Arabic and Aramaic in Iraq: Language and Syriac Christian Commitment to the Arab Nationalist Project (1920-1950)
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Introduction

> There is nothing in the custom of patriotism named Muslim, Christian or Israelite, but there is something called Iraq.
> —Faisal I, King of Iraq (1920–1933)

These words were reportedly uttered by King Faisal in 1921 during a visit to leaders of the Jewish community of Baghdad.[1] The quotation has become a famous symbol of Faisal's ideals for the state of Iraq, which had been established under a British mandate a year earlier. In the new country of Iraq, all citizens regardless of religion were supposed to be equal under the umbrella of Iraq as an Arab state, which Faisal embodied because of his major role during the Arab revolt in the Hijaz. This included the small but significant two to four percent of Christians, the great majority of whom belonged to one of the four churches of the Syriac tradition. After Faisal's death, Chaldean Christians proudly repeated the words together with a number of other quotations in an obituary in the Chaldean Catholic journal *al-Najm* (The Star).[2] The Chaldean Catholic Church, which had its patriarchate in Mosul, was the largest of the four Syriac churches in Iraq and staunchly supported the fact that Iraq was an Arab state. *Al-Najm* was the Chaldean patriarchate's official mouthpiece in the years 1928–1938 and throughout its years of publication we find words of support for the new state and its king, as well as expressions of belonging to the Arab nation. In line with these ideas, the journal was published in the

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[1] Rashīd al-Khayyūn, "*Mīr Baṣrī yuʾarrikh li-yahūd al-ʿIrāq ayyām al-waḥda al-waṭaniyya*," *al-Sharq al-awsaṭ*, 14 Safar 1427/March 15, 2006, http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?article=353029&issueno=9969. All translations from Arabic, Syriac and French in this dissertation are mine.

[2] *Al-Najm* 5:7 (1933): 329–30.

Arabic language only and Arabic was propagated as the language of
the Chaldeans, in complete harmony with the state's official ideas.

When taking the current situation of Iraq into account, the appar-
ent optimism of the Chaldean Patriarchate about their future in the
country seems remarkable. In addition to that, the 20th-century his-
tory of Iraq is full of dark episodes concerning the treatment of its non-
Muslim communities. For the important community of Jews of Iraq,
the 1940s and the 1950s even led to an end of their presence, starting
with a pogrom in Baghdad in 1941 known as the *Farhūd* and culmi-
nating in mass emigration to the newly founded state of Israel during
the years 1949–1951. At the Christian side, trust in the state of Iraq
underwent a major blow in 1933, when more than 600 Assyrian Chris-
tians lost their lives in the Simele massacre. Nevertheless, the first
couple of decades after World War I were characterized by a great op-
timism about the future of Iraq as a country in which Jews, Christians
and Muslims could live together as equal citizens under the wing of
an Arab government. The case of the Jews of Iraq, who formed a third
of Baghdad's total population in the beginning of the twentieth cen-
tury, is especially well studied and shows that integration into Iraqi
society and the Arab world was actively strived for by a large share
of the country's Jewish elite.[3] But also for many Muslim intellectuals,
the state of Iraq offered new horizons for a progressive future of the
country.[4] As Orit Bashkin notes for both the Jewish experience and
that of the progressive intellectuals of the early years, the sometimes
dramatic outcomes of Iraqi history should not blind us when we look
at earlier times, when genuine attempts to promote equality of the re-
ligions were prevalent in all layers of the Iraqi elite.[5] In other words:
we should see the efforts to promote coexistence and equality in the
early Iraqi state in their own right.

That being said, even in the early decades of the state of Iraq the
theory of religious equality within an Arab nation did not always ma-

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[3]Orit Bashkin, *The New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Palo Alto:
Stanford University Press, 2012); Aline Schlaepfer, *Les intellectuels juifs de Bagdad:
Discours et allégeances* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

[4]Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford:
Stanford University Press, 2009).

[5]Bashkin, *The New Babylonians*, 138. In relation to the *Farhūd*, Bashkin calls this
tedency the "Farhudization" of Iraqi Jewish history.

terialize. In some cases this led to serious confrontations between the state and specific parts of Iraq's population. The reason for these confrontations can partly be found in the fact that the idea of Iraq as an Arab state accommodated most, but not all elements of Iraqi society. The largest non-Arab group was that of the Kurds, who were formally included in Iraq when the former Ottoman province of Mosul became officially part of the country in 1925. Directly after the League of Nations decision in Iraq's favor, autonomy for this ethnically diverse area was promised together with the recognition of Kurdish as an official language. In the end, however, none of these promises came to fruition: the northern part of the country did not obtain any special status and Arabic remained the only official language.[6] This resulted in several revolts and a lasting separatist movement. On the Christian side, the greatest catastrophe was the Simele massacre of 1933. One year after the independence of Iraq and the end of the British mandate, more than 600 Assyrian Christians were killed in a series of massacres that would forever shape the way the outside world looked at the treatment of the Christians in the country. The attacks specifically targeted the Assyrians who had come as refugees from the Hakkari and Urmia regions outside Iraq. This kept the other Christians out of range, but the massacre went hand in hand with general anti-Christian sentiments in society. Events like these may be seen as indicative of the limits of tolerance within the Arab nationalist ideals of King Faisal and the rest of Iraq's political elite.

The Simele massacre of the Assyrians, which is dealt with in detail in Chapter 1, is the event that most plainly shows how Iraq's Arab nationalist ideology was not fitting for all Christians. It raises the question of how this relates to the apparent harmony between the Chaldean Catholic Church and the state. Why did the Assyrians and the Chaldeans have such different experiences in Iraq? And was Iraqi society genuinely inclusive to the Chaldeans, or was the toleration contingent on forced assimilation, and eventually bound to fail because the anti-Assyrian sentiments in Iraq were in fact anti-Christian in nature? To a certain extent, the Christian situation is similar to that of the Kurds and the other non-Arabs in the country, but at the same time it is more complicated. The Christians in Iraq, who belonged

[6] Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: 1914–1932* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), 135.

to the four major denominations of Syriac Christianity (see below), showed great variation in mother tongue and ethnic or national identification. As we saw in relation to Faisal's quotation, the Chaldean Catholic Church did not only propagate allegiance to the state of Iraq and its king, but also embraced the Arab language and the state's Arab character as their own. On the other hand, members of the Assyrian intellectual elite advocated a distinct Assyrian identification by providing education for themselves and by publishing books in the Classical Syriac and Neo-Aramaic languages. Despite being citizens of Iraq, the state's Arabness did not appeal to most of them, and the Simele massacre of 1933 caused mass emigration. The two further groups, the Syriac Orthodox and the Syriac Catholic, generally showed more support for the state but did not go as far as to identify as Arabs.[7] In other words, while the Arab nationalist ideas, upon which the Iraqi state was built, explicitly left room for Christians to take part in it, there was great variation between the different groups as to how they saw themselves as part of, or outside Iraqi Arab society.

By building a state on the ideology of Arab nationalism, non-Arabs are by definition in a precarious position. In that sense, the case of Christians in Iraq is no different than the case of the Armenians in Lebanon in Syria or the Kurds and Turkmens in Iraq. However, what is special about the Syriac Christians in Iraq is that even though they almost all belonged to the Syriac branch of Christianity,[8] many of them identified as Arab or had positive feelings about the fact that Iraq was an Arab state, while others did not. As Syriac Christians, they had a shared history and heritage, which can be traced back to the first centuries of Christianity and possibly earlier, and which is characterized by the use of the Classical Syriac language and a shared liturgical and literary tradition. Taking this into account, the above-mentioned differences in participation in the state's Arab character are striking. Ranging from two extremes – 1) the complete rejection of identification as Arabs to 2) the support of radical right-wing Arab nationalism

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[7] The four groups I mention here are loosely defined at this point, but their definitions are problematic as some of the names may have different meanings according to the context. Below I discuss in detail the Christian groups in Iraq and how I categorize them.

[8] Exceptions in Iraq are a number of Armenian Christians and foreign Catholic and Protestant Christians, who are largely left out of this dissertation.

– this dissertation tackles the plentiful differences that arose along this scale.

Language is one of the main keys to look at these differences. Apart from the fact that language is seen in general as an important factor for ethnicity and nationalism, it is usually the main factor given by the main proponents of Arab nationalism itself: an Arab is somebody with Arabic as their native language. For the situation of the Syriac Christians in Iraq, language also serves as an excellent starting point for explaining the differences in participation. The Syriac Christians were not homogeneous as to their mother tongues: those native to bigger cities like Mosul and Baghdad had Arabic as their native language, while those from outside these cities and those who came as refugees from abroad spoke a certain form of Neo-Aramaic. Differences in native languages do not explain everything, however, since there are cases where groups that have similar situations concerning native languages show different tendencies in their identifications and positions towards the state's Arab character. The purpose of this dissertation is therefore to carefully analyze the Syriac Christians' use of and thoughts about both Arabic and other languages, in order to find out how the relation of the various groups of Syriac Christians in Iraq to Arabic and other languages influenced their ability and willingness to participate in the Arab nationalist project as it was being set up in the new state of Iraq.

