in the region, is marked by reintegration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to both the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Mardin, and through this process to the Ottoman government after the defeat of the Bedirxan Rebellion. In 1364, the region of separated from the

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<sup>585</sup> Tan, *Turabdin'den*, 105-106.

<sup>586</sup> This is often explained in reference to the Çelebi clan who were until the 1920s part of the Heverkan, they became part of the Dekşurî, and the group is currently led by Süleyman Çelebi, recently a parliament member from the ruling AKP, but who supported the opposition party CHP during the 2023 elections.

ecclesiastical control of Mardin, establishing a new Patriarchate of Tur Abdin, reportedly due to a monk slandering Matran [bishop] Saba, who was excommunicated by Patriarch Isma`il of Mardin. In response, Matran Saba established his own patriarchate.<sup>587</sup> In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Patriarchate of Tur Abdin had fallen into disarray in a series of ineffective patriarchs, and in 1838 it was reincorporated as a diocese.<sup>588</sup> This period was marked by two major events; first, an increase in missionary activity, with the already existent Syriac Catholic community now joined by Anglican and American Congregationalist missionaries beginning their activities targeting the Syriac Orthodox community, which served as an impetus for cohesion within the church. Second was the Bedirxan Rebellion, an attempt by the Emirate of Botan, led by Bedirxan Beg, to retain its independence I Ottoman centralization.<sup>589</sup> This period, from roughly 1840 to his defeat in 1847, was marked by widespread massacres by Bedirxan and his allies against the Assyrian Christians of Hakkari, massacres and forced conversion of the Êzîdîs of Southeast Anatolia, Shingal and Sheikhan, and smaller-scale violence, looting and forced conversion of the Suryani of Tur Abdin and Mardin.<sup>590</sup> Even prior to the rebellion, in 1834, Bedirxan Beg was one of two

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<sup>587</sup> Ignatius Ephrem Barsoum, *Maktebanuta d`al Atra d Tur Abdin*, (Holland: Bar Hebraeus Verlag, 1985), 143. The Patriarchate, formally titled the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, moved from Antioch to Mardin in 1106.

<sup>588</sup> Patriarch Ignatious Ephrem Barsoum's history of Tur Abdin attributes their decline to immorality, claiming that the Tur Abdin-based patriarchate had become a source of derision, which is a charge often associated with creating vulnerabilities for the church's near existential threat of widespread Catholic conversion.

<sup>589</sup> This rebellion is described in nationalist historiography as the first Kurdish nationalist uprising, in part due to the influence of Bedirxan of Botan's descendants within the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Kurdish nationalist movement. It was sparked in part by Bedirxan's having observed the Ottoman defeat at Nizip, which led him to believe that the Ottoman government would not pose a threat.

<sup>590</sup> These massacres resulted from a number of factors, including political rivalries, religious motivations, financial incentive and agitation of local politics by American missionaries in Hakkari. It marks one of the most violent events in the modern history of the Êzîdî community. On details of these events, see my MA thesis: Michael B. Sims, "*Congregationalist and Anglican Missionaries in Ottoman Hakkari and Tur Abdin*" (M.A. thesis, Georgetown University, 2013).

leaders involved in the deaths of reportedly up to two hundred Syriac Christians in the region of Hezek (Idil).<sup>591</sup>

The Ottoman government's defeat of the Botani mir was enabled in part by the defection of Ezdînşer Beg, Bedirxan's nephew, who was promised permission to rule as his uncle's replacement.<sup>592</sup> In 1855, Ezdînşer attacked Kerboran, killing the head of the Arabiyan tribe Muhammed Beg.<sup>593</sup> According to the history of the region by Patriarch Ignatious Barsoum, after repelling an attack by rival Kurdish leaders, Ezdînşer then confiscated eighty "purses" of money from local Syriac Christian elite in Tur Abdin, and, despite attempts by Sultan Abdulmecid to convince Ezdînşer to cease, the mir then began more widespread attacks, the murder of local Christian village heads, and ransoming the priest Shero to take the rest of the church's wealth in the region.<sup>594</sup>

The list of the atrocities committed by Ezdînşer against the population of Tur Abdin and Midyat included the elimination of the Beth [house of] Safar, a family who became central to the region's narrative in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and whose importance is not adequately reflected in its historiography. The family, whose heads were highly influential on both church, government and Dekşurî policy in the region, originated from Diyarbakir and migrated to Midyat in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, becoming one of the largest families in the city.<sup>595</sup> Within his discussion of Ezdînşer Beg's atrocities in the region, Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem finishes the section by stating "and so

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<sup>591</sup> Barsoum, 178.

<sup>592</sup> Wadie Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 73.

<sup>593</sup> Barsoum, 178

<sup>594</sup> Barsoum, 179.

<sup>595</sup> Tan, 202.

they killed `Antar Safar, and the young man Melke Bate, and harassed the priest Karim of `Ainwardo so severely that he threw himself into the [village's] cistern.<sup>596</sup>

The murder of `Antar Safar sets in motion the flight and triumphant return of the Safar family, who become central figures in the history of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Tur Abdin. In a letter to the Patriarch in 1881, members of the Safar family write to reclaim the wealth they had left behind a generation before, stating “in the year of Ezdîn Şêr [1855] we fled to Diyarbakir, where we remained, yet our house remained in Midyat.”<sup>597</sup> Claiming that in their absence their property was sold illegally, and that they were abused by other prominent Christians of Midyat when attempting to retrieve payment for it, they cite their support on the matter by Matran Shem`un, the local bishop, and ask for the Patriarch to pressure members of Midyat's other prominent Christian families to pay them. However, what is not reflected in this record is the contemporary efforts by the Safar family to establish near-feudal hegemony over Midyat. The most revealing source of this trend is an unpublished Arabic-language family memoir, entitled *Sayfō Rabō* [*The Great Seyfo*], which provides historical details as well as attitudes regarding the perceived role of the Safar family within both tribal-state relations and intra-tribal relations.<sup>598</sup> Although the text centers on the achievements of the Safar family, it often, and very openly, presents the resentment of Christian families against the Safars. Most important, however, is the manner in which it indicates that Christians played central roles in Tur Abdin's major events of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, not solely as passive victims of violence, and that complex tribal relations were the primary factor in dictating events, rather than simple religious boundaries and hierarchies.

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<sup>596</sup> Barsoum, 179.

<sup>597</sup> HBS 1/2/63

<sup>598</sup> I thank Hanna Bet-Sawoce for providing me this and other important texts.

After the events of 1855, tribes from Botan still preserved their authority in the region. It was not until 1864 that the area was fully recaptured through an allied force of Ottoman regular army and Dekşurî militias. Within the memoir, the narrative of the recapture is presented by a figure who refers to himself as “Safar al-Abidin.” According to him, during Ezdinsar Beg’s capture of Midyat, only two figures from the Safar family were able to escape: Safar ibn Safar Agha and Barsoum Agha. Safar Agha was accompanied by a Êzîdî servant named Hemo whom he gained control of after rescuing him from execution. The pair were reportedly seen as formidable figures, with Hemo at one time freeing the two from jail in Diyarbakir by loosening their cell’s iron bars, and that Safar’s demeanor and reputation were so terrifying as to cause “some to urinate when he stared them down.” The memoir often notes the closeness between Safar and the Êzîdî community, stating, for example that Safar Agha was known to carry a walnut wood pipe which he received as “a gift from the Yezidis of Sinjar,” and that two of his closest companions aside from Hamo were a Êzîdî servant named Suluki and a Êzîdî bodyguard named Mousli, to whom he later entrusted political power.

During his exile, first in Diyarbakir and later traveling to Constantinople, Safar Agha was able to receive the attention of the Sultan through the intercession of the Patriarch in Mardin and by a request from Matran Paulus, the Patriarchate’s representative in the capital. During this meeting, Sultan Abdulaziz, impressed by Safar’s story, pledged to send an Ottoman army detachment to support Safar and his allies in “expelling the invaders [who have come] from Jazira ibn Omar.”<sup>599</sup> As becomes the case in Safar’s later dealings with Protestants and other rival communities, the discourse of foreigner and outsider is central to his claim of local authority.

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<sup>599</sup> Meaning Cizre and Botan. *Sayfō Rabō* (Unpublished Manuscript), 5.

Safar traveled to Midyat to begin preparations for the reconquest of Tur Abdin. The Patriarch reportedly gave a sermon to rally support around Safar Agha, ordering them: “Unify your words, close your ranks and obey our son Safar, whom the government has given full authority to wage war” against those who have terrorized the region.<sup>600</sup> Shortly after an Ottoman military contingent arrived, whose leader Osman Pasha Berik issued Safar Agha a medal from the Sultan, praising the Suryani community’s “example of true citizenship, peace and dedication” to the Ottoman government since its inception. With these reinforcements, Safar was then able to gain the support of the region’s other various Suryani elite, such as heads of the Grigo and `Ajjō families, and the “tobacco smoking” matriarch of the Saido family who give the force tactical advice on coordinating between irregular Suryani militias and regular Ottoman units.<sup>601</sup> In final preparations, he then bolstered the morale of his community on the eve of battle by giving a speech stating ““we were able to withstand over 24 centuries in the face of challenges of various peoples, empires, kingdoms and barbarians,” declaring the Suryani community’s indigeneity and resilience against outside aggression. Safar Agha continued: “We did not lose our Suryani identity nor abandon our sacred language or beloved dialect, we did not abandon our customs and traditions and did not reject our faith” those who died are martyrs, and must be merciless in protecting their customs and religion from annihilation.<sup>602</sup>

The Suryani-Ottoman army began their operation on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1864. This force was quickly joined by a variety of the region’s non-Suryani communities. Safar Agha received word that the Êzîdîs of Bab al-Jannah and Kafnas “did not want to become involved in an event that

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<sup>600</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>601</sup> The Saido was itself a branch of the Safar family. Tan, 203.

<sup>602</sup> *Seyfō Rabō*, 13.

did not concern them, but do not want to deepen enmity,” and so a smaller contingent of Êzîdî forces volunteered to join. While noting that local Kurds “are loyal to their word but are still religious fanatics,” various Kurdish groups joined Safar Agha’s army. Most notably, as is important for the subsequent six decades of tribal relations in the region, is that Mala [House of] Osman, the most important family of the Heverkan, decided to join in this mostly Dekşurî force. Within the memoir, Safar Agha portrayed his appreciation to them for having protected Christian holy sites in Tur Abdin during the previous three decades but notes the long-standing animosity between them is deep rooted. During the battle, in which the Botani are driven out over a multi-day fight, Safar’s Êzîdî servant Hemu demonstrated his bravery, while Safar Agha’s first-born son was carried wounded off the field. His removal from the battlefield was interpreted by Safar Agha as an act of cowardice – a transgression severe enough to revoke his birthright.