The Syriac Christians of Iraq are not the only people in the Arab world whose language use is complicated enough to make their position in Arab nationalism undecided. This ambivalence is especially an issue for the region's non-Muslim groups, who all deal with one or more languages other than Arabic. For some groups, this is because of the presence of other languages than Arabic that are spoken as native languages. It is even an issue for groups of which all members have Arabic as their native language, because in virtually all cases there is an ecclesial or liturgical language that performs a function inside the church—an example is the use of Coptic by the Arabic-speaking Copts of Egypt. Finally, educational efforts by European missionary and aid organizations regularly caused Christians and Jews to get closer to European culture by means of language, often to a greater extent than they did with Muslims. The question how language worked as a factor in the complex relationship between the Christians in the

Arab world and Arab nationalism in the period 1920–1950 was the
subject of the Leiden research project *Arabic and Its Alternatives: Religious Minorities in the Formative Years of the Middle East (1920–1950)*.[9]
The main problem that this project sought to address is the fact that
on the one hand the Arabic language, and not Islam, was regarded
as the main ingredient of being an Arab, allowing non-Muslims to
participate, while at the same time those non-Muslim groups usually
spoke or used other languages next to Arabic—hence the name of the
project.[10] The present dissertation, which takes the Syriac Christians
of Iraq as a case study, is the result of one of its sub-projects, and stands
alongside another dissertation about the Jews of Baghdad and a monograph about the Latin Catholics of Palestine.[11]

For the Syriac Christians of Iraq, the ambiguity of their status in
Arab nationalism boils down to their use of Neo-Aramaic as a mother
language next to Arabic, as well as in the use of Classical Syriac as
a liturgical language. Usage of European languages like English and
French was limited despite the influence of Catholic and Protestant
missionaries, and does not seem to have been a factor that differentiated them from Muslims. Differences in support of Arab nationalism furthermore roughly correspond to ecclesial affiliation, according to the four denominations of Syriac Christianity that were mentioned above. Apart from being separated by religious differences,
there is ample evidence that this separation was also visible on social,
political, and cultural levels. In other words, the different denominations corresponded to different groups in society. Yet at the same
time, these Christians were not unaware of their mutual similarities as
Syriac Christians. In the early twentieth century, a wider movement
to create cultural and political union between the different groups of

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[9]This project was led by Professor Heleen Murre-van den Berg (Radboud University and formerly Leiden University) and was sponsored by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) for the period 2012–2018.

[10]Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "Arabic and its Alternatives: Language and Religion in the Ottoman Empire and its Successor States," in *Arabic and its Alternatives: Religious Minorities and their Languages in the Emerging Nation States of the Middle East (1920–1950)*, ed. Heleen Murre-van den Berg et al. (forthcoming).

[11]Sasha Goldstein-Sabbah, *Baghdadi Jewish Networks in Hashemite Iraq: Jewish Transnationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, Leiden, Ph.D. dissertation; Karène Sanchez Summerer, *Language and Religion in the Holy Land: Catholics, Nationalism and Language Challenges in Palestine (1918–1948)* (in preparation).

Syriac Christians became active. This movement was described as "unity discourse" by Naures Atto and often known by the Syriac word *umthonoyutho*, and it was so successful that nowadays there is little disagreement that all Syriac Christians belong together as one nation, even if there is disagreement about the name of this nation.[12] In Iraq, however, the effects of this movement seem to have been limited until the second half of the twentieth century. For this reason, a detailed study of the use and the status of Arabic, Neo-Aramaic and Classical Syriac in Iraq in relation to the Arab nationalism of the state of Iraq is not only relevant for the study of Arab nationalism, but also for the development of the unity discourse among the Syriac Christians in the twentieth century.

The treatment of Christians in the historiography of Iraq of the early twentieth century is in many cases limited to the horrible experience of the Assyrians in relation to the Simele massacre of 1933. At the same time, King Faisal's ideal of equality between Muslims, Christians and Jews is often mentioned in Iraqi historiography and all accounts of early Iraqi patriotism highlight the Christian contribution to it. In this dissertation, one of my aims is to show that a close look at multiple kinds of cultural and political expression by the Syriac Christians in Iraq shows that both sides of the coin could exist together. The Syriac Christians developed themselves as citizens of Iraq in multiple ways. Some chose the path of assimilation and identified as Arabs; others chose to highlight their separate identification, stressing their similarity with their coreligionists abroad. These two positions and everything in between can be found in Iraq. The case of the Syriac Christians in Iraq shows the flux in which Arab nationalism remained at the beginning of the twentieth century, and it shows the same of the Syriac unity discourse.

Iraq and Arab nationalism

Iraq has a reputation of having failed as a nation state, which is supposedly evident from its recent troubles in keeping the country uni-

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[12]Naures Atto, *Hostages in the homeland, orphans in the diaspora: identity discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac elites in the European diaspora* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011), 263ff.

fied and caused by a set of misguided decisions around the time of World War I, leading to the shattering of various peoples across different countries. The discourse around the Sykes-Picot agreement suggests that the separation of Iraq from other Arab states, especially from Syria, was a Western invention with no rooting whatsoever in the new country's society. But while the role of Great Britain and the Western-initiated League of Nations in shaping the future of Iraq is certainly considerable, the enthusiasm of many intellectuals in the first decades after the creation of the state of Iraq about the possibilities that the new political order promised to provide is remarkable. More importantly, even though many authors expressed their concerns about the British presence, the same authors took for granted that they now lived in a country called Iraq, separate from Turkey and from the other Arab countries. Apparently, the creation of Iraq as a state was not associated with British imperialism. To the contrary, it did not take long until patriotist sentiments based on Arab nationalism developed and consolidated. In this patriotism, the Iraqi nation was seen as part of the Arab nation, and this was not seen as a contradiction. Many Christian and Jewish intellectuals and members of their clerical and secular elites supported and contributed to this patriotism. A main argument of this dissertation is that within the various groups of Syriac Christianity in Iraq there were large differences in the extent to which they supported this patriotism and its Arab nationalist fundaments. Here, I lay out how Iraqi patriotism provided a framework that allowed some Christians to take part in the further development of the Iraqi nation state.

The rise of Arab nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has proven to be rather controversial among historians, especially concerning the issue to what extent non-Muslim intellectuals and activists have contributed to its development.[13] However, it is clear that the origins of Arab nationalism can be traced back to the nineteenth century and there are strong indications that even the partition of the Arab Middle East into the different modern-day countries has its origins from before World War I. Today, there is scholarly consensus that Arab nationalism is the eventual outcome of growing

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[13]For an overview about the developing historiography, see Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 6–12.

opposition from the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire against the central government in Istanbul. This opposition movement developed at the same time as the rise of the more general liberal opposition against the authoritarian rule of sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909), who had cancelled the Ottoman constitution two years after its proclamation. This opposition was known as the Young Turk movement and was a continuation of the Young Ottoman movement.[14] Self-identification as Arabs among speakers of Arabic was on the rise in this period, even though it did not yet translate to demands for independence or even autonomy. The demands from the Arab opposition rather concerned equality of the Arabs and the Arab provinces within the context of the Ottoman Empire. In this period, the development of an Arab identification, which can be called Arabism, was mainly cultural and connected with a rise in literary production known as the *nahḍa* or Arab renaissance.[15] Both the political opposition and the development of an Arab cultural identification were mainly conducted by people from places in Syria and Lebanon. Cities that would come to belong to Iraq, like Baghdad, Mosul and Basra, were less well represented in this movement.

From the mid-nineteenth century, regional feelings in some places translated to ideologies of belonging to a particular homeland. Cem Emrence calls this phenomenon "concentrical homelands" and stresses that rather than searching for autonomy or independence, these homelands (Turkish *vatan*, Arabic *waṭan*) were "envisioned … within the Ottoman universe."[16] The best-known case of this in the Arab parts of the empire is Syria, which from the end of the nineteenth century featured a movement that Hasan Kayalı called "Syrianism."[17] Here, Syria was envisioned as a *waṭan* (homeland), and as a political movement its goal was the "integration of Syria" within the Ottoman Empire. The best-known spokesperson of this movement was Buṭrus al-Busṭānī (1819–1883), a Protestant from a Maronite

[14] Ibid., 39.

[15] For the distinction between Arabism and Arab nationalism, see Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 8.

[16] Cem Emrence, *Remapping the Ottoman Middle East: Modernity, Imperial Bureaucracy and the Islamic State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 42.

[17] Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 42–43.

background from Mount Lebanon who became a staunch supporter of the Ottomanist ideology of the Tanzimat, where all Ottoman citizens were equal regardless of religion. While he was in favor of the Ottoman government—absolutely no separatist tendencies can be discovered in his work—the homeland on which his attention was centered was Syrian rather than the Ottoman Empire.[18] In his thinking, remarkably many ingredients of post-war Syrian nationalism are already present: an identification as Arab based on the Arabic language, Syria as the homeland (and not the Arabic-speaking world as a whole), and equality between the different religious groups. The only important ingredient missing to make it a form of Arab nationalism was the wish to create a separate state. In Iraq, there is evidence that a similar envisioning of an Iraqi "concentrical homeland" was present at the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, one of its propagators was the well-known Christian author Anastās al-Karmilī, who is discussed in Chapter 5. The existence of these homelands, which correspond to the postwar Arab states, partly explains why national identities could develop so quickly after the war, or at least why the existence of these countries was not questioned.

By World War I, a cultural Arab identification was prevalent and the Arab political opposition to the Ottoman policies was at its peak. Until the last moment it seemed that the Arab oppositional organizations would continue to support the Ottoman state in itself without separatist ideas.[19] Nevertheless, in the year before the war started, the tide turned, and demands for autonomy were uttered more explicitly. Eventually, it was the loyal Ottomanist Sharif Hussein bin Ali of Mecca who led the Arab revolt in 1916 that would be of great significance to the future of the Arab provinces as separate from the Ottoman Empire. He was assisted by two of his sons, including Faisal, who was the de facto leader of the revolt and who would later be installed as King of Iraq. Initially, the revolt was not meant to be separatist, but contacts with Arab nationalists elsewhere and British encouragement eventually caused him to fully embrace the search for independence. With help of the British army, the revolt was a great military success, and

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[18] Butrus Abu-Manneh, "The Christians Between Ottomanism and Syrian Nationalism: The Ideas of Butrus al-Bustani," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11 (1980): 287–304.

[19] Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 174–81.

in 1920 Faisal was able to install himself as King of Syria for a short period.[20] The Syrian revolt did not take place in Iraq, where the British themselves conquered the whole country from the strategic port city of Basra at the end of 1914 to the Ottoman province in 1918, right after Istanbul's signing of the Mudros armistice. The British conquest took place within the framework of Arab nationalist resistance against the Ottoman Empire with a promise of eventual Arab self-rule in Iraq. However, after the war British control was made official by the creation of a League of Nations mandate.

After the French had ousted Faisal as King of Syria after four months of rule, the British nominated him as king of the new mandatory state of Iraq, mainly because of the authority he had for his role in the Arab revolt. While the British kept tight control over the country, Faisal and his government were free to help develop a state based on the basic ideas of Arab nationalism. As such, the years of the mandate (1920–1933) were very important for the country's later future as an independent Arab state. Even if the great majority of the rulers always came from the country's Sunni minority, they consistently invested in state institutions that were relevant for the whole country.[21] This also included the Kurdish north, officially included into the country after a League of Nations decision in 1925, even though the Kurds' cultural (non-Arab) demands were not met within the framework of Arab nationalism. Apart from being an instrument to organize the state, Arab nationalism also implied opposition against the unpopular British presence. Especially after the formal independence of Iraq in 1933, the opposition against the British became stronger, as the latter had formally handed over the authority but still kept influence on key issues such as oil and foreign policy. Especially at the end of the 1930s, the anti-British sentiments were at a high point, culminating in an anti-British coup d'état in 1941, when the new government chose sides with Germany. A more pro-British government was then quickly installed after Britain had invaded the country, but the larger role of nationalism in Iraqi politics in general was not reversed. The late 1940s saw also the rise of pan-Arab nationalism, with explicit solidarity with the

[20] See Ali A. Allawi, *Faisal I of Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), chapters 4–8.

[21] Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History from Independence to Occupation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 6.

other Arab states, especially concerning the events in Palestine, and the wish to create a single Arab state. Iraq took part in both the 1948 war between Israel and the Arab countries and in some endeavours to form a union with Syria.

   Arab nationalism in Iraq theoretically allowed the Christian population to assimilate to become Arabs. However, it limited participation on an ethnic basis: the point is whether a Christian identified as an Arab or not. For the Syriac Christians of Iraq, this is a crucial point, because the definitions of Arab nationalism that most thinkers use only allow part of Iraq's Syriac Christians to adopt an Arab identification. George Antonius, one of the most famous theoreticians and a Greek Orthodox Christian himself who was born in Lebanon, but a "true Arab" given the many Arab countries in which he lived, was one of the many who defined an Arab as somebody who speaks Arabic.[22] Antonius explicitly gives a few examples of Christian communities in the Middle East that he recognizes as Arabs, such as the Copts, the Greek Orthodox and Catholic, and the Maronites. Even if it is questionable if these communities unanimously regarded themselves as Arabs, for Antonius it is clear, since there is no question that they speak Arabic.[23] The situation is as clear for the Armenians, who do not speak Arabic and are therefore no Arabs. Of the Syriac Christians, Antonius only mentions the Assyrians, who were not included in his definition.[24] The other Syriac Christians are not explicitly mentioned. Strictly following Antionius' definition based on speaking the Arabic language, in fact only part of the Syriac Christians are included in his definition, since some of the Syriac Christians have Arabic as their mother tongue and some are Aramaic-speaking. The situation

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[22]George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938). Antonius accepts the idea that the people who in modern times form the Arab people are descendants of people who originally became Arab through what he calls "linguistic" and "racial Arabisation." This idea, which is significant given the value that was given to race in the thirties when the book appeared, explains why Antonius feels comfortable giving non-racial and non-fixed criteria such as speaking a particular language for the question if one ought to be regarded as an Arab or not.

[23]H. Murre-van den Berg, "The Language of the Nation: The Rise of Arabic among Jews and Christians (1900–1950)," *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 2 (2016): 178–79.

[24]Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, 365. Cf. Murre-van den Berg, "The Language of the Nation": 178n.

for the Syriac Christians is therefore more complicated than for the other Christian groups in the Middle East.

The question whether the Christians in Iraq could count as Arabs has various consequences. One of them concerns the issue whether they would be considered a minority, or rather be counted as part of the majority. Forming just two to four percent of the population, the fact that the Syriac Christians are a minority in Iraq may seem obvious. However, in the early twentieth century the term "minority" was more of a novelty that was highly indicative of the new politics of self-determination, which was developed during World War I and in the period afterwards. Benjamin White points this out in his monograph about minority policies in French mandate Syria, noticing that while most secondary literature about the French mandate uses the word minority for the country's non-Muslim groups for all periods without questioning it, the French administration itself did not use the term until the early 1930s.[25] White argues that by using the word minority for the early mandatory period of Syria, the divide into a Sunni Arab majority and various minorities characterizing the later independent Syrian state is (unconsciously) anachronistically adapted to the French mandate.[26] As the modern conception of the term minority rapidly developed in the period immediately after World War I, it appears that various non-Muslim groups in the Middle East did not wish to be regarded as part of a minority. Vivian Ibrahim shows this for influential groups of Copts. These Christians, who actively took part in the Egyptian struggle for independence of the 1920s, did not want the Copts to be subject to minority protection schemes as they were set up by the League of Nations, and refused to accept proportional representation for Copts in parliament.[27] It can therefore not be taken for granted that recognition as a minority is neccesarily regarded to be in the group's advantage. In relation to Arab nationalism, Arabic-speaking Christians may rather want to stress what they have in com-

[25] Benjamin T. White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

[26] Ibid., 2–3.

[27] Vivian Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt: The Challenges of Modernisation and Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 73–75.

mon with the Muslim population in their countries and frame themselves as part of the majority instead.

For Iraq, there is ample evidence that part of the Christians in the country actively sought protection from the League of Nations as a religious and ethnic minority. This is the case for at least part of the Assyrian Christians in the country.[28] As indicated, this is the group most often pointed at in political histories of modern Iraq and therefore their minority discourse is (probably not on purpose) presented as representative for all Christians in Iraq. In addition to that, current discourse on Assyrian and Aramean identification often dismisses the possibility of a Syriac Christian to be an Arab at the same time.[29] Both factors may be responsible for a bias about the possible ethnic or national formations in the past. In this dissertation, I use evidence from mainly literary and religious works to show that ethnic and national identifications of Iraqi Christians have greatly varied over time, and that the responses of the Iraqi Syriac Christians to the developing Arab nationalism show a wider range of possibilities than most general histories show.

Iraq and the Syriac Christians

Syriac or Syrian, Assyrian, Aramean, Chaldean, Nestorian, Jacobite—these are only the most commonly used names for the Christians of Iraq that this dissertation concerns. All terms refer to either part of or all of the "Syriac Christians," as academic literature often refers to them. All of these terms can be found in books, reports, archives, news articles, and on the Internet, and while none of the terms means exactly the same, they are all related and partly overlap with one another. This confusion is partly caused by religious differences—the

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[28] Hannah Müller-Sommerfeld, *Staatliche Religionspolitik im Irak gegenüber Juden, Assyrischen Christen und Bahá'í (1920–1958)*, 2015 (unpublished *Habilitationsschrift*), and H. Müller-Sommerfeld, "The League of Nations, A-Mandates and Minority Rights during the Mandate Period in Iraq (1920–1932)," in *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East*, ed. S.R. Goldstein and H.L. Murre-van den Berg (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 258–83.

[29] This is not to say that there are no Syriac Christians nowadays who identify as Arab. However, much of the Assyrian and Aramean nationalist discourse presents this as impossible.

Syriac Christians have been divided over five major churches over the centuries since antiquity—and partly because of debates about the proper name for these people as a nation. The presence of this multitude of names for more or less the same group causes two major issues. First, the heated nature of the name debate makes it impossible to find a neutral term. Second, the multitude of names causes confusion with those who are not fully aware of the debates surrounding those terms, including some journalists and non-specialist historians. Employing the term "Syriac Christians" in academic works, as I do in this dissertation, does not solve all problems. One reason is that the term "Syriac Christians" is not completely neutral either. It denies the indisputability of ethnic or national identifications, Assyrian and Aramean, and it highlights the religious element of the category more than can be justified. A more problematic reason, especially for this dissertation, is that this definition takes for granted that all Syriac Christians belong together and that this categorization inherently makes sense. Today, this is a commonly-held view. When I visited the Christian town of Ankawa (Iraq) in 2013, I was told when I asked about the different names for the Syriac Christians that "it was all the same," which implies that they were one people anyway; and indeed this idea was shared by many others. But while this view accepts any name for the Syriac Christians, it does not recognize the possibility that not everybody who belongs to one of the Syriac churches necessarily identifies as belonging to this group in an ethnic or national way as well.