After this conflict and the re-establishment of local rule, the Safar family became more entangled in the region’s tribal relationships now split between two confederations. The memoir presents Safar Agha and his descendants as having a legitimate claim to the leadership of the Dekşurî confederation. Stating that “there were two hostile parties surrounding Tur Abdin, one known as the Dekşurî and the other as the Heverkan,” the Dekşurî are claimed to be both the more powerful of the two and were reported to possess a greater proportion of the Suryani population.<sup>603</sup> The aim of the memoir is clear Safar’s position in the region, namely that they serve as loyal Ottoman subjects unlike most of their Kurdish neighbors. Their position among these networks is defended as a necessary part of life in the region, but sets apart the Suryani as loyal members of the Ottoman Empire, unlike their Kurdish – and as becomes clear, their Heverkan – neighbors. To Safar, the Kurds, although “brave and relentless... would establish a

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<sup>603</sup> Ibid., 124.

homeland on the ruins of another people, but the Suryani have no such ambitions.”<sup>604</sup> The family’s understanding of the Suryani’s position in Ottoman society was that they had, through constant obedience in their subaltern status, come to be seen as a “religious sect rather than a people,” an approach which the memoir states was preferable to the burgeoning Assyrian nationalist movement. The memoir’s author states this plainly: “How could the Suryani claim patriotism and be proud of Syria as a land, a homeland, and a nationality without being subject to abuse and murder and being accused of high treason?”<sup>605</sup> Rather, the memoir portrays Safar Agha’s and subsequent family heads’ political interests in maintaining close relations with the government and establishing his and his family’s dominance in the region’s political apparatus. This was further demonstrated in the marriage celebration of Safar Agha’s second son, Hanna, who became his father’s heir, and chief architect of Safar domination of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hanna Safar was educated in Diyarbakir, having interrupted his studies to participate in the war in Tur Abdin. His marriage to a woman of Tur Abdin rather than of Diyarbakir was due to his father’s pressure to, as he states, “take the weeds of your own country and not the wheat of a stranger.”<sup>606</sup> The wedding was attended by a variety of the region’s religious, tribal and Ottoman officials, including Patriarch Petrus, Abdurrahman Pasha, head of the Tayy, Ibrahim Pasha Millî, multiple Dekşurî tribal leaders, as well as the chiefs of the Osman family, the ruling dynasty of the Heverki tribal confederation, who also conducted a peace negotiation between themselves and the Safars, gifting twenty daggers and a flock of sheep. Having found a loyal and powerful ally in Midyat, an Ottoman delegation also used the opportunity to demonstrate their support of

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid., 167.

the newly betrothed Hanna, upon whom they awarded a medal and bestowed the title of Pasha, and conducted a military procession in his honor.

The Safar family's state-supported domination of Midyat was not universally accepted by the population, nor was their newfound power accepted as sufficient justification for leadership of the Dekşurî confederation. One local family head is reported to have asked "did the Safar family need more power and authority to multiply their oppression? Were they not satisfied by the stick they hold over the peoples' heads?" Religion also served as the final obstacle to their rise. The memoir narrates an event in which Safar Agha traveled to Gercüş in attempt to negotiate his place as head of the tribe, drawing upon his close support from the government. Although the Kurdish notables openly acknowledge the Safar family's power and qualities, the final decision is that the community is unable to accept a Christian family as head of the Dekşurî.

Local views of these episodes and of the dynamics of interfaith tribal concerns demonstrate the ways in which denominational rivalry and tribal solidarities could be utilized by Christians to their advantage. A particular example of the role of the House of Safar the politics of conversion is shown in the autobiography of Suleeba, a Syriac Orthodox deacon from Diyarbakir who became a Protestant missionary in Mardin, Diyarbakir and Tur Abdin in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century working alongside American missionaries.<sup>607</sup> The text, which mostly serves as a narrative for the tribulations of Suleeba's missionary work, provides information on the Kurdish, Suryani and Armenian communities of these regions. At one point, two Christians from Kerboran ask to have Suleeba come and preach to them, a process that would require first gaining a foothold in Midyat. Thus, in 1866 he traveled to Midyat, and immediately visited Safar Agha upon his arrival, indicating his status as the city's senior Syriac Christian. However, Safar

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<sup>607</sup> Specifically, he worked alongside missionaries associated with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the governing body of Congregationalist missionaries abroad.

Agha forbade Suleeba from staying in Midyat, even declaring after an Ottoman official's attempt at pacification: "I will not give him a place, nor will I allow him to stop in this town."<sup>608</sup> Safar Agha relented after a threat from the Ottoman official, allowing him to stay one night, during which a Christian named Gelly [sic] menacingly displayed a dagger to the guests and boasted "I have slain three Moslems [sic] with it in one day."<sup>609</sup> The message was clear, and Suleeba departed the next day to briefly evangelize the Church of the East's community in Botan, returning one week later, and then traveling back towards Mardin to attend a meeting between two ABCFM missionaries and Patriarch Ya`qub at Deyrulzafaran. The group requested permission to open a school in the interior of Tur Abdin, but the Patriarch staunchly refused, stating "let our people go to Hell rather than that I should give them leave to do such work among them," and even declaring that conversion to Islam would be better for them than to Protestantism.<sup>610</sup> This threat, from the Patriarchate and the Safar family led Suleeba to abandon the Midyat mission for a decade.

One of Suleeba's colleagues, Isaiah, initiated another attempt to establish a school in Tur Abdin. A cycle of intimidation began almost immediately, in which "the priests and Sefr [sic] would frighten the fathers" after two days of instruction, causing students to leave, only to later return.<sup>611</sup> A member of the Safar family directly threatened Isaiah, then Isaiah's family, and, once Suleeba became involved, the issue finally moved to the government's administrative building, where representatives from the Syriac Orthodox Church forced Suleeba to declare his

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<sup>608</sup> American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, *Suleeba (ca. 1825-1881), Shamas Suleeba, or Pioneer Work in Eastern Turkey: An Autobiography* (Unpublished Translation: Houghton Library), 133.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

“refusal to accept Mohammad as a prophet,” clearly an attempt for fellow Christians to draw the ire of the government officials. This attempt failed, as the officials sided with Suleeba as the honest party, and so the Safar family continued its harassment of Suleeba and Isaiah. By late 1874, the Safar family and local clergy enacted a plan to “procure false witness” from a member of the community, who agreed to swear ownership of the land upon which the Protestants’ mission house sat, attempting to draw upon the governor’s anti-foreigner inclinations to rid Midyat of Protestantism and Protestant missionaries.<sup>612</sup> Safar Agha’s illness, which began during this period, was declared by Suleeba to be God’s smiting for his work against the Protestant mission. This illness led in part to a power struggle between the Heverkan and Dekşurîs, during the middle of which Safar Agha passed away.

This conflict eventually led Protestantism to gain a foothold in Tur Abdin, with its primary appeal being protection from the violence of the region’s inter-tribal rivalries. The tensions of this period escalated with two events in which five Safar-aligned Êzîdîs and five other Midyat Christians were killed, leading to rumors that Haco Agha, leader of the Heverkan, was preparing a full assault against Midyat. In response, a military detachment from Mardin was sent to Midyat for a punitive raid against Haco.<sup>613</sup> Following a day of fighting between the Heverkan and government-Dekşurî forces, Haco managed to slip out of the village while the besiegers were eating their evening meal. The governor then pillaged Mzizah, razing Haco’s stronghold and forcing the village’s Christian women to flee in terror to the nearby mountains and scatter to neighboring villages. Suleeba claims that after this conflict abated, delegations from Christian villages of Tur Abdin – with no distinction mentioned between tribal affiliations – began

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<sup>612</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid., 145.

requesting to convert to Protestantism to be “protected from oppression,” or more specifically, in a sentence redacted from the text, the oppression of “the government on the one hand, and that of the heartless head men of their own faith on the other.”<sup>614</sup> One such delegation from Kerboran came to Midyat in 1878 and declared “we wish to become Protestants. Deliver us from the oppression of both Muslim and Christian Aghas.” After dealing with linguistic challenges of this mission, a group of sixty houses in Kerboran declared their conversion and enabled a long-standing presence in Kerboran and a new base from which to operate in Tur Abdin.

The Safar family’s authority reflected its representation not only of Christian authority in the region, but also as being the senior Dekşurî authority for Christians. In August, 1881, a letter to the Patriarchate reported that a herd of thirty animals used by petition’s authors’ monastery were stolen by Ezidis who brought them to the village of Kafnas [Kafrnas, modern Elbeğendi].<sup>615</sup> Unable to secure their return themselves, they ask the Patriarch to reach out to both Safar “Al-Midyati” and ibn Haco in order to retrieve their property. A few years later the Safar family, still feeling threatened by these outside influences, organized an attack against the Protestants of Midyat to drive away the city’s foreign and local Protestant missionaries. A mob pelted the mission house with stones, injuring one ABCFM missionary, and prompting the missionary Suleeba to leave for Mardin to once again petition the governor for intervention.<sup>616</sup> The government responded by summoning Hanna Safar to Mardin, where they arrested him and his companions, releasing them later after a bribe had been paid. The Patriarchate archive indicates the efforts the Safar family took to secure their freedom, either from imprisonment from this

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<sup>614</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>615</sup> “Letter to the Patriarch from Habo Shem’un,” 5 September, 1881, HBS 1/18.

<sup>616</sup> Suleeba, 175.

event or some other transgression which the government could not overlook. In a letter in 1886, Hanna Safar writes that his imprisonment stemmed from another dispute, and pleads with the Patriarch to help secure their release, with a figure named Salu to act as intermediary in delivering the bribe. In a letter to the Patriarchate dated to December of 1887, Safar states that he is either still or yet again imprisoned, and that the intermediary set to deliver the bribe had stolen their money instead.<sup>617</sup>

The use of the Ottoman legal system as a tactic for intra-Suryani frustration with Hanna Safar continued into 1889. In one letter to the Patriarchate, Hanna Safar charges that due to an upcoming election, members of the Gawwo and Shabo Murad families have sent a frenzy of telegraphs to the government seeking to frame him. According to Hanna Safar in the previous 40 days, “Hanno Jawwa and `Antar, brother of Shabo [Murad]... wrote a quantity of 10 telegraphs to the Mutasarrif Pasha, saying ‘Hanna Safar is the killer of Papo’s sons and of the shepherd Shabo Walak.’”<sup>618</sup> However, this did little to undermine the influence of the Safar family, who continued to pressure the church to achieve its aims.

The non-Dekşurî Suryani of Kerboran and Tur Abdin viewed the Safars as a rival or usurper of Patriarchal authority, even asserting that their own Suryani better exemplify the community’s righteous virtues vis-à-vis Hanna Safar. In a strongly worded letter to the Patriarch, a group from Kerboran and Heverkan villages of Tur Abdin state that a newly arrived bishop, Abdelhad, “from the day he arrived in Midyat has been immobile and corrupt in his actions... and does not proceed according to the management of the community.”<sup>619</sup> They state that the

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<sup>617</sup> Hanna Safar, “Letter to the Patriarch,” 18 Kanun al-Awwal [December], 1887 HBS 1/6/45

<sup>618</sup> Hanna Safar, “Letter to the Patriarch,” 21 Şubat [February], 1889. MPA K05-385.

<sup>619</sup> “Letter to the Patriarch,” 27 Ayar [May], 1893. MPA K05-538.

bishop is preventing any potential unity among the Suryani across the region, splitting them like “Jeroboam, who split the Children of Israel asunder and led them to worship idols,” and that there is “no place among them for a friend like Melke Hanno Kerborani,” asserting their own expression of Christian behavior as preferable to other influential points of reference such as Safar.<sup>620</sup>

In Tur Abdin, representatives worked to prevent the growth of the Safar family’s hegemony over the region’s Syriac Orthodox community. A letter to the Patriarch from representatives from both Midyat and the major villages of Habisnas, Mezizeh, Ainwardo, Bsorino, Bethqustan, Kafro, Saleh, and Arbo describes a local outbreak of violence, which they blame the Safar family as partially responsible. In this event, a group of Christians led by the Grigo family “produced a scheme and killed a Christian, wounded another, and wounded a Muslim as well.”<sup>621</sup> This was reportedly orchestrated to frame Shabo Murad, and to have the Safar and Grigo families gain further authority in the eyes of the government, with the goal of adding the village of Ainwardo to Safar’s political authority.

As discussed in Chapter 1, conversion was an element of inter-tribal dynamics. The Safar family would also leverage threats of conversion into action by the Patriarchate. At some points, such as the 1880s, Hanna Safar would even refer to the Patriarch as “Crown of the Suryani Nations” to assert purported obedience to him even among Protestant and Catholic converts. Such conversion could also be fluid, at times requiring some sign of penance and a *mazbata* of allegiance to the Patriarch. In one such episode, during fighting between the Murad and Juwwa

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<sup>620</sup> Ibid.

<sup>621</sup> “Letter to the Patriarch,” 7 Şubat [February], 1889. HBS 1/5/83

families, the later had converted to Protestantism, later returning and being forced to pray in particular locations to atone for their transgression.

### **Êzîdî-Christian Relations**

The nature of these relationships, which demonstrate the ineffectiveness of ethnic division as the sole means of understanding local dynamics are reflected as well in relations between Suryani and Ezidis of the region. In many cases, Êzîdîs lived among Syriac Christian villages, building particularly close ties with them over time, and often establishing ritual kinship through the *kirivati* system. However, relations were of course not always irenic. Two particular episodes related in the Patriarchate archive, the murder of a Suryani shepherd by a gang of Ezidis and subsequent negotiations between these communities, and the protection of a large number of Suryani and Armenian refugees in Sinjar during the genocide of Christians in Southeast Anatolia, and attestations of pre-war Ezidi and Suryani connections across regions.

In 1882, a Suryani from the village of Selekûn (modern Tepeli) in Tur Abdin sent a letter to the Patriarch, detailing the murder of his son Melki Shemun by a group of Ezidi youth. Listing eight specific names in total responsible for the murder, he says that they were led by “Ferikho the Êzîdî brute who murdered my son this same year... came to my village to kill me [the author], but instead killed my son. Ferikho is now in jail, but the government wants to free him for their own interests, and to further choke the blood of my tormented son.”<sup>622</sup> He requested the Patriarch to send a letter to the the aymaqam in Midyat demanding the murderer not be released, and another to another mukhtar whom he believed had captured two of the other members of the gang. To this point, there is no follow-up present within the archive of outgoing

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<sup>622</sup> “Letter to the Patriarchate” 1882, HBS 1/2/29

correspondence satisfying either of these requests. However, correspondence between the Patriarchate and representatives of the Êzîdî community indicate that steps were taken to solve such problems without involving the government. A letter from the Êzîdî Supreme Council to the Patriarch in 1888 requesting specifically that any offenses by their communities against one another be remedied through direct negotiation prior to requesting the government's involvement.<sup>623</sup> In 1896, Patriarch Abdulmesih himself sent a letter to a group of Êzîdî leaders asking for the return of property stolen from his community. Unique to this exchange as well is that, unlike other examples of the Patriarch intervening, no documentation is sent to other parties such as local Ottoman officials. Official contacts between these communities outside of tribal relations occurred as well and included some debates over the future of the community regarding expansion of rights of education now available to all Ottoman subjects. In his memoirs, Matran Yohannan Dolabani discusses a visit by Ismail Chol Beg, a one-time contender for temporal leadership of the Êzîdî community residing in Sinjar, to Tur Abdin's Mor Gabriel Monastery in 1913.<sup>624</sup>

### **Rivalries Between Kurdish Aghas**

Aside from broader rivalries across the two main confederations, old grudges and competitions within the Heverkan routinely incorporated members from the region's various communities. The Haydo family of Bsorino (*Syr. Beth Sbrino/modern Haberli*) was the most influential Heverkan Christian family and was not immune from the violent rivalries that marked

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<sup>623</sup> "Letter to the Patriarchate," 6 Teshrin al-Thani [November], 1888. MPA K05-654

<sup>624</sup> Dolabani, *Taş'itā*, 35. As it falls outside of Tur Abdin, this chapter will not address the siege of Sinjar in full, but Ismail Beg Chol and Hemoye Shero were responsible for the protection of Armenian and Syriac Christians during the genocide at great personal cost, and the Patriarchate's archive includes a number of letters to local government officials claiming individuals had traveled to Sinjar for trade, perhaps more likely episodes of Suryani fleeing to an area where they believed they would be protected.

the region. Hanne Haydo, head of the family, and his son Yawse had reportedly participated in the fight to rid Heverkan territory of Botani domination, leading an army of two hundred Suryani against a force dispatched to punish them for refusing to pay taxes.<sup>625</sup> This raised the status of the family in the region, as well as the ire of some Kurds and Êzîdîs of the area who killed Yawse to diminish the Haydos' hegemony. In the late 1870s, Haco Agha led a small uprising against the Ottoman government for control of Tur Abdin, and whose forces were joined by a contingent led by Hanne Haydo. This aid was reciprocated by Haco II who reportedly then assisted Hanne Haydo in recovering a monastery that had been occupied by force during the region's unrest. In 1888, Hanne Haydo was finally detained after pressuring the Bishop of Tur Abdin, with Hanne's young son Shemun then being sent to Mardin, and the family's influence diminished. 1896 Haco II, chief of the Heverkan, was murdered by the forces of Cîmo Agha, leader of the Dekşurî, causing leadership of the Heverkan to fall to Çelebi Agha and Êlikê Bate, who, along with Haco III and the Christian Shem'un Hanne Haydo, would lead anti-government efforts during and after the First World War.

The government, which routinely sent punitive expeditions against the Heverkan, had difficulty in establishing control over an area being overtaken by inter-tribal conflict. In 1901, Shemun Hanne Haydo, having returned home after receiving an education at the Protestant College in Mardin, wished to reassert his family's rule over the village, and refused to offer Çelebi Agha an exorbitant tax that he was imposing on the village. Unable to let this refusal be ignored, Çelebi Agha attacked the villages of Sare and Bsorino with a force of Kurds, Êzîdîs and Suryani, but were successfully resisted, causing Çelebi to accept Shemun's refusal. Although I have not located the original outgoing letters in the archive, the Ottoman Interior Ministry

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<sup>625</sup> Kemal Yalçın, *Şemun Hanne Haydo*, (Leck, Germany: CIP Books, 2018), 68.

reported that they had routinely received statements from the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate about Çelebi Agha's "years of abuse of the Suryani."<sup>626</sup> This abuse would be, at times, too much government to tolerate, leading to Çelebi Agha's arrest. After his arrest imprisonment in Mardin, Usiv, leader of the Dekşurî, sought opportunity to gain influence I his leaderless rivals. The Ottoman archives indicate a spike in violence between the two factions between 1902 and 1904, which the state first used mediation and later military force to end. Çelebi Agha was considered a bandit for much of the remaining pre-war period, leading to his intermittent imprisonment, which would then at times lead to inter-confederation fighting or of sub-tribes switching sides. The state also watched the region apprehensively after Çelebi's release, with one Interior Ministry document reporting that "because the release of Çelebi and his brother have had a negative Influence on Kurds and the tribes," the notables of Nusaybin had already reached out to the government warning of a potential flareup of inter-tribal violence.<sup>627</sup> This near-constant, protracted competition between the Heverkî and Dekşurî locked many of the Suryani in a network of duties and obligations to Muslim or even Christian tribal authorities. As shown by the experience of the Safar family in navigating this system, much could be gained through engaging with politics of loyalty to the state or church. This paradigm of loyalty and sedition, however, once a means of mitigating state oppression, would soon offer no such protection.

### **The Seyfo**

The defining event of the experiences of the Syriac Christians during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is the Seyfo. This event, which was concurrent with the Armenian Genocide, was responsible for

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<sup>626</sup> BOA DH.MUI 88.62, 8 Teşrin-i Evvel 1328 [15 November, 1912].

<sup>627</sup> BOA DH.MKT 2839.1, 21 Temmuz 1327 [5 August, 1911].

the deaths of half of the Assyrian population. The Seyfo received reduced attention compared to the Armenian Genocide for a number of reasons, including continued denominational fragmentation which prevented a unified recognition effort and an official narrative of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate which described these events in terms of the violence of lawlessness, rather than extermination. This was born in part out of the need to preserve the safety of the Syriac Christian community of the Turkish Republic. Historiography in recent decades has served to remedy this, indicating that the suffering by Syriac Christians was not, as was often understood, an unintended consequence of anti-Armenian violence, but rather reflects a more widespread targeting of Christians in Southeast Anatolia. Significant recent texts which explore this are Gaunt (2006), Travis (2018) and Gaunt et. al (2017), which draw upon oral histories, memoirs, missionary accounts and Ottoman and foreign diplomatic documents to provide the depth of detail needed to understand the scope this tragedy.<sup>628</sup> Many works on the Seyfo have also placed blame on various church leaders, Orthodox, Catholic and Chaldean, for acquiescing to the government's demands for disarmament, or, as is discussed in memoirs of the genocide by Audo, the readiness in which church authorities accused rival denominations of disloyalty while affirming their unshaking obedience to the Ottoman government.<sup>629</sup>

It is not the purpose here to provide a detailed history of the Seyfo, but rather to discuss how these events were described within unexplored sources, particularly in the record of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, and how these reflect the importance of religious identity as a

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<sup>628</sup> David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia During World War I* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006); Hannibal Travis, *The Assyrian Genocide: Cultural and Political Legacies* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Gaunt, David, Naures Atto, and Soner Onder Barthoma, *Let Them Not Return: Sayfo: the Genocide Against the Assyrian, Syriac and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Berghahn), 2017.