In other words, when looking at the Syriac Christians in more than a purely religious way, one must watch out not to assume that the category has been meaningful at all times and places and that people recognized a connection between the different groups of Syriac Christians. In this dissertation, I explicitly show that in early twentieth-century Iraq not all Syriac Christians identified as being connected to members of one of the other Syriac Christian churches except their own. Moreover, even when they did, this was not always reflected in real acts. Evidence for communication between members of the different churches is often scant: in practice, the different Syriac Christian groups in Iraq often worked in isolation from each other. Despite these considerations, I still use the terms Syriac Christianity and Syriac Christians in this dissertation, while stressing that this term does

not necessarily imply a sense of the concepts "Syriac" and "Christianity" as being inherently compatible. I use this section not only to introduce the Syriac Christians of Iraq in the early twentieth century, but also to explain the problem of the question to which (sub-)groups the Syriac Christians of Iraq belonged to, and under which names, a theme that lies at the heart of this dissertation.

Syriac Christians are people who belong to (or whose families belong to) one of the Syriac Churches, the most important of which are the following: the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Syriac Catholic Church, the Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, and the Maronite Church. The first four of these are found in Iraq. Apart from these five churches, there are also several Syriac Churches in India. The Syriac churches are connected to one another because they share a tradition, a language, and a history dating back to the first centuries A.D. The linguistic situation of this time, as well as the theological discussions that took place in the fourth and fifth centuries, were decisive for the Syriac churches' further development and its results are still visible today. The earliest phase of Syriac Christianity can be traced back to the city of Edessa (modern Şanlıurfa, Turkey) where a local dialect of Aramaic developed into a separate literary language, now known as (Classical) Syriac. The language obtained prestige on its own, creating a situation where both Syriac and Greek were used alongside each other in Christian circles in the area of Syria, most of which was under Roman rule. Further east, in Mesopotamia and the western part of Persia, Christian communities were established under Persian rule. Here too, Syriac became an important language for the written literature that was produced by the Christians. As such, the basis for Syriac Christianity was laid in both the Roman and Persian Empires. The Christian communities in Persia were rather isolated from the rest of the Christian world in this period, which is one of the main causes of the split between the western and eastern branches of Syriac Christianity. Another main cause for this split is the outcome of the theological discussions that took place in the fourth and fifth centuries. These debates resulted in the fixation of the basic foundation of Christian theology as it is in use until today, including the Creed. The part of the debate concerning Christology, however, caused major rifts in early Christianity, resulting in a long-lasting theological schism. Two positions were officially rejected

by the official church sponsored by the Roman Empire. Nestorian dyophysitism was rejected in 431 during the Council of Ephesus, but it became the position of the eastern branch of Syriac Christianity, which continued to develop in relative isolation under Persian rule. Monophysitism (nowadays often called miaphysitism) was rejected in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon, but it remained popular in parts of the Eastern Roman Empire, including Syria, where the western branch of Syriac Christianity was developing. Eventually, the eastern Persian church became a separate church known as the Church of the East, and in the west under Roman rule a separate miaphysite hierarchy was created in the sixth century, which would become the Syriac Orthodox Church. After these developments, the separation between eastern and western Syriac Christianity was complete, as was the separation between the Syriac churches and the rest of Orthodoxy.[30] Both branches of Syriac Christianity were present in Iraq in the beginning of the twentieth century in considerable numbers. Even though both branches are present alongside each other in several places, such as Mosul and Baghdad, they have not merged. The existence of the different branches is in fact, as we see later, of great importance in this dissertation.

From the sixth century until the nineteenth century, the separation between western and eastern Syriac Christianity remained in place, but there have been many factors that made the situation even more complicated. The Arab expansion and the influence of Catholic missionaries are two of them. The Arab expansion caused a major rift in the political and religious landscape with changes that have lasted until today. Islam became the dominant religion in the area that had come under Arab rule. For Syriac Christianity, the new political situation also caused its western branch to be cut off politically from the church under Roman (Byzantine) rule, so that the Syriac Orthodox Church could develop in relative freedom. The connection would be

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[30] The current-day Greek Orthodox church in the Middle East is the continuation of the state-sponsored church that accepted the Council of Chalcedon. Besides the Syriac Orthodox Church, the other monophysite churches are the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolian Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. For an overview of the early history of the Syriac churches, see Lucas Van Rompay, "The East (3): Syria and Mesopotamia," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 365–86.

	Non-Catholic	**Catholic**
East Syriac	Assyrian Church of the East (Nestorians)	Chaldean Church
West Syriac	Syriac Orthodox (Jacobites)	Syriac Catholic
		Maronites
Coptic	Coptic Orthodox	Coptic Catholic
Armenian	Armenian Orthodox (Gregorians)	Armenian Catholic
Ethiopian	Ethiopian Orthodox	Ethiopian Catholic
Greek	Greek Orthodox	Greek Catholic (Melkites)

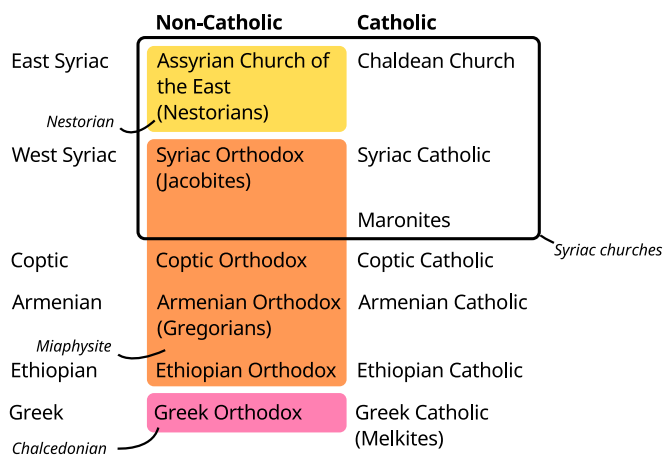*Nestorian* · *Miaphysite* · *Chalcedonian* · *Syriac churches*

Figure 1: The churches of the Middle East

restored by the emergence of the Ottoman Empire, which connected the Arab lands with Constantinople. On the other hand, thanks to the conquest of Persia by the Arabs, the western and eastern branches were now connected to one another politically. The political connection did not cause a merge of the Syriac Orthodox Church with the Church of the East, however, but rather caused both branches to become part of one single political arena. Crucially, Arab rule brought about a lasting influence on Syriac Christianity from a cultural perspective. Gradually, many (but certainly not all) Syriac Christians also adopted the Arabic language as their spoken language instead of Aramaic, especially in the cities. The use of the Arabic language therefore became something deeply rooted in Syriac Christianity. This is striking, as the Arabic language is nowadays often framed as something alien to Syriac Christian tradition.

The other major factor of complication is the emergence of Catholicism in the Middle East. From the seventeenth century, Catholic missionaries sponsored by the Vatican's newly established *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* successfully converted large numbers of eastern Christian communities, including communities belonging to the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Church of the East. This led to the creation of new, autocephalous churches, which recognized the Catholic Church of Rome and the authority of the pope while

holding to their own liturgical practices and with their own hierarchies. For the Syriac Churches, this led to the creation of the Syriac Catholic Church (out of the Syriac Orthodox Church) and the Chaldean Catholic Church (out of the Church of the East). Together with the original churches, all four churches were present in Iraq in the early twentieth century. The creation of the Catholic Syriac churches did not immediately change anything to the divide between eastern and western Syriac Christianity, as both branches had (and have) their own autocephalous church. For the situation of the Syriac Christians in Iraq in the early twentieth century, their division into four churches was still highly important, and in this dissertation it becomes clear how this division still played an important role in the ideas of the different groups of Syriac Christians concerning the Arabic language and their positioning towards the state.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a new development complicated the situation of the four Syriac Churches yet another time. This development is the emergence of an identification as Assyrians and Assyrian nationalism. From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, it became accepted among East Syriac Christians in the Hakkari region (the extreme south-east of modern Turkey) and the area around the city of Urmia (right across the border with modern Iran) that these people were the heirs of the ancient Assyrians. As such, these Christians came to be known as the Assyrian nation.[31] In the early twentieth century, the Assyrian national identification developed into a full-fledged nationalist ideology. Increased migration out of the Middle East, especially to the United States, allowed it to develop into a worldwide movement. A large share of the Syriac Christians eventually started to identify in this way, and among them were the Assyrian Christians who would later come into Iraq as refugees—those from the region where the Assyrian identification started. This national or ethnic identification of the Assyrians was also quickly adopted by Western actors, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, and recognized in Britain's dealing with the Assyrians in Iraq,

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[31] The early history of Assyrian nationalism is not treated in this dissertation, but it is described in depth in Adam Becker, *Revival and Awakening: American Evangelical Missionaries in Iran and the Origins of Assyrian Nationalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

who often referred to the Assyrians as a race.[32] Not all Syriac Christians were influenced by this idea, and their primary identification remained with their church. In the second half of the twentieth century, opposition against the movement also provoked the emergence of yet another form of nationalism from the side of Syriac Christians: that of Aramean nationalism. By using the word "Aramean," this alternative nationalism traced back the history of the Syriac Christians to the Arameans from Biblical times. Both nationalisms can be found among the members of different Syriac churches, and while only the Assyrian Church of the East has one of the two national identities in its name, Assyrianism also enjoys popularity within the other churches.[33] Aramean nationalism is not very relevant for this dissertation, because it emerged after 1950. Here, the question is rather to what extent a sense of an Assyrian national identification was adopted by which groups of Syriac Christians in Iraq. I employ the term Assyrianism for the identification as Assyrian, and Assyrian nationalism for the potential political consequences of this identification.