<sup>629</sup> Chapter One of this dissertation focuses on Syriac Orthodox identity and boundary formation as a process hastened by the need to distance themselves from the Armenian community.

category for the government and cause for targeting by the genocide. This section explores how Ottoman authorities initially understood the various Christian communities of the region in relation to their obedience to the government, with any façade of this distinction disappearing early into the genocide as particulars were subsumed into larger anti-Christian discourses. It also demonstrates that the central administration of the Syriac Orthodox Church, with the Patriarch ill in Jerusalem, was unaware of the severity of the situation. However, of great importance is the recognition of the scale and intent of this violence by lower-level members of the church hierarchy, with a previously unseen archival document stating this in stark terms. Finally, even though the church itself was pushing for continued subservience to the government through theological arguments, members of the Tur Abdin community and their allies in the region as well as Êzîdîs in Sinjar raised arms against the government and its auxiliaries. It then considers the importance of anti-government resistance by figures of the Heverkan Confederation after this event, and their impact on historical memory and Kurdish nationalist narratives.

### **The *Seyfo* in Midyat**

The study of the genocides of the First World War requires careful engagement with the Ottoman archival record, which, if read at face value, presents these events as a series of security-oriented deportations of Armenians from the Eastern Provinces, during which opportunistic bandits harassed the deportation caravans. Taner Akçam's 2018 work *Killing Orders* has expertly demonstrated the impossibility of this narrative and its illusion of an orderly deportation plan, particularly the archive's claims that the Ottoman government intended to reimburse deported Armenians upon their arrival to Syria.<sup>630</sup> The same claims could be made

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<sup>630</sup> Taner Akçam, *Killing Orders: Talat Pasha's Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

regarding the Syriac Christians, with an additional stipulation that deportations of non-Armenians occurred only by accident at first, so as to claim that the deportation program did not broadly target Christians, but only the troublesome Armenians, a narrative that falls apart at further inquiry. The ostensible shifting priorities are presented in direct communications between Mehmed Reşid, the infamous vali of Diyarbakir sent to oversee the genocide, and the central government, and then by Talat Pasha. Mehmed Reşid, a cofounder of the CUP, had been kaymakam of Karesi in Edremit during the deportations of Greeks from the region in 1914, and had contributed reports to the government to justify strengthening Izmir's Turkish and Muslim demographics.<sup>631</sup> He was then appointed by Talat Pasha to Van with the rank of vali, then transferred to Diyarbakir in March, 1915 to replace Hamid Pasha, whose unwillingness to target Armenians led to his removal.<sup>632</sup>

Mehmed Reşid's policy indicates this shift from viewing particular subsets of the Syriac Christian population as a security threat in 1915 to describing the population as a whole as corrupted by missionaries and intermarriage with Armenians. Decrypted copies of secret documents, available in the Ottoman Archives, indicate a hierarchy of reported threat between communities, with non-Armenian Christians treated as suspect, but with subdivisions of region applied to Syriac Christian communities. The most important of these subcategories is the specification of the Suryani of Midyat as in a state of rebellion and thus subject to deportation.

The first of these communications between the government and central government states the urgency of establishing a security organization to coordinate and oversee deportations to prevent an imminent uprising, focusing on Diyarbakir. For this purpose, Reşid paid five hundred

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<sup>631</sup> Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Talaat Pasha: Father of Modern Turkey, Architect of Genocide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 175.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

Ottoman pounds to Mustafa Cemilpaşazade, a CUP founder and member of one of Diyarbakir's most prominent Kurdish families, to create a group for this purpose, which began murders, pillaging and deportations in the Armenian Quarter of Diyarbakir on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1915. In a document written to Talat on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1915, Reşid justifies these actions stating "the city [Diyarbakir] has become a depot of weapons, dynamite and deserters [firari]" with neighboring villages described as "in a similar state," and seeks cash support to procure informants and a "committed and self-sacrificing" deportation force.<sup>633</sup> A letter composed the two months later states that "an important portion of the Armenian population has been deported."<sup>634</sup> Reşid's letters begin discussing other Christian communities in the region, indicating the subcategories through which the state viewed them. He claims initially that there is no broad "arrangement to massacre Christians," asserting these are simply lawful, orderly arrests and deportations but that those Chaldeans and Suryani, here meaning Syriac Orthodox, Protestants or Catholics, who were "working in conjunction with the Armenians... have been deported in order to address wrongdoing."<sup>635</sup>

The shift from Armenians alone to widespread murder of Syriac Christians began during June, a fact which becomes reflected in the Ottoman record. One document, dated July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1915, the Interior Ministry wrote a telegram seeking clarification from Reşid, claiming "in recent times, within the province, massacres were organized against Armenians and Christians with no distinction of denomination," a claim meaning that these events were perpetrated solely by locals, and not under government direction.<sup>636</sup> Reşid's response displays two contradictory

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<sup>633</sup> BOA DH ŞFR 469/29-1/1, 2, 3. 18 Nisan, 1331 [1 May, 1915].

<sup>634</sup> "Ermenilerin mühim bir kısmı sevk edilmiştir," BOA., DH ŞFR 477/74-1-1, 14 Haziran 1331 [27 June 1915].

<sup>635</sup> BOA. DH. ŞFR. 480/40-1/1. 28 Haziran 1331 [11 July, 1915].

<sup>636</sup> BOA., DH.ŞFR., 54/406. 29 Haziran, [1]331 [12 July, 1915].

tendencies in his communications regarding non-Armenian populations. In the first, he typically downplays the perception of the deportations as broadly targeting Christians, using Syriac Christians as a reference for this distinction. In one letter, he states that some non-Armenians of Diyarbakir city were deported, stating that “in order not to give the impression that we are against Christians in general, unless there is no obligation or reason to do otherwise, nothing will be done to the various [non-Armenian] populations.”<sup>637</sup> Elsewhere, he claims that Suryani who were “accidentally” deported would be identified and returned upon arrival at deportation centers, where in reality few survived the deportation caravans, the murder of Chaldean and Suryani deportees in deportation hubs such as Urfa (Nayeem, 1921), and Syriac Orthodox internal communications indicated the presence of surviving, destitute deportees in Mosul. Elsewhere, Reşid writes that “tribes have attacked some non-Armenian villages, however, to the extent possible our action has worked focusing upon Armenians.”<sup>638</sup>

As the massacres continued, Reşid blamed them on “those who think of nothing but plunder, neither homeland or religion, with no affiliation or allegiance, or whose tribal leaders have come from Bitlis, Harput or even Erzurum here to attack the migrants and convoys.” In his own defense, he also claims that reports of widespread massacres are exaggerated, and that “with all my conscience, I swear that no armed gangs have been organized for the purpose of killing Christians... and that peace has been achieved through [both] honor and arms.”<sup>639</sup> Maintaining a record absolving the government for direct responsibility, the central theme of these letters becomes organized killing by opportunistic Kurdish and Arab tribes, who “follow the convoys

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<sup>637</sup> BOA., DH. ŞFR. 486/27-1/1, 15 Ağustos 1331 [28 August, 1915].

<sup>638</sup> BOA. DH. ŞFR. 480/40-1/1, 3 Temmuz 1331, [16 July, 1915].

<sup>639</sup> BOA., DH. ŞFR. 482/83-1/1. 22 Temmuz, 1331 [4 August, 1915].

from afar, following to kill those who desert or otherwise depart from the convoys, or, if necessary, robbing those who are expelled and those who died on the road.”<sup>640</sup> Absolving himself directly of guilt within the official record, his defenses indicate the reality that lines between Armenians and non-Armenian Christians were in fact blurry, given intermarriage, shared villages and city quarters. Reşid retorts “I can assure you that those... non-Muslims not of Armenian rank, as they often share the situation and thoughts with Armenians, as they are often residing together in the same houses, and that exceptions are made for them to be left out of the dispatched convoys, and every time this issue is brought forth to the administrative centers.”<sup>641</sup>

The second tendency displays not only the reality of the genocide; that it in fact broadly targeted Christians – Armenian and non-Armenian alike – through language of security, and also indicates the communal and regional subdivisions of these communities in the eyes of the state. In one letter, Reşid continues the discussion of Suryani and Chaldean “insurrection,” writing “non-Muslims in the province, carrying the various names of Chaldean, Jacobite [Ya`qubi], Tiyyari or Nestorian [Nasturi], have in general been poisoned by the English missionaries who have reached their villages.”<sup>642</sup> Later, in August, he writes, “As I previously reported, in this district, there is no difference between the corrupt and abominable Armenians and other various groups who carry the names Syrian Catholic, Chaldean, Jacobite, Tiyyari and Nestorians.”<sup>643</sup> Although, countering this broad accusation, he states again that “in order not to give the impression that we are against Christians in general,” they will only be targeted for security purposes, he further claims that the intermixing between Armenians and other

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<sup>640</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid.

<sup>642</sup> BOA. DH. ŞFR. 480/40-1/3, 3 Temmuz, 1331 [16 July, 1915].

<sup>643</sup> BOA., DH. ŞFR. 486/27-1/1, 15 Ağustos, 1331 [28 August, 1915].

communities has blurred the distinction between them. He justifies the supposed mistakes of the deportations by claiming, “the Syrian Catholics, Chaldeans and Jacobite of Diyarbakir, due to [intermarriage] of [their] girls, and generally as speaking Armenian, have become virtually Armenianized, with some even members of Armenian committees, and due to this some of them were mixed in with the [deportation] convoys.”<sup>644</sup> The same encrypted cable also indicates the Suryani of Bitlis as a potential security threat, claiming that “at the time of the evacuation of Bitlis,” following the Russian occupation of Van, “the Suryani openly rose up, with hope and courage, and the attitudes they have demonstrated in this action are so clear as to leave no doubt.”<sup>645</sup>

By the fall of 1915, as the organized deportation and murder of Syriac Christians was well underway, one letter to the Interior Ministry provides numbers of Suryani, mentioning they are the ones “detained within their neighborhoods, aside from the deportations,” but without giving numbers of those deported or removed from their homes.<sup>646</sup> Resistance by Syriac Christians in Tur abdin, to be discussed in greater detail shortly, gave the justification Reşid Pasha needed to present more non-Armenian Christians as a security threat. In one letter he clearly states his opinion of the Suryani of the Midyat region. Within a letter detailing the purported lawlessness affecting the deportation process, Reşid justifies the Suryani’s deportation through discussing what is, in reality, Suryani attempts to defend themselves against massacre: “[It is] made evident by the negligence shown by the qaymaqam and mounted gendarmes, due to the uprising [isyan], that it has become necessary to deport the Suryani of Midyat.”<sup>647</sup>

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<sup>644</sup> Ibid.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid.