Together with the emergence of Assyrianism came the idea that all Syriac Christians belong together as one nation, sometimes known as *umthonoyutho* (see above). This idea should certainly not be taken for granted, especially not for the early twentieth century.[34] While elements for a connection between the various different Syriac churches were always present because of the Classical Syriac language and shared early church fathers such as Ephrem the Syrian, this is not the case for the existence of a common national or ethnic identification. The idea can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century, when groups of West Syriac Christians started to use an Assyrian identification, too. For the first time, members of all Syriac churches started to identify as members of the same ethnic or national group. By the time of World War I, it looked as if Assyrianism was to be indis-

[32]For example, when Percy Cox affirmed that the Assyrians were to be settled according to "the reasonable claims and aspirations of their race," as reproduced in Isaac E. Asia, *British Policy in Assyrian Settlement* (N.P.: 2009), 100 (available online: https://www.atour.com/people/20100815a.html). See also Robson, *States of Separation*, 44.

[33]For an overview of the development of the two national identities and the name debate, see Aaron Michael Butts, "Assyrian Christians," in *A companion to Assyria*, ed. Eckart Frahm (Hoboken: John Wiley, 2017), 599–612.

[34]Atto, *Hostages in the homeland*, 261–321.

puted in the future. The climax was perhaps reached when both West Syriac and East Syriac leaders put forward Assyrian national claims to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, to conclude World War I. The Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Ephrem Barsoum—before he became patriarch—filed a petition to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 to consider "the sufferings and the wishes of [the] ancient Assyrian nation." Pointing at the lack of recognition of the massacres against the Syriac Christians in the Ottoman Empire despite the recognition of those against the Armenians, and lamenting the neglect of their "ancient and glorious race," he requested that the Turkish authority be removed from a number of Ottoman provinces and that no Kurdish authority be installed. He used the term "Assyro-Chaldean civilization," which implies the inclusion of East Syriac Christians, but he left out Van in his list of provinces, thereby excluding Hakkari, where most East Syriac Christians lived.[35] At the same time, an East Syriac American delegation, with support of the Assyrian Patriarch Mar Shimʿūn XX Paul, presented a series of claims to the Conference calling for an Assyrian state under some mandatory power. They presented the Assyrians as an ethnicity that comprised multiple "divisions," including the Nestorians (Church of the East), Chaldeans, and Jacobites (Syriac Orthodox), but also the Maronites and some "Islamic Assyrians" who were supposed to be of Assyrian descent. The claims have been recorded by Joel E. Werda as president of the "Assyrian National Associations of America." The definition explicitly included those who "lost their mother tongue and speak Turkish, Arabic and Armenian," defying Europeans who counted these people as members of the respective ethnic groups.[36] Placing the demands from West and East next to each other, there is a great difference between the demands of the two, even though an Assyrian identification is present for both sides. This shows that the shared Assyrian identification did not (yet) translate into tangible joint efforts between East and West Syriac

[35] The petition is reproduced in Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland*, 541–42.

[36] Joel Euel Werda, *The Flickering Light of Asia, or, The Assyrian Nation and Church* (N.P., 1924). I used a digital reproduction of this book that was published on the website *Seyfo Center*: http://www.seyfocenter.com/english/e-werda-the-flickering-light-of-asia-the-assyrian-nation-and-church-1924/ (accessed September 13, 2018), comprising pages 67–73. See also Sargon Donabed, "Rethinking Nationalism and an Appellative Conundrum: Historiography and Politics in Iraq," *National Identities* 14:4 (2012): 410.

Christians.[37] After the war, unity discourse seems to have died down
in Iraq. Assyrianism was certainly an important force from the 1920s
onwards, but it appears that an expression of unity between the West
and East Syriac Christians was not well developed until the 1950s. The
different groups of Syriac Christians did not see each other as belong-
ing to the same nation. Instead, while some of the Syriac Christians
identified as Assyrian, many of the Syriac Christians saw themselves
as part of an Arab nation. Which groups of Syriac Christians chose
which position is an important part of the argument of this disserta-
tion.

Identification, nation, *ṭāʾifa* and *millet*

In their famous essay about the term "identity," Rogers Brubaker and
Frederick Cooper reject usage of the word as an analytical term and
propose several alternatives covering the wide range of meanings in
which identity is used by scholars. One of their main objections is
that the term is used for too many things, including its use by scholars
of ethnicity and nationalism focusing on sameness of multiple peo-
ple within one group, and its use by psychologists and other social
scientists who stress the individual aspects of identities.[38] Another
main objection is the problem that the use of "identity" as a "term of
analysis"—which the authors contrast with its usage as a "term of prac-
tice" in daily life and for political purposes—implies that the ideas that
people commonly have about identity exist in reality. This includes
the idea that "[i]dentity is something all people have" and that a col-
lective identity "impl[ies] strong notions of group boundness and ho-
mogeneity."[39] For current-day academic works that deal with identity
as something fluid and constructed rather than something static and
essential, this is problematic. In our case, for example, saying that a
group of people "have an Arab identity" implies that there is an iden-
tity that exists in reality and that is present inside all these people,
whether they know it or not, so that these people intrinsically belong

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[37] For this argument, see also Becker, *Revival and Awakening*, 328.

[38] Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'identity'," *Theory and Society*
29:1 (2000): 1–47.

[39] Ibid., 10.

together. This is something that we cannot prove and that is also not likely to be true.

Two of Brubaker's and Cooper's alternative terms are helpful for our analysis. The first of these is the term "identification." Identification is a "processual, active term" and "lacks the reifying connotations of 'identity'," they write.[40] As such, it refers to the act of identification rather than the result. It also allows a distinction between "self-identification" and "identification and categorization of oneself by others." In our case, saying that a person or a group of people "identify as Arabs" does not imply that they are intrinsically related to others who identify the same. For that reason, I will use the term "identification" throughout this dissertation. The term "identification" is therefore safer to use, but also limited: it cannot be used to analyse whether a group of people actually feels to belong together. For that, Brubaker and Cooper propose the terms "commonality," "connectedness," and "groupness," the latter of which is the strongest, defined as "the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group," which may be a proper term to describe a "nation."[41]

Usage of the terms "identification" and "groupness" instead of "identity" solves a number of problems. However, we are still dealing with different types of identification and groupness: does somebody who identifies as a, say, Assyrian, identify as such in an ethnic, national or religious way? It is tempting to ignore this issue and simply note the fact that people or groups of people show identification as Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and so forth. While safe, this solution would not do justice to the different kinds of categories people use to identify. Identification as part of a nation is not the same as identification as belonging to a religious denomination. Moreover, this solution would not allow for the study of multiple layers of identification. A possibility would be to work with definitions of theorists on ethnicity and nationalism, as was done in a recent project where the development of an ethnic community for the Syriac Orthodox before modern

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[40] Ibid., 14.
[41] Ibid., 20.

times was traced.[42] This does not immediately solve the difficulty of distinguishing an ethnicity from a nation.

In his book on nationhood, the British historian Adrian Hastings gives definitions of ethnicity and nation that are closely related to each other, where an ethnicity has a "shared cultural identity and spoken language" and a nation is a "far more self-conscious community than an ethnicity."[43] A nation may be "[f]ormed from one or more ethnicities." If this is the case, a fusion of ethnicities may have taken place if the ethnicities are culturally close to each other and if the state does not favor one of them. A nation formed of multiple ethnicities is also possible without fusion of ethnicities, such as in the case of Switzerland.[44] There is an "intrinsic connection between ethnicity, nation and nationalism," and "[e]very ethnicity … has a nation-state potentially within it."[45] I will take a nation therefore as a further development of an ethnicity. This allows me, for the sake of this dissertation, to leave unanswered whether we are talking about an ethnicity or a nation. This is further supported by the fact that, while sources often explicitly speak of "nation" and "race"—the latter being the early-20th-century equivalent of "ethnicity"—these two words are often used interchangeably. I will use the term "national or ethnic identification" in these cases. In Arabic, this type of identification is most of the times represented by the word *umma*, which then can be translated one-to-one as "nation."[46] However, the Arabic *umma* may also refer to a no-

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[42] Bas ter Haar Romeny et al., "Identity among West Syrian Christians: Results and Conclusions of the Leiden Project," in *Religious Origins of Nations: The Christian Communities of the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1–52. In this project, a list of features of an ethnic community by Hutchingson and Smith is used, building on the idea that ethnic communities already existed before modern times. To assert whether one may speak about an ethnic community, a group ought to have all six elements of a name, an ancesty myth, shared historical memories, a territorial link, elements of common culture, and a sense of solidarity. John Hutchingson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6–7. The same list of features is used by Peter Webb in his recent work where he traces the development of an Arab ethnic identity. Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 10 and 15.

[43] Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.

[44] Ibid., 3 and 29–30.

[45] Ibid., 31.

[46] One-to-one translation is often possible because many political terms in Arabic originate as calques from Western languages, often via Ottoman Turkish. C.H.M.

tion as in the Islamic *umma*, where it has the meaning of a global religious community, and it may even be interpreted as *millet*. For the Syriac cognate *umtho*, the same range of possibilities is possible (see Chapter 2). A clear example of an ethnic or national identification is Arabism or Arab nationalism, and Assyrianism may also be included.

Besides "national or ethnic identification," the second type of identification I distinguish is a *millet*-type identification. This is a type of identification that corresponds to the *millet*-s of the Ottoman Empire and is based on denominational affiliation. The traditional interpretation of this "*millet* system" entails that the non-Muslim groups of the Ottoman Empire managed their own affairs and communicated with the Ottoman authorities by means of the leader of the *millet*. The *millet* system was codified from the eighteenth century onwards,[47] but there is discussion about the degree to which we can speak of a consistent legal *millet* system at all in the late Ottoman Empire.[48] However, more than a legal system, "millet system" refers to the wider idea that non-Muslim groups in the Ottoman Empire were bound together within their religious denominations, with some form of autonomy and an identification as member of a *millet* that was stronger than a religious identification. As far as it was a legal practice, it was not a unified and static system with the same features throughout the Ottoman Empire in place and time. For this reason, some authors prefer to speak of "millet practice" rather than "millet system."[49]

There is evidence that this *millet* practice was inherited in the early state of Iraq, even though legally there was litte recognition for it. While the word *millet*, or its Arabic equivalent *milla*, was not widely used, the Arabic word *ṭāʾifa* "sect" appears to have had roughly the same meaning. Rafāʾil Buṭṭī, one of the intellectuals I discuss in this

Versteegh, *The Arabic Language*, second edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 223.

[47] Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 61.

[48] For a discussion about the development of scholarly opinions on the *millet* system, see Maurits H. van den Boogert, "Millets: Past and Present," in *Religious Minorities in the Middle East: Domination, Self-Empowerment, Accommodation*, ed. Anne Sofie Roald and Anh Nga Longva (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 25–45.

[49] Latif Taş, "The Myth of the Ottoman Millet System: Its Treatment of Kurds and a Discussion of Territorial and Non-Territorial Autonomy," *International Journal of Minority and Group Rights* 21:4 (2014): 498.

dissertation, wrote that the word *milla* was incorrectly used in the
sense of *ṭāʾifa*—see page 184 for this quotation.[50] This inheritance is,
for instance, visible in the first Iraqi constitution, where everybody
is equal for the law, but where there is at the same time room for
special courts for each *ṭāʾifa*, or non-Muslim group (see Chapter 1).
This reflects the Ottoman system in granting the possibility for reli-
gious communities to manage their own affairs. In addition to that,
the word *ṭāʾifa* only applies to non-Muslim communities, just like the
Ottoman *millet*. Even in the late 1940s the term *millet* was in use in
Western discourse to describe the situation of the Christians in Iraq,
and also in Arabic the word *milla* is attested with the meaning of *mil-
let* here and there. A (formerly secret) CIA report from 1950 starts
with a discussion of the "community, or 'millet' system," and later de-
scribes all Christian communities in detail. Here, the word "millet" is
probably an "English" rendering of the Arabic *ṭāʾifa*.[51] Sami Zubaida
writes that the "*millet* model … remain[ed] prominent in mentalities
and forms of solidarity and organisation of most sectors of the popula-
tion" in Iraq, despite the fact that Iraq was officially a nation-state that
was not organized on the basis of religious groups.[52] It will become
clear in this dissertation that some of the Christians in Iraq themselves
showed that a *millet*-type of identification, using the word *ṭāʾifa*, was

[50] Or to be more precise, the word *millet* gradually narrowed down to the meaning
of the word *ṭaʾifa*. The word *ṭāʾifa* had always denoted individual non-Muslim groups,
while the word *millet* was first used to refer to Christians and Jews in general. Later,
more and more individual non-Muslim groups obtained their own (legal) *millet*, so
that the latter term took over the meaning of *ṭāʾifa*. Becker, *Revival and Awakening*,
109; Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World*, 61–65.

[51] *National Intelligence Survey: Iraq. Section 43: Religion, Education, and Public
Information* (Washington: Central Intelligence Agency, 1950), 6–7. The report is de-
tailed and well informed about the different Christian communities. It should be
taken into account that it is possible that scholarly discourse about the *millet* system
has been planted on the contemporary situation, but the information on the situation
of the individual communities is according to local intelligence. Benjamin White, in
his work on the emergence of the concept of minority in the Middle Eastern context,
warns us that "[t]he communities that emerged as 'minorities' during the mandate
cannot simply be mapped back onto the *millet*-s or Christian and Jewish communi-
ties of the Ottoman period." However, it is one of my arguments that the Christian
groups who had a *millet*-like identification were not seen as minorities. White, *The
Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East*, 45.

[52] Sami Zubaida, "Contested nations: Iraq and the Assyrians," *Nations and Nation-
alism* 6:3 (2000): 365.

indeed the primary way they looked at themselves, although in some cases this was in addition to an envisioned membership of a larger nation: the Arab nation. In some other cases, a *millet*-type identification goes hand in hand with an *overlapping* form of national identification. The Ottoman *millet* system or practice did not prevent national or ethnic identities from developing next to the traditional classification in *millet*-s. In Adam Becker's work about the emergence of Assyrian nationalism in the nineteenth century, he deploys the term "millet nationalism" for the formation of national ideas *within* a *millet*, without aspirations for a separate state.[53] This practice of "millet nationalism" was brought to Iraq by the Assyrians as they arrived in Iraq as refugees.

Arabic and its alternatives

Many scholars have recognized the role of language in creating and defining ethnic, national, and religious identities. In the well-known studies by theoreticists such as Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, language plays an important role. The role of language has also been established in scholarship on identification in the Middle East. We have already seen George Antonius, who explicitly mentioned the Arabic language as one of the defining factors in the question whether somebody can be regarded as an Arab or not. Yasir Suleiman has shown for numerous early Arab nationalist authors the importance of the Arabic language in their definition of Arab nationalism.[54] But Arabic was not the only language in the Arab Middle East, and it seems that every other language that was spoken or used at places with an Arabic-speaking majority comes with the possibility of adopting a non-Arab identity. This is the case for the Kurds, but also for most

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[53] Becker, *Revival and Awakening*, 297. The term was earlier used by Joseph Grabill in his work on the influence of Protestant missions in the Middle East, but he uses it to refer to the development of Armenian (territorial) nationalism with the *millet* as a starting point. Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy, 1810–1927* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 50.

[54] Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A Study in Ideology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), and Yasir Suleiman, "Nationalism and the Arabic Language: A Historical Overview," in *Arabic Sociolinguistics: Issues & Perspectives*, ed. Yasir Suleiman (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1994), 3–24.

of the non-Muslim communities in the Middle East. Virtually all Jew-
ish and Christian communities were in a linguistic situation that was
more complex than that of the Muslim environment because of the ex-
istence of a liturgical language in addition to Arabic—always a classical
language in a form that was not in use for everyday communication—
including classical Greek, Armenian, Syriac, Coptic, and Hebrew.
This language was to a greater or lesser extent used in church and other
formal situations. In addition to that, some of the non-Muslim com-
munities also had a separate colloquial language that was not used by
Muslims, sometimes with the exception of some villages. This collo-
quial language was in some cases also in use as a formal language. On
top of that, Arabic or other majority languages such as Turkish always
played a role for official purposes or inter-communal communication.
The Syriac Christians, in Iraq but also elsewhere, are characterized by
a complex linguistic situation where Arabic was the language for offi-
cial use, where colloquial Arabic or Neo-Aramaic was the language for
private communication, and where Classical Syriac was the language
used in ecclesial situations. Both Neo-Aramaic and Classical Syriac
were sometimes used as written languages in non-ecclesial situations
as well. All these languages, of the Syriac Christians and the other non-
Muslim communities in the Middle East, had a function in the various
ethnic and national identities that were developing in the early twen-
tieth century. Crucially, it seems that the inclusion of Arabic in the
list of languages together with all its alternatives made it possible that
the non-Muslims in the Arab Middle East had many possible compet-
ing ways of identifying. In other words, speaking or using a language
other than Arabic did not close the road towards adopting an Arab
identity, but it was not the only possibility either. How this works for
the Syriac Christians in Iraq is the main subject of this dissertation. In
this section, I introduce the linguistic situation of the Syriac Christians
of Iraq and I explain how I discuss the different types of language use
in this dissertation.

Arabic is the most widely spoken language in Iraq and has been po-
litically dominant since the fall of the Ottoman authority in the coun-
try during World War I. It is also spoken by a large share of the Syriac
Christians in the country, especially in the cities. Because of its politi-
cal status and its literary heritage, it was also in use with many speakers
of other languages than Arabic. To understand the use of the Arabic

language by the Syriac Christians in Iraq, it is important to be aware of the phenomenon of diglossia that is characteristic for the situation of Arabic all over the Arab world: the fact that the spoken, informal form of Arabic (*al-lugha al-ʿāmmiyya* "the popular language") with strong variation all over the Arab world is very different from its standard form (*al-lugha al-fuṣḥá* "the pure language"). In Western publications the informal form is usually called colloquial Arabic, while the standard form is known as Classical Arabic, or Modern Standard Arabic in its appearance since the nineteenth century.[55] Iraq hosts two main varieties of colloquial Arabic, and should be divided between the north and the rest of the country. In the north the variety of Arabic is often called North Mesopotamian Arabic, which is closely related to the Arabic of Syria. In the rest of the country, the Muslims speak the distinct Mesopotamian Arabic, but the Christians and Jews in this area speak North Mesopotamian Arabic instead due to earlier migration processes.[56] Colloquial Arabic is relatively unimportant in this dissertation, but we see a few cases in Chapter 2 where the influence of North Mesopotamian Arabic is visible in written texts. Another point to keep in mind is the fact that Arabic has already been in use by the Christians of the Middle East, including the Syriac Christians, since the first centuries after the Arab expansion.[57] In some places, including cities like Mosul, Arabic had replaced Aramaic as the spoken language. Equally important, it was also quickly adopted as a language for more formal contexts, as the many Arabic-language texts and manuscripts produced from the ninth century onwards by Syriac

[55] Many linguists argue that one can better speak about a continuum between colloquial and Modern Standard Arabic, but for an argument for the duality based on the interpretation by users of Arabic, see Yasir Suleiman, "Egypt: From Egyptian to Pan-Arab Nationalism," in *Language and National Identity in Africa*, ed. Andrew Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.