<sup>646</sup> BOA., DH.ŞFR., 57/112 12 Teşrin-I Evvel, 1331 [25 November, 1915].

<sup>647</sup> BOA., DH. ŞFR. 482/83-1/5, 22 Temmuz, 1331 [4 August, 1915].

By 1916, Talat Pasha, in a letter from the Interior Ministry to security representatives in various eastern provinces, reiterates that Suryani fall within the purview of “deportations” as a security threat, undermining the narrative that these injustices were carried out only against the Armenians. The letter announces a notification that Suryani, “whose political positions have been opposed to the government since the outbreak of the war,” are to be located in “whichever regions they are found, or wherever they are located within the Ottoman lands for trade... to be part of the deportations.”<sup>648</sup> The reality of these deportations targeting Suryani is reflected as late as May, 1918 in these communications. A document from a public security branch office, although lacking numbers, even two years later states that it is creating a list of Suryani who were deported, “along with the Armenians,” in Aleppo, Diyarbakir, Mosul, Memuratulaziz, Bitlis and Urfa.<sup>649</sup>

### **Responses by Syriac Orthodox Church Authorities**

During these events the Syriac Orthodox Church enacted its standard technique of protection, utilizing networks between senior clergy and Ottoman officials and asserting the uniqueness and obedience of their community vis-à-vis the Armenians, a technique which had gained the government’s assistance in Diyarbakir during the Hamidiye Massacres in 1895. During this period, however, nuances of ethnic or denominational differences mattered little. As discussed in Muzaffer Iris’s work *Soğan Kabukları* (2017) on the Syriac Christian community of Adiyaman, government officers informed local officials that orders for deportation applied to all Christians, not just the Armenians, using a language of Christians as a disease

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<sup>648</sup> BOA., DH. ŞFR., 68/98. 8/10 Eylül, [1]332 [21/23 September, 1916].

<sup>649</sup> BOA., DH.ŞFR., 87/40. Mayıs [1]334 [May, 1918].

within the body of the empire.<sup>650</sup> The book's title comes from a response by a military officer when questioned why the loyal Suryani, like all Christians, should be deported: "The layers of an onion [soğan kabukları] are not important, what is important is the smell underneath."

Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Abdullah II, who reigned from 1908-1915, appears to have been unaware of the particulars of this calamity. He was the successor to Abdulmesih, who had taken charge of the community during the massacres of 1895, the impact of which deeply affected his ability to perform his duties, leading in part to his removal. Abdullah II focused a great deal of his attention on reestablishing the church's global connections and influence, traveling to London and India. He returned to the Empire in 1912, residing in Jerusalem rather than Madin his death in late 1915.<sup>651</sup> The Patriarch's outgoing correspondence prior to the war indicate confusion with the activities of the church in Mardin and Tur Abdin. In one episode in 1912, for example, the Patriarch states in a letter to Matran Gergis that he was informed via reading a newspaper that a large group of the community in Southeast Anatolia were planning to convert, and that he would send money to help prevent this.<sup>652</sup> Another letter shortly later states that he now believes this conversion will occur in Egypt and is due to pressure by the Russian government. However, in another letter shortly after, he states he has finally been informed on the matter and now locates the group at risk of conversion to being the Suryani of Diyarbakir, instigated by a local named ibn Qusho.<sup>653</sup> Ultimately, the Patriarch comes to understand that

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<sup>650</sup> Muzaffer Iris, *Soğan Kabukları: Adıyaman Süryanilerinin Tarihi*, ed. Jan Beth-Şawoce (Istanbul: Su, 2017).

<sup>651</sup> In 1914 he oversaw the creation of a *Nizâmnâme* whose purpose was gain official recognition of the Syriac Orthodox millet as an independent political entity rather than a subordinate of the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate. The millet had been treated as defacto independent since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>652</sup> "Letter to Matran Gergis," 8 Kanun al-Awwal [December], 1912, CFMM 878/6v.

<sup>653</sup> Letters to Rahib Ephrem Barsoum, Matran Gergis, 15 Kanun al-Awwal [December] 1912, CFMM 878 7r.

these problems were caused by a desire for schools, but his having learned of this from a newspaper and his lack of accurate information indicates his isolation.

Much of the communication between the church and government shifted to Derulzafaran in Mardin, the Patriarch's traditional residence. The authorship of particular correspondence sent to the government from the monastery is often unclear, but, like all of the church's correspondence, all outgoing letters were copied into a series of defters according to the Rumi calendar year. In the available record of church communications from Mardin to the government which is available the first open acknowledgment of the scale of the ongoing atrocities dates to August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1915. The letter, sent to Diyarbakir governor Reşid adopts language familiar to the 1895 Hamidian Massacres, using modifications of formulaic phrases developed during and after that event, extolling the long-standing loyalty of the Syriac Orthodox Church and its members since the days of the Prophet Muhammad, rather than the typical dating to the Pact of Umar used in earlier letters. Building upon this religious language, it then describes the community's obedience to the "ummah of the Islamic Ottoman State." Similarly, and with perhaps more sinister impact than in 1895, it builds upon preexisting discourses, amplifying the typical descriptions of Armenian "corruption" and "banditry," as used over the previous two decades, to a harsher language of "treachery."<sup>654</sup>

The letter then specifies the areas in which Syriac Orthodox Christians have been killed, declaring in accusatory language: "It is understood from miserable news and trustworthy documents that military units and their auxiliaries have been sent to annihilate members of the Syriac Orthodox community."<sup>655</sup> The blame, predictably, is placed upon the necks of the

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<sup>654</sup> "Letter to the Diyarbakir Governor," 28 Temmuz 1331 [10 August, 1915]. CFMM 866/067r; September, 1915, CFMM 861/41v.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid.

Armenian community rather than directly at the government. While pleading that its own community is being “trampled, annihilated and routed,” the Patriarchate claims this stems from confusion in the mind of the government between the “treacherous” Armenians and his own “innocent” community. Asserting again the innocence of the Syriac Orthodox, the document states “these suspicions and seditious thoughts [of Armenians] will no doubt cause conflict, as, clear as the sun, are in opposition to the well-meaning thoughts of our Ottoman sultan, enlightened by God’s word with merciful thoughts and deeds which challenge the western governments.”<sup>656</sup> These attempts at saving the community were to no avail.

From the Patriarch himself, the first correspondence indicating a sense of the scale of the ongoing calamity dates to October 5<sup>th</sup>. A letter, noting a delay in response as the Patriarch had been forced to go to the hospital for eye treatment.<sup>657</sup> This letter, to Matran Gergis in Mardin notes that he has been made aware of the situation in Mardin, Midyat, Cizre, Diyarbakir, Siverek, Beshiriye, Farqîn, Harput, Sirt, Bitlis and Nusaybin, referring to nearly every major Suryani population centers in Anatolia. The same day, a letter sent to Elyas Shakir in Mosul, who would replace him as the next patriarch, explains that his eye ailment has prevented him from being able to travel to Homs “for the protection of our community,” indicating that he sensed the need to leave his two-year residency in Jerusalem.

The final full letter from the Patriarch to the government, dated to November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1915, one week before his passing, begins by expressing the Patriarch’s condolences at the death of Hans von Wagenheim, the German General Consul in Constantinople. With another attestation of the Syriac Orthodox community as being “well-known for its loyalty, service and zeal to the

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<sup>656</sup> Ibid.

<sup>657</sup> The patriarch was fully blind in his right eye and partially blind in his left at this point, some two months before his death. “Letter to Matran Gergis in Mardin,” 5 Teshrin al-Awwal [October], 1915. CFMM 878/57v.

Ottoman government,” the letter then shifts its language to denouncement of Catholic communities vis-à-vis French interference, under the guise of presenting this as a property dispute: “The French, for centuries and by utilizing a thousand various tricks... in order to gain upon their own interests, have made catholic a once devoted nation and a significant part of our old friends, such as the now Maronites and Syrian Catholics... who have received nothing regarding religion.”<sup>658</sup> He then accuses the French of using these communities to undermine the Ottoman Empire’s internal affairs, evidenced by many “churches and monasteries belonging to our Syriac Orthodox millet to be captured by Catholics,” an issue he reminds that was raised in January, 1914 by the millet’s representative in Constantinople. The Patriarch then reaffirms the church’s devotion to the state, writing that the community and its leaders are praying, “in a manner that has become obligatory in our churches,” for the Ottoman government that has “made all kinds of sacrifices in defense of rights and justice,” and for its partner, the “great state of Germany,” and for the continuation of its victories. He then briefly returns to the not fully ratified *Nizâmnâme*, an attempt to indicate the legal precedent that acknowledges their separate status. The Patriarch died on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1915, in Jerusalem.

The single most damning letter, however, was sent by an unspecified author at Deyrulzafaran Monastery to the government. Two copies of this letter exist, with the original draft having been stored in the defter for another year of correspondence records. The letter, which has been edited by a copyist, dates from September 23, 1915, and states that the “annihilation of the Suryani Orthodox millet in the Diyarbakir vilayet, Beshiri, Silvan, Derik qazas, Siverek and connected sanjaks, Viransehir, Bitlis and their sanjaks, Mardin, Midyat, Nusaybin, Cizre... is being conducted by the Islamic ummah of the Ottoman Empire and its

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<sup>658</sup> “Letter to Fahim Beg in Istanbul,” 19 Teshrin al-Thani [November], 1915, CFMM 878, 54r. This is the final letter in defter 878.

auxiliaries, and various government commanders, in opposition to the compact of the Rightly Guided Caliph... and to the many decrees [until today] that had been respected, and the clear evidence and actions in recent times demonstrating our servitude and sincerity.”<sup>659</sup>

The events themselves were also being documented within Deyrulzafaran by anonymous scribe along with the famed Hanna Dolabani, then monk and later Archbishop of Mardin, who the year prior had served as editor of the Patriarchate’s journal *al-Hikma* and as a theology teacher to students from the community. The monastery itself suffered an attack during the summer of 1915, the events of which were written as a note in a copy religious manuscript dated October of the same year.<sup>660</sup> The note lists three bishops who had been martyred, then states the names of monks and priests are too numerous to list. It lays blame upon the *Tayoye*, the Syriac term used for Muslims, who were “not distinguishing between us and the children of Togarma [i.e. Armenians].”<sup>661</sup> However, as is not occurring elsewhere, the government reportedly intervened, sending ninety soldiers to protect the monastery.