[56] B. Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari, "Iraq: Language Situation," in *Encyclopedia of language and linguistics*, second edition, ed. K. Brown (New York: Elsevier, 2006), 23–24.

[57] There were already intensive contacts between Aramaic-speaking and Arabic-speaking Christians before the rise of Islam, and these contacts have possibly influenced the quick rise of the status of Arabic within Syriac Christianity in the first centuries after the Arab expansion. S.H. Griffith, "What Does Mecca Have To Do With Urhōy? Syriac Christianity, Islamic Origins, and the Qurʾān," in *Syriac Encounters*, ed. Maria Doerfler et al. (Peeters: Louvain, 2015), 375.

Christians prove.[58] Both colloquial and standard Arabic are deeply
rooted in Syriac Christianity, and this is crucial if we wish to under-
stand the developments concerning Arabic and other languages in the
last two centuries.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries indeed brought about ex-
treme changes to the way the Arabic language was used throughout
the Arab world. Three interrelated developments have to be men-
tioned here: the *nahḍa* or Arab renaissance; the emergence of Mod-
ern Standard Arabic; and Arab nationalism with Arabic as one of its
main ingredients. The *nahḍa*, already briefly introduced above as a
development related to the increasing Arab cultural identification of
the nineteenth century inside the Ottoman Empire, was a literary re-
vival in the Arabic language that took place from the second half of the
nineteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century. This
revival, which had an enormous literary but also cultural impact,[59]
caused a massive increase in production of Arabic texts, a renewed in-
terest in the classical language and an adoption of Western genres and
mediums, such as journals. Related to the *nahḍa* is the emergence of
Modern Standard Arabic. Linguists usually hold to a differentiation
between Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic, even though
the usual terminology in Arabic itself does not make this differentia-
tion, employing the term *al-lugha al-fuṣḥá* for both, and the fact that
to a large extent and by principle, the grammar, orthography and vo-
cabulary of both varieties are the same. Because the difference does
in fact not exist in the perception of most users of Arabic, which has
implications for the discourse surrounding the Arabic language and
national identity, Yasir Suleiman favors the use of the Arabic terms
ʿāmmiyya and *fuṣḥá*,[60] without denying that there evidently are sub-
stantial differences between the standard Arabic of today and the clas-
sical Arabic of the Middle Ages. Many of these differences started to
emerge from the nineteenth century onwards, partly because of the

[58] Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, part 1: *Die Überset-
zungen* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944), 51.

[59] For a recent discussion of the *nahḍa* as a cultural phenomenon, see Jens
Hanssen and Max Weiss, "Language, Mind, Freedom and Time: The Modern Arab
Intellectual Tradition in Four Words," in *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: To-
wards an Intellectual History of the Nahda*, ed. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cam-
bridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1–38.

[60] Yasir Suleiman, "Egypt: From Egyptian to Pan-Arab Nationalism," 27–28.

need to adapt the language to the modern world, and to such an extent that a differentiation between Classical and Modern Standard Arabic is justifiable from a linguistic point of view.[61] For the present dissertation, both terms are problematic because we are in the middle of the transformation in which the Arabic language found itself. For that reason, I employ the term Standard Arabic, without the word "modern," when referring to the standard language.

Some scholars have interpreted the *nahḍa* as a process that, among other things, created a common literary ground for Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Before the *nahḍa*, Christians and Jews already used Arabic, but usually in a way that was distinguishable from how their Muslim neighbors did. The Arabic of the Syriac Christians was often characterized by mixing it with other languages, especially Syriac, and in many cases written in Syriac script, a practice known as Garshuni. The language was often in a form between the colloquial and Classical Arabic, often described as Middle Arabic. From the time of the *nahḍa* onwards, this has changed: Christians and Jews started more and more to adopt a standardized way of using the Arabic language, even allowing a considerable number of publications co-authored or co-edited by adherents to different religions. The Arabic script became common practice for non-Muslims and practices such as Garshuni diminished.[62] Abdulrazzak Patel observes in this respect that the period *before* the start of the *nahḍa* features the "reintegration of pre-modern Christians into the mainstream of Arabic literature."[63] From approximately 1600 to 1800, Christians once again became active participants in the Arabic literary realm, which they had been well-known participants of during the translation movement and through the thirteenth century. According to Patel, "[b]y the nahḍah the reintegration of Christian writers into the mainstream of Arabic literature was complete and an inter-religious, almost supra-religious, space had evolved where Christian writers were no longer

[61] On the emergence of Modern Standard Arabic, see Versteegh, *The Arabic Language*, 221–40.

[62] Alessandro Mengozzi, "The History of Garshuni as a Writing System: Evidence from the Rabbula Codex," in *Casemud 2007: Proceedings of the 13th Italian Meeting of Afro-Asiatic Linguistics, Held in Udine, May 21st–24th, 2007*, ed. F.M. Fales and G.F. Grassi (Padova: s.a.r.g.o.n. Editrice e Libreria, 2010), 300.

[63] Abdulrazzak Patel, *The Arab Nahḍa: The Making of the Intellectual and Humanist Movement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 4–5.

hampered by specific religious or theological considerations."[64] This process can therefore be seen as a "preparatory" internal development that opened the way for the *nahḍa* to begin full scale. Other authors have noted similar developments. In the course of the *nahḍa*, the language of literary production became more standardized, creating a link between the *nahḍa* and the emergence of Modern Standard Arabic, and new textual genres began to be deployed, such as novels and articles in journals. Christians took part in the *nahḍa* in the same way as Muslims, and already in the eighteenth century we can see that they adapted genres that had been deployed solely by Muslims.[65] During the *nahḍa*, Christians, Jews and Muslims began to use the Arabic language in the same sorts of ways, which is visible in common genres and mediums, like printed books and journals, use of a common type of standardized Arabic with a shared grammar and vocabulary (which was to evolve later into the Modern Standard Arabic of today), and the consistent use of Arabic script for all religions. This "*nahḍa* hypothesis," as I call it, seems not to be completely applicable to the situation of Iraq in the early twentieth century: while many Syriac Christian authors used Arabic in a standardized way, many did not. Or, put differently, the "*nahḍa* hypothesis" may be correct, but the process had not been completed in Iraq until the second half of the twentieth century.

Apart from Arabic, the other main languages that were used by the Syriac Christians of Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East are varieties of Aramaic. While by the twentieth century, Aramaic had been reduced to a much smaller language than Arabic, in many aspects the situation of Aramaic is comparable to that of Arabic. Like Arabic, albeit with some differences, we perceive a situation of diglossia for Aramaic. The official form of Aramaic for Christians is Classical Syriac, which probably emerged as a literary language out of the local Aramaic dialect of Edessa, and which has been in use as a largely unchanging liturgical and literary language for the Syriac churches at least since

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[64] Ibid., 69.

[65] Farouk Mardam-Bey and Hilary Kilpatrick, "L'état des lieux dans le monde arabe à la fin du XVIIIᵉ siècle," in *Histoire de la littérature arabe moderne*, part 2: *1800– 1945*, ed. Boutros Hallaq and Heidi Toelle (Paris: Sindbad 2007), 70.

the fifth century.[66] In Syriac its name is (*leshānā*) *suryāyā* "the Syriac (language)," and in Arabic it is known as *al-lugha al-suryāniyya*. Whether the literary language as we know it now was ever in use as a spoken language is unclear, and it features a similar usage and position as Classical or Standard Arabic, though on a smaller scale and without the official status that Arabic gained since the twentieth century. While there is one Classical Syriac language, the language was split into a western and eastern tradition, alongside the lines of the ecclesial split between the western and eastern branches of Syriac Christianity. On both sides of the split we find a distinct pronunciation tradition, different scripts and a few diferences in orthography. In total there are three scripts: *Esṭrangelā*, an old script that is in use in both branches of Syriac Christianity; *Serṭā*, the West Syriac script; and *Madhnḥāyā*, the East Syriac script. The different pronunciation traditions and scripts immediately reveal whether the writer or speaker has a West or East Syriac background. This split is also visible in Iraq in the twentieth century, as we will see here and there.

Next to Classical Syriac, we find various colloquial forms of Aramaic, called Neo-Aramaic by linguists and locally known under various names, often signifying the specific dialect. All Aramaic dialects present in Iraq in the twentieth century belong to the North Eastern Neo-Aramaic dialect (NENA), which includes the dialects spoken by the Syriac Christian original inhabitants of the many villages in Northern Iraq (known as Sureth) and those of the Assyrians who came from the Hakkari and Urmia regions (in its standardized form known as Urmia Aramaic or Swadaya).[67] Sureth is on a small scale also in use as a written language, and also in Iraq there is some evidence of this in the twentieth century manuscripts that we come across.[68] Swadaya, on the other hand, has developed a full-fledged literary tradition in the

[66]Lucas Van Rompay, "Some Preliminary Remarks on the Origins of Classical Syriac as a Standard Language: The Syriac Version of Eusebius of Caesarea's Ecclesiastical History," in *Semitic and Cushitic Studies*, ed. Gideon Goldenberg and Shlomo Raz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994), 72–73.

[67]A. Mengozzi, "Sureth," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Sebastian P. Brock et al. (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011), 385–86.