In other examples, the processing of these events within the church focused on arguments to quell outrage against the government. However, within these archives, multiple letters shared between clergy demonstrate an aversion towards any perceived rebellion against the Ottoman Government, despite the ongoing genocide. Two such letters, both written on the backs of newspapers, were sent to Matran and soon Patriarch Elias Shakir, who was then residing in Mosul. The first, an Arabic letter dated late March, 1916, claims the endorsement of both the bishops of Mardin, Homs, Aleppo and Jerusalem along with their public. Their primary point,

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<sup>659</sup> CFMM 861/41v.

<sup>660</sup> Sebastian Brock, “A Historical Note of October 1915 Written in Dayro d-Zafaran (Deyrulzafaran),” in Gaunt, *Let them Not Return*, 148.

<sup>661</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

bolstered by a variety of scriptural references, is, as they state, that as the Sultan as with other authorities are appointed by God, “whoever rises against the sultan rises against God’s order.”<sup>662</sup> This is followed by an Ottoman-language letter three days later sent to Urfa, Harput, Diyarbakir and Istanbul, stating the same argument through reference and connection to scripture, such as Proverbs 24:21: “Fear the Lord and the king, my son, and do not join with rebellious officials,” and 1 Peter 2:13: “submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor as supreme authority.”<sup>663</sup>

### **Resistance in the Region**

The Seyfo’s targeting of non-Armenians and non-Protestants in Midyat and Tur Abdin began on July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1915, when, over the course of a week, the Christian population of Midyat suffered the full force of the genocide. As a preliminary step, the Diyarbakir governor Mehmed Reşid arranged for the murder of Midyat governor Nuri Bey, who held a close relationship to the Syriac Christian community, replacing him with a figure willing to implement the government’s plan within the city. On June 21st, Armenian Catholics and Protestants of Midyat were arrested, despite protests by Hanna Safar and those detained were killed one week later.<sup>664</sup> Additionally, military and auxiliary forces had positioned themselves throughout the region to ready themselves for their attack. In late May, an opportunistic breakaway force from the Heverkan Saliha tribe, that to which the Haydo family and many Christians belonged, attacked the villages of Bsorino and Kfarbe, but were repelled by a hastily organized defense by the Suryani

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<sup>662</sup> 21 Mart [March], 1916. HBS 2/11/79-80.

<sup>663</sup> 24 Mart [March], 1916. HBS 2/11/27.

<sup>664</sup> Sait Çetinoğlu, “Genocide/Seyfo – and How Resistance Became a Way of Life” in Travis, Hannibal ed., *The Assyrian Genocide: Cultural and Political Legacies*, 182.

community. This emboldened them to resist the upcoming calamity, organizing a series of defense committees throughout the region.

A few days prior to the start of the full-scale, government-backed massacre in Midyat, Hacı Başır, the new *qaymaqam*, held a planning meeting with loyal Kurdish tribal leaders, the details of which were reported to the Christian community by Mhelmi Arab and Kurdish individuals. This prompted a defense to be organized in the village of ‘Ainwardo, located to the east of Midyat, whose high walled and roofed primary church, Mor Had Bshabo, served as the defenders’ base of operations. Some six thousand villagers held out for fifty two days against over an ever growing force of Kurdish militias and Ottoman military, refusing to disarm and repelling multiple waves of attack, ending through the intervention of the Mhelmi Sheikh Fetullah, who pressured the attackers to cease. To the east, in Hezek, a militia and Ottoman army forces fought against defenders who had organized themselves into a unit entitled “Jesus’ Fedayeen.”<sup>665</sup> There, according to historian Sait Çetinoğlu, this group fully surrendered only in 1927, with many participants being murdered or dying in Diyarbakir Prison. In Bsorino, however, Melke Hanne Haydo, son of Şemun, organized a defense of the village in coordination with local sympathetic Kurdish tribal leaders.<sup>666</sup>

Absent from the region during this period were many of the most powerful figures of the Heverkan confederation, who were instead languishing in prison in Harput. Following news of losses in the Balkan Wars, Şemun Hanne Haydo, who, given his education was uniquely aware among his peers regarding larger events, had himself began preliminary steps to prepare defense

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Yalçın, *Şemun Hanne Haydo*, 257.

in the event of such violence, receiving Êlikê Bate's pledge that he would defend Christians.<sup>667</sup> But, before such preparations could be undertaken, Şemun, Çelebi Agha, Êlikê Bate, Haco III and Çelebi's brother Serhano were arrested in 1913 in order to weaken anti-government activity in the region, with an unsolved murder of Êzîdîs by Celebi Agha as the reason given.<sup>668</sup> A letter from Reşid Pasha dated April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1915, states that Êlikê Bate and Haco had, in particular, "worked together for a long period in undermining the security of Mardin province and to weaken the government."<sup>669</sup> No doubt aware of what was occurring, Şemun and Êlikê Bate planned and executed their escape from Harput in November, 1917 to take charge of their communities, with Êlikê Bate now the de facto leader of the Heverkan.

The two escapees set about reestablishing their power and the security of Tur Abdin, securing the support of the various tribes of the Heverkan confederation. After setting off to Nusaybin to arrange the sale of supplies to a German rail outpost, Êlikê Bate, answering a request from his community, raided the Nusaybin jail, freeing its prisoners. Emboldened by this event, more groups started to align with Êlikê Bate, and the government recognized that this had grown into a full-scale rebellion, one which they were now ill equipped to handle. As a result, the government turned to members of the Dekşurî, who had maintained their closeness with the state, to act as their auxiliary force against the Heverkan.<sup>670</sup> Part of this apprehension, noted in government documents, is that these two and their supporters had gathered machine guns, with

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<sup>667</sup> Ibid, 215.

<sup>668</sup> Tan dates this arrest to 1911. Tan, 146.

<sup>669</sup> In this letter Reşid recommends having Elike Bate executed; it is unclear what prevented this from being carried out. Document reprinted in Mahmud, Ibrahim, *Âlike Bate: F-ilwathaiq al-'Uthmaniyya – al-Turkiyya* (Damascus: Matba`a Zeman, 2021), Appendix.

<sup>670</sup> Cibo, *Haverkan Sultanlari*, 68.

local commanders stating artillery would be necessary to quash the uprising.<sup>671</sup> In a major clash in Nusaybin, Heverkan forces repelled the Dekşurî-government forces, effectively solidifying Êlikê Bate and Şemun Hanne Haydo's dominance of Tur Abdin, and resulted in the region's Christians identifying Êlikê Bate as their worthwhile protector against the Ottoman government.<sup>672</sup>

Having failed in its attempt to use the Dekşurî to defeat Êlikê Bate, who had by 1919 carved out an effectively autonomous area in Tur Abdin and Hezek, the government drew on Êlikê's preexisting rivalry with Çelebi Agha, Êlikê's relative and competitor for leadership of the Heverkan. Thus, the government granted amnesty to Celebi, Haco and Sarohan, releasing them from Harput Prison on the agreement that they would work to reign in Êlikê Bate. Celebi, returning to Mzizah, began gaining the support of the region's Syriac Christians by arranging the return of kidnapped women being held in villages under his control.<sup>673</sup> Having quickly reestablished some level of his previous authority, he fulfilled his side of the agreement, and murdered Êlikê Bate in the Syriac Christian village of Midin on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1919.

The period between 1919 and 1925 was marked by fighting for control of the Heverkan. Çelebi and his brother Serhan II built a retinue of one hundred men and began to establish their control over various tribes.<sup>674</sup> Haco, in return, harassed undefended areas loyal to Çelebi, and slowly built authority over groups from all Heverkan tribes.<sup>675</sup> The government, which had

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<sup>671</sup> Mahmud, *Âlike Bate*, 112.

<sup>672</sup> In an interview with Êlikê Bate's grandson, I was told that Şemun Hanne Haydo, unique in being properly educated, was the only one who understood how to operate these machine guns. He also stated that Şemun was the individual his grandfather trusted the most, even more than his Muslim comrades.

<sup>673</sup> Yalçın, 374.

<sup>674</sup> Van Bruinessen, 102.

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

reached its aims through eliminating Êlikê Bate and placing the Heverkan in disarray, were able to reestablish control by 1921, treating the Heverkan as a loyal group. Additionally, by 1925, Haco had established clear authority over Çelebi Agha, who now weakened was once again arrested along with Şemun Hanne Haydo. Celebi Agha died in prison shortly thereafter.

### **Haco Agha and Xoybûn**

The impact of this division and resulting weakness manifested in Haco and the Haverkan's actions during the Sheikh Said Rebellion. According to historian Nezire Cibo, the weakening of Haco due to fighting with the state and the split between Celebi's supporters and his own meant that refusing the government's call to support their suppression of the Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925 would bring disaster upon the Heverkan. In order to avoid the government's reprisal, he volunteered a force which he deliberately led on a circuitous route west to Siverek to delay their arrival and thus avoided any confrontation with Sheikh Said's supporters. However, this act caused some to criticize Haco as having turned his back against the Kurdish nationalist movement and is a cause of debate in historiography. In his own history of Kurdistan written in 1970, the famed poet Cegerxwîn places particular blame on Haco, interpreting his actions as deliberately in opposition to the rebellion, claiming that "if Haco Agha had not been the chief of the Hevêrkan, there would have been none to obstruct us."<sup>676</sup> Others, including Haco's son, have argued that, given no choice by the government, Haco manufactured an excuse to prevent him from having to enter Diyarbakir until after he had received word that the fighting had ended.<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>676</sup> Cegerxwîn, *Tarixî Kurdistan: Cîld 2* (Stockholm: Weşanên Roja Nû, 1987), 91. Van Bruinessen posits that Haco likely had foreknowledge of the rebellion, but, given his reputation was unwilling to participate in support rather than at the head of a rebellion.

<sup>677</sup> Cibo, 100.

However, this statement reflects an assumption that the Sheikh Said Rebellion should be considered a fully Kurdish Nationalist uprising.

Instead, Haco attempted his own uprising one year later, seizing police and frontier posts, and, according to van Bruinessen, then demanding assistance from Kurdish leaders throughout the greater region, including within Syria and Iraq.<sup>678</sup> Unsuccessful, he then fled into Syria, where he received protection from the Tayy tribe, conducted raids into Turkey, and soon became the French Mandate administration's preferred intermediary on Kurdish issues. In exile, living alongside other nationalists who had fled Anatolia, Haco became one of the founding members of *Xoybûn*, the most influential Kurdish nationalist organization of the interwar period. As a member of the organization, Haco participated in planning and mobilization for the Ararat Rebellion (1930), and in outreach and coordination with Êzîdî tribes of Sinjar, marking an expansion of the Kurdish nationalist movement to now explicitly include non-Muslim Kurdish speaking communities. However, the Heverkan, its leadership now in exile, never returned to its previous level of dominance within Tur Abdin.

## **Historical Memory**

These events, in particular the personalities of and relations between Êlikê Bate and Şemun Hanne Haydo, and, although not entirely accurate, the symbol of the Heverkan as a religiously tolerant model of Kurdishness echoed throughout cultural and intellectual production in the post-war period. In particular, the journal *Hawar* (1932-35, 1941-43), a publication edited by *Xoybûn* founder Celedet Ali Bedirxan, includes multiple examples of reference to the Heverkan alluding to these aspects. One short story, entitled “Mîr û Keşe” [The Emir and Priest]

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<sup>678</sup> Van Bruinessen, 104.

written by an author identified as “Koçerê Botan” [a nomad of Botan] reflects this multi-religious fascination of the Heverkan.<sup>679</sup> In the story, the emir of Botan sets out on a journey and enters the “Heverkan mountain,” staying the night in a Christian village, in which he visits a church. The Mir tells the priest he will ask three questions to him three months later in Cizre. If the priest can answer, he will be made patriarch; if he cannot, he will be removed from the priesthood and made a groundskeeper for the church. A shepherd who served the priest then offers to go in the priest’s stead and succeeds in the emir’s quiz.<sup>680</sup> In another example, a poem published later in the journal’s run entitled “Bêrîya Botan” [Longing for Botan] discusses the various areas and peoples of the region of Botan and its surroundings through a long poetic list. With each mention, it attributes some select quality of the tribe or region. In its presentation of the Heverkan, the poet praises “our sword bearers, our Christians, the Heverkî.”<sup>681</sup> Perhaps reflecting a sense that they were firmly allied with the state, the Dekşurî are not mentioned. Another significant example is the memorialization of this event in the popular *dengbêj* song entitled Êlikê Bate. It is, to this point, unclear when this was first performed, but is present in recordings from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by multiple artists. The song’s narrative centers upon both the life and heroism of Êlikê Bate, as well as his friendship with Şemun Hanne Haydo.

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<sup>679</sup> Koçerê Botan, “Mîr û Keşe,” *Hawar*, 1 no. 9, 30 September, 1932. 102-103.

<sup>680</sup> The questions and answers are: “How many drops of water are there in the sea?” “That’s easy to count, for you could command that the edge of the sea close in on itself.” “If I were to sell myself, how much gold would I get?” “Twenty-nine pieces... for my emir, you know that Jesus was sold for thirty pieces. However much else it might be, it could not be that amount.” “What is it that I am about to say?” “This is easiest of all... you’re going to ask if I’m the priest. Well, I’m just a shepherd, the priest is in the village!”

<sup>681</sup> Herekolu Azîzan, “Bêriya Botan,” *Hawar*, 3 no. 25, 19 July, 1935. 2.

## Conclusion

Through careful examination of the social history of Late Ottoman Tur Abdin, this chapter demonstrated the ways in which local Christian actors were able to influence or control tribal politics and to utilize the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Ottoman government for their benefit. As demonstrated in the history of the Safar family, such figures negotiated an environment of intercommunal violence and political rivalry. However, through collaboration with the government and other members of the Dekşurî confederation, this family was able to rise to prominence in Midyat, serving as intermediary for the government and church in its relations with the surrounding communities. In the rival Heverkan confederation, the Syriac Orthodox Haydo family was centrally involved in the region's history from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the Seyfo and post-war resistance against the government. Thus, this chapter illuminated how religious categories were part of, but not the sole factor determining the power of local families.

Regarding the Seyfo, this chapter has demonstrated that the main agents of its implementation first viewed the Suryani community within local contexts but quickly utilized language of corruption and foreign influence to justify deportation and murder of the entire community. It provided new, previously unused documents from the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate and its leadership in both Jerusalem and Mardin indicating perception that the ongoing violence was part of a plan to rid the region of Christians, as well as indicating that the Patriarch Ignatius Abdullah II, in his final months, was unaware of the full extent of the ongoing catastrophe.

## CONCLUSION

*Oh Assyrians, without unity there is no chance for freedom  
Wake up, and work with grace and righteousness  
For if we remain unmoved in this age  
There is no doubt that they will rule over us forever*<sup>682</sup>

-Naum Faiq, 1919

“If only Kurdistan was ours, then everything would be for the sake of the homeland... the foreman would be a chosen by the Kurds and wouldn’t shout at us for being Kurds... the language which we speak together, so dear to us, would be spoken and heard everywhere. Today we are paupers, and our homes have been stolen from us. And why?”<sup>683</sup>

-Celadet Ali Bedirxan, 1927

By the end of 1925, the surviving ideologues of the Assyrian and Kurdish nationalist movements found themselves operating from exile, with both of their final hopes for a national homeland all but destroyed following the Paris Peace Conference and partition of the Ottoman Empire. For the Assyrians, the tragedy of the past decade was incomparable. Up to 250,000 Assyrians were killed in the Seyfo Genocide, murdered and deported by government directive as the Armenian Question quickly shifted to include all Christians, with the killing and brutality most often perpetrated by the Kurdish communities among whom their community had lived for centuries. Their homeland in Tur Abdin, Hakkâri, Urmiah, Harput and elsewhere were left devastated, in many cases their homes and villages now belonging to those who had carried out this violence, and many of the wives and daughters who survived now enslaved as war spoils.

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<sup>682</sup> Naum Faiq, “For the Assyrian and Chaldean Diplomatic Missions,” *Beth Nahrin*, 4 no. 4, 15 April 1919. This is the final stanza of a long poem dedicated to those representing the Assyrian cause at the Paris Peace Conference.

<sup>683</sup> Celadet Ali Bedirxan, “Ber Tevna Mehîrê (In Front of the Weaver’s Loom),” *Hawar*, 1 no. 4, 3 Tirmeh [July], 1932: 4. This is from a dialogue in a 1927 short story between the characters Zizê and Rindê, two young girls living in abject poverty with their mother and brother after their father was killed during the Sheikh Said Rebellion. They are forced to work in a textile workshop under harsh conditions in order to raise money to pay for their brother’s education, which both daughters willingly agree to do, recognizing educated young men as the only key to the Kurds’ salvation.

Very few of the luminaries of the pre-war movement survived, and those, such as Naum Faiq, who had found refuge elsewhere sought to salvage whatever hope and unity they could, trying to coalesce the still disparate Syriac Christian communities into a single Assyrian identity.

The intellectual circles of Kurdish nationalism had also begun its shift away from the homeland to exile in French Mandate Syria. Although not a broad Kurdish nationalist uprising, with its goals both nationalist and religious, the Sheikh Said Rebellion had brought down the full might of the new Turkish Republic upon Diyarbakir and its surroundings. The nationalist organization behind the rebellion, *Azadî* (Freedom) drew many of its leaders from the Hamidiye Cavalry and sought a return from secularist Turkey back to a caliphate. Although they gathered many supporters, the cause of restoring the old order did not prove salient enough of a rallying cry to make sustained gains against the Turkish government. Given free reign with emergency powers and the reinstated *Istiklal Mahkemeleri* (Independence Tribunals), the Turkish military suppressed the rebellion and issued execution orders to more than 600 participants and supporters of the rebellion, along with journalists and members of the nationalist *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan), and 20,000 deported to Western Turkey.<sup>684</sup>

The previous decade had brought the first waves of Assyrian and Kurdish nationalisms in the homeland to an end. Although the Kurdish nationalist movement would soon attempt another rebellion in Turkish Ararat at the end of the 1920s, it, like Assyrian nationalism, underwent significant changes in order to form a more effective movement. This dissertation sought to demonstrate the processes behind the emergence of the Assyrian and Kurdish nationalist movements in Northern Kurdistan. Through tracing the historical events and discourses linked to

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<sup>684</sup> Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: a Modern History*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 172.

these nascent movements, it displayed the processes underlying them, and illuminated how historical and social factors dictated the contours of their formation.

This work opened with the events surrounding the Hamidian Massacres, a wave of violence peaking in 1894-1896 caused by the repressive administration of the Abdulhamid regime and his auxiliary Kurdish Hamidiye Cavalry regiments in Kurdistan. According to the Ottoman government, the violence and chaos that spread throughout the Eastern Provinces was a result of Armenian separatist activity. In reality, their underlying cause was the free hand to maintain order given to the government's loyal Kurdish, Arab, and Circassian tribes, who used Armenian political activity as an excuse to plunder and retaliate against old foes. This work's first chapter argued that this was the necessary catalyst for driving Assyrian and Kurdish nationalisms into action. The Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, still technically under the hierarchical authority of the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate under the millet system, rapidly shifted its language with the state to present itself as a distinct community and loyal subjects of the Sultanate. Nationalists such as Naum Faiq and Ashur Yusuf saw the Syriac Orthodox Church as a primary target for reform, but sought to bind together an Assyrian identity that crossed denominational lines. Kurdish nationalists likewise channeled the disasters of the Hamidian Massacres to call for immediate change, seeing Russian occupation as inevitable otherwise. A groundbreaking part of this initial process was the creation of *Kürdistan*, the first Kurdish-language journal, which was founded in Cairo by Midhat Miqdad Bedirxan. The urgent, confrontational language of the journal's Kurdish-language writing criticized Kurdish leaders of the Hamidiye Regiments, and rallied Ottoman Kurds around a message of religious and educational reform.

The story then followed the rise of nationalist organizations and the orientation of initial discourses around education, which was treated as the most meaningful and realistic target of reform. Both groups discussed their current state as a decline that only education could reverse, and both also identified institutions key to making educational changes a reality. For Assyrian nationalists in the Syriac Orthodox community, these arguments became a way to criticize and negotiate with the Patriarchate and promote boundary-maintenance against Protestant conversion. Their Kurdish counterparts used similar approaches against Turkification and the elite politics of state education. The newfound freedoms of the Second Constitutional Era in 1908 opened new forums for debate over these ideas, with Kurdish nationalist periodicals no longer smuggled in from exile but freely published and read in the Ottoman Empire, and nationalist organizations better able to operate.

Then, it explored how these nationalist discourses evolved into more complex discussions over national histories, the role of language, and of the function of ethnic boundaries. The dissertation's third chapter, through careful analysis of such debates most clearly shows the ethno-symbolist process central to the broader study. Entities such as the Kurdish *Hevî* student organization, or the Assyrian periodicals of Naum Faiq and Ashur Yusuf broadened their discussions, pulling out increasingly complex symbols from the past to address questions of their present. By looking deeper into periodicals from 1908-1914, the third also shows how these discourses were understood and viewed by the reading public, evidenced by letters and external discussions.