[68]Alessandro Mengozzi, *Israel of Alqosh and Joseph of Telkepe. A Story in a Truthful Language. Religious Poems in Vernacular Syriac (North Iraq, 17th Century)* (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), 1–7.

course of the nineteenth century.[69] It was brought as such into Iraq
by the Assyrians from the Hakkari and Urmia regions, and thanks to
this a good number of printed Swadaya works have been published
in Iraq, which is discussed in Chapter 3. The Neo-Aramaic dialects
are no direct descendants of Classical Syriac, but there is a close con-
nection between the two. When written, the same scripts are used
for Neo-Aramaic—featuring the same split between the western and
eastern scripts—and in the case of Swadaya, the orthography is based
on that of Classical Syriac. In addition to that, the words to refer to the
languages do not always make it clear whether Classical Syriac or Neo-
Aramaic is meant: in English, Neo-Aramaic is also known as Modern
Syriac, where the word "modern" can also be omitted. Another name
is "(modern) Assyrian," which emphasizes the link to the ancient As-
syrians but which equally asserts a connection between Classical Syr-
iac and Neo-Aramaic. The term *Kthobonoyo* for Classical Syriac, liter-
ally "the written language," also points into this direction.[70] Because
of this connection, we could almost describe the situation as one of
diglossia, like that of Arabic, but it has to be kept in mind that active
knowledge of Classical Syriac is much more limited than that of Stan-
dard Arabic, while the literary tradition of Swadaya is stronger than
that of modern Arabic dialects, certainly in the early twentieth cen-
tury.

   Like Arabic, Aramaic has a function in ethnic, national or religious
identification. Classical Syriac is exclusively used by the Syriac Chris-
tians, and with some exceptions only Syriac Christians are speakers
of the Neo-Aramaic dialects.[71] For that reason, Aramaic is the pre-
eminent language of the Syriac Christians and part of Syriac Christian
identity. In the twentieth century in Iraq, we can identify three phe-

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[69]For the development of literary Urmia Aramaic, see H.L. Murre-van den Berg,
*From a Spoken to a Written Language: The Introduction and Development of Liter-
ary Urmia Aramaic in the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het
Nabije Oosten, 1999).

[70]George A. Kiraz, "Kthobonoyo Syriac: Some Observations and Remarks,"
Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies 10:2 (2011): 130–31. I use the western Syriac pro-
nunciation for this form, because this term is almost only used in West Syriac Chris-
tianity.

[71]There are some Jewish and Muslim villages where Aramaic is spoken, or where
it used to be spoken until recently. Apart from that the importance of Aramaic in
Jewish religious texts should be mentioned.

nomena where the expression of a Syriac Christian identity using Aramaic is visible, be it ethnic, national, or religious. In the first place this is the use of written Neo-Aramaic or Swadaya by the Assyrian Christians. The development of literary Urmia Aramaic was connected to the parallel emergence of Assyrian nationalism in the Hakkari and Urmia regions, and as indicated above this practice was brought into Iraq in the 1920s. This issue is extensively discussed in Chapter 3. In the second place we sometimes see the influence of the twentieth-century revival of Classical Syriac.[72] Many of the authors related to this movement were explicit in their ideas of a distinct Syriac national identity. In Iraq, the fruits of this movement were limited, but in several manuscripts its influence is clearly visible. This is a significant marker of a Syriac Christian identity, be it not necessarily in a ethnic or national way. Finally, the use of Garshuni is a remarkable way of identification as Syriac Christian, where not the Syriac language but only the Syriac script is used. However, while the marking of a Syriac Christian identity as the most commonly suggested explanation,[73] the evidence for this argumentation is scarce and as much can be said for the argument that Garshuni was just "the way it was done": Syriac script was the script of the Syriac Christians and therefore the most practical way of writing whatever language. Following this argumentation, only when Arabic script became common among the Syriac Christians thanks to mass education or otherwise, Garshuni became a conscious choice and a possible marker of identification.[74] We see both the influence of the Classical Syriac revival movement and the use of Garshuni in detail in Chapter 2. Apart from these three phenomena where Aramaic/Syriac or its script is actually used, there are many examples of texts in other languages, especially Arabic, where the Ara-

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[72] See Sebastian P. Brock, "Some Observations on the Use of Classical Syriac in the Late Twentieth Century," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34:2 (1989): 363–75; H. Murre-van den Berg, "Classical Syriac and the Syriac Churches: A Twentieth-Century History," in *Syriac Encounters*, ed. Maria Doerfler et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 119–47; Knudsen, "An Important Step in the Revival of Literary Syriac;" and Elie Wardini, "Modern Literary Syriac: A Case of Linguistic Divorce," in *Symposium Syriacum* VII, ed. René Lavenant (Rome: 1998), 517–25.

[73] F. del Río Sánchez, "El árabe karshūnī come preservación de la identidad siríaca," in *Lenguas en contacto: el testimonio escrito*, ed. P. Bádenas de la Peña et al. (Madrid: Consejo superiores de investigaciones científicas, 2004), 185–94.

[74] Murre, "Arabic and its alternatives."

maic or Syriac languages are not in use but explicitly mentioned as important languages for the Syriac Christians, in fact revealing the impracticalities of using a language that was in limited use. We see examples of this throughout this dissertation, but especially in Chapter 4 and 5.

One final aspect that I want to mention here is a difference between traditional forms of language use and modern forms. The *naḥḍa* is supposed to have created a common literary field where Muslims, Christians and Jews were able to use the Arabic language equally, contrary to the situation before, where Christians and Jews had distinctive ways of using the Arabic language. Since the *naḥḍa* Muslims, Christians and Jews have been using common genres and all equally use correct Standard Arabic to write in.[75] The *naḥḍa* process is supposed to have finished around 1920.[76] Yet, some of the distinctive features that set apart "Syriac Christian Arabic" from "Muslim Arabic" were still present after 1920 in Iraq. Garshuni was still a common way to write Arabic until after 1950 and various languages were still being mixed in manuscripts. On the other hand, at other places the influence of the *naḥḍa* is strongly visible, such as the various Arabic-language journals that were published, especially those with an multi-faith editorial board. The use of Classical Syriac may also be interpreted as a modern phenomenon. The above-mentioned revival of Classical Syriac is in many aspects similar to the Arabic *naḥḍa*, as it featured a enormous increase in modern production in Syriac, especially in poetry. Not only are both Standard Arabic and Classical Syriac principally written languages where its use for original work was limited before the start of the respective revivals, as opposed to their colloquial counterparts, but some of the actors of this revival even explicitly mentioned the fact that they were inspired by authors of classical

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[75]Yasir Suleiman argues against the idea that Christians and Jews used a type of Arabic that was distinguisable from "normal," i.e. Muslim Arabic. I think it is correct that it is not possible to identify a specific kind of Christian Arabic, but there still are several features that set non-Muslims apart: the more frequent appearance of dialectal forms (Middle Arabic) and the use of different scripts (Garshuni and Judaeo-Arabic). In addition to that, co-publication by Muslims and Christians or Jews seems to be a post-*naḥḍa* phenomenon. Yasir Suleiman, *Arabic, Self and Identity: A Study in Conflict and Displacement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 33.

[76]P. Starkey, "Naḥḍa," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, volume 2, ed. J.S. Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998), 574.

Arabic genres, such as the poetry genre of the *maqāmāt*.[77] According to Heleen Murre-van den Berg, the revival of Classical Syriac can even be seen as change in status of Syriac from a mere ritual language to a "modern" and "secular" language.[78] Obviously, the smaller amount of users of Syriac as compared to Arabic limits the comparison, and Classical Syriac has never been able to gain the support of mass education or mass media. To understand the existence of these traditional and modern types of language use at the same time, it is helpful to make a distinction between the roughly corresponding traditional types of publishing—especially manuscripts, but also letters could belong to this category—and modern types of publishing—printed books and journals. In traditional publications, the pre-*nahḍa* setting is usually visible, and Arabic, Syriac, Garshuni and sometimes other languages are used side by side. In modern publications this is not the case: the languages are clearly distinguished from each other, and Arabic publications look identical to those published by Muslims. Generally, expressions of national or other identities are stronger in modern publications. However, the traditional publications receive due attention in this dissertation, for they offer examples of authors who seemed—at least at first sight—to be less conscious about the way they identified.

The vast amount of languages that were spoken and otherwise used by the Syriac Christians evokes the question whether this was seen as a favorable situation or something to avoid. Research on multilingualism in mandatory Palestine shows that while monolingualism was promoted by the British authorities (Arabic for the Arabs, Hebrew for the Jews), multilingualism was promoted by French Catholic missionaries on top of a focus on Arabic.[79] In this regard,

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[77] This is the case for the Syriac Orthodox poet Ghattas Maqdisi Elyas, who wrote in an introduction to one of his volumes of poems that he was inspired by al-Hamadhānī (11th century), al-Ḥarīrī (12th century), and al-Yāzijī (19th century). Ghattas Maqdisi Elyas, *Tawgone: nebhe w-reʿyone* (Glane: Bar-Hebraeus Verlag, 1988), 2–5. For an analysis of the twentieth-century Syriac poetry by Naʿʿūm Fāʾiq, see Robert Isaf, "Awakening, or Arising: Syriac Language Poetry at the Fall of the Ottoman Empire," in *Arabic and its Alternatives: Religious Minorities in the Formative Years of the Modern Middle East (1920-1950)*, ed. Heleen Murre-van den Berg et al. (in print).

[78] Murre, "Classical Syriac and the Syriac Churches," 141.

[79] Suzanne Schneider, "Monolingualism and Education in Mandate Palestine," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 52 (2013): 68–74; Karène Sanchez Summerer, "Linguistic Di-

Karène Sanchez Summerer shows that for Latin Catholics, favoring knowledge of other languages than Arabic—in their case, western languages—did not mean a lack of allegiance