The dissertation's final chapter moved from the largely urban-based nationalist circles to the rural, tribe-dominated villages of Tur Abdin. Focusing on the back-and-forth struggles between the ethnically and religiously diverse Heverkî and Dekşurî tribal confederations, it

traces the region's history from the 1850s through the early 1920s. Through a narrative centered at first around the Midyat-based and Dekşurî-aligned Safar family, it showed how ethnic and religious identity was not the sole determining factor that defined social life, but rather that they served as one part of an intricate web of obligations and allegiances. Furthermore, it showed how threat of conversion was a tool of gaining leverage from church authorities. Then, shifting to the Seyfo and its aftermath, it offered a narrative of heroic defense and cooperation within the Assyrian community and key members of remaining Kurdish Heverkî leadership. It also provided valuable new evidence regarding the Seyfo, including correspondance produced within the Patriarchate during the summer of 1915 that characterized the ongoing events as the eradication of all Christians in the Eastern Provinces. It then ended the dissertation's narrative with the subjugation of the Heverkî, the collapse of the Sheikh Said Rebellion and the flight into exile of Haco Agha, laying the groundwork for the next iteration of the Kurdish nationalist movement.

The research for this dissertation explored subjects beyond the bounds of this particular project, leaving room for myself and future researchers to investigate other areas of the region's history. Much of this would serve scholars interested in constructing a detailed history of the Late Ottoman Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, whereas this project sought to blend that perspective with others wherever possible. There is still much work to be done cataloging archival records, and certainly new insights relevant to nationalism, social history, and theology and religious studies. Another hope is that this material can serve as a vital tool for other Kurdish Studies researchers, which is slowly becoming less reliant on Ottoman and foreign primary sources.

I wish to conclude by discussing ongoing research that shows how the interconnectivities between these communities still exist in the region today, despite the Seyfo, the flight of

Assyrians caused by the state and the PKK war, and ongoing usurpation of Assyrian farmland by unscrupulous agents. This dissertation began with a discussion of intercommunal relations based on folkloristic and linguistic data from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including Eugen Prym and Albert Socin’s work on the modern Aramaic dialect Surayt, referred to as Turoyo by scholars.<sup>685</sup> Ongoing linguistics research, which I have been fortunate to assist with in editing, shows how many of these elements continue in the Syriac Orthodox community’s heartland. Some recent articles that have emerged from this project show the continued recitation of the Matran Îsa, a sung folktale about a marriage between a Muslim young man and Christian young woman, which ends in a gun battle between an Armenian bishop and the Ottoman army in their defense.<sup>686</sup> Other oral histories reflect the continued ties across Muslim and Christian families in Tur Abdin. A Turoyo oral telling of the lives of Saints Boses and Shushan recorded by the team of researchers includes mention by the narrator of Muslims and Christians gathering water seen as holding divine healing powers, with Muslims referring to its source as “the sheikh’s cave (şikefta şex)” and Christians as “[Mor] Şhushan’s Basin (gurno d-Şuşan),” reflecting how even in shared spaces different narratives have formed of their origin.<sup>687</sup> Christian clergy in Tur Abdin and its eastern neighboring region of Botan also continue use of Kurmanji as the language of communication to many in the community, showing how linguistic boundaries still overlap across ethnic communities. Still, the Christians of Tur Abdin are routinely subjected to violence

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<sup>685</sup> As mentioned previously, the term Turoyo is based on the Syriac word for mountain, and is connected to the regional name Tur Abdin. It was a name for the language used at first by Mardin’s Assyrian community to refer to the language of the Tur Abdin hinterland.

<sup>686</sup> Gülsima Demir, Yulia Furman and Nikita Kuzin, “‘Metran Îsa! Do Not Stir Up Trouble, Trouble is Bad!’: A Kurdish Folk Song Through a Christian Lens,” *Oral Tradition*, 35 no. 2 (2022): 441-62.

<sup>687</sup> Unpublished Recording, “Mar Boses and Mar Shushan,” Conducted by Gülsima Demir, Yulia Furman, Nikita Kuzin, and Sergey Loesev. January, 2020.

and land confiscation by opportunistic neighbors, and are in a constant struggle to maintain a livelihood and presence in their ancestral homeland.<sup>688</sup>

Although both nationalist movements have transformed throughout the past century, Kurdish nationalism has achieved a cohesive narrative, one which can maintain its ideological tenets. The rise of the PKK and the current coordination of the KCK of Kurdish parties and organizations across border divides eventually created a near hegemony of the Kurdish nationalist movement. Although the particular tenets of this dominant form are not ubiquitous in all portions of the movement, other groups, such as the religiously devout Kurdish members of the Nurcu movement are influenced by the discourses that Öcalan and the PKK have firmly established. There has also been a sense expressed by some Ezîdîs that the Kurdish nationalist movement tokenizes their community. The abandonment of the Ezîdîs of Sinjar by Kurdistan Region Government security forces and prevention of local defense organization during the Islamic State's summer 2014 offensive left them vulnerable to the genocide that unfolded in August of that year. This tragedy led some to renounce Kurdish identity, seeing their community as uniquely Ezîdî. The Assyrian community, in contrast, is still engaged in a process of debate over nomenclature, national history and denominational and ethnic boundaries, a divide driven by political and religious leaders navigating the complexities of both the diaspora and struggles of preserving the communities of the Middle East. The Syriac Orthodox Church, seeking to protect its community by avoiding any hint of subversiveness also engages with these debates within the Syriac Orthodox heartland in Turkey. One source worth considering on this topic is a

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<sup>688</sup> Even while finishing this conclusion one such attack has occurred; two elderly villagers were attacked by four shepherds near the small Assyrian village of Sederi (Üçyol) in Nusaybin Province near Mor Evgin Monastery. Three years prior, in 2020, members of the village were arrested along with a well-known monk at the monastery for baseless accusations of supporting the PKK. Also occurring in early 2020 were the still-unsolved murder of Şimoni and Hürmüz Diril in their home village of Mehr in Şirnak Province.

hymnal arranged by the monk Nahir Akçay and published by the Syriac Orthodox diocese of Adiyaman. Aside from a collection of religious songs penned by various figures from the Syriac Christian tradition it also includes a section entitled *Zmīrōte Ūmtōnōyōte* or “Songs of the Nation.” Although the particular meaning here is songs from among the community, rather than nationalistic songs, these works engage in many important symbols of the nationalist movement. The authors of these 54 total works hail mostly from villages throughout Tur Abdin, and includes two 20<sup>th</sup> century Syriac Orthodox Patriarchs and multiple Metropolitans. It does include three works by Naum Faiq, albeit none that explicitly use the word Assyrian to describe the nation. In the many contained works ascribing a title to the nation other than *Suryōyō* (Suryani), the nomenclature is clear: Saint Ephrem is “the pride of Aramaeanness,” the community and the language they speak are both descendants of the Aramaeans, or, as one writer declares “Suryaniness, it is my nation, and the Aramaeans are my ancestors.”<sup>689</sup> Still, the influence of the Assyrian nationalist project remains, even if the nomenclature has changed due to political pressures of life in the Turkish Republic. Whatever the choice of title for the community, the symbols are familiar: the language they preserve is that the same used by Jesus, Saint Ephrem, Jacob of Serugh, and Bar Hebraeus, the schools they attend connect to a long history of Syriac learning, and they are the original inhabitants of both Mesopotamia and Tur Abdin.

This dissertation did not seek to address the full story of the changes of Kurdish and Assyrian nationalism since the 1890s, focusing solely on their initial ideological formation in the Ottoman Empire. The continued importance of this story’s main figures does, despite whatever changes have occurred, bear witness to the foundations they established. The logical next step of this project would be to track changing conditions of the 20th century caused continued

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<sup>689</sup> Nahir Akçay, *Qūqnūs dNe ‘mōte* (Adiyaman: Diocese of Adiyaman, 2012), 218.

reformulations of the symbols essential to the Kurdish and Assyrian nationalist movements. It is the hope that this has provided a useful basis for any seeking to tackle such a question.

## Bibliography

### A Note on Primary Sources

This dissertation drew heavily from a variety of archival sources. It is the hope that this brief explanation will offer some guidance to those seeking to research the history of the Suryani and Kurds of the Late Ottoman Empire and provide some context on the documents' materiality. As the sheer volume of documents cited in this archive would make individual listing cumbersome, I encourage any readers to make note of the documents cited in the body of the dissertation. The majority of archival documents come from various collections related to the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate. Details on these and their relationship to the dissertation's focus are described in the introduction and the following information can serve as a guide for access.

Archive 1 is the Mardin Patriarchate Archive housed in Mardin, Turkey. A team of researchers photographed these documents in 2005 and I was fortunate to assist Beth Mardutho in cataloging a portion of them. These are listed in the dissertation under the general format of MPA-K05-SetNumber-DocumentNumber. MPA is an abbreviation for Mardin Patriarchate Archive, K05 is an abbreviation for [Deyro d'] Kurkmo 2005, the "set number" for a cataloging subset, and document number for the number assigned to that subset.

Archive 2 is a varied assortment of documents being catalogued in collaboration with scholar Hanna Bet-Sawoce. These are listed to the cataloging scheme which I have devised. For example, HBS 1/2/14 refers to Hanna Bet-Sawoce/Set1/Subset2/Document number 14. When possible, I have given titles to the documents based on the sender, although the sender's name cannot always be determined. I have also provided dates either directly from the document or through context based on handwriting or subject matter.

Archive 3, unlike the other two, is easily accessible. This archive consists of copies of correspondence sent out by the Patriarchate and is arranged chronologically in a series of *defters* [notebooks] arranged by Rumi calendar year. These are freely available for viewing through the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library's Virtual Reading Room located at the following address: <https://www.vhmm.org/>. These are footnoted in the dissertation under the format: [Collection name] [Folio number]/[Page number].[Entry number]. For example, CFMM 857/128v.2 refers to Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin, Folio number 857, page 128 verso, second entry on the page.

### **Archival Collections**

*Osmanlı Başbakanlık Arşivleri* (Ottoman Prime Ministerial Archives): Istanbul, Turkey.

- (A\_)MKT\_UM :Sadaret Mektubi Kalemî Umum Vilayet Yazmışmalarına Ait Belgeler
- BEO: Bab-1 Ali Evrak Odası
- DH.İD: Dahiliye Nezaret İdare Evrakı
- DH.MKT: Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi
- DH.MUİ: Muhaberât-1 Umumiye İdaresi Belgeleri
- DH.ŞFR: Şifre Kalemî Belgerleri
- DH.TMİK: Dahiliye Nezâret-1 Muamelat ve Islahat Komisyonu
- İ.DH: İrade, Dahiliye
- MF.MKT: Maarif Nezâret Mektubi Kalemî
- Y.PRK.AZN: Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Adliye ve Mezahib Nezâreti Maruzatı
- Y.PRK.MF: Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Maârif Nezâreti Maruzâtı

*Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*: Vat.sir.584

MPA: Mardin Patriarchate Archive

HBS: Patriarchate and Miscellanea Archive

CFMM: Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate Archive (External): Hill Museum and Manuscript Library.

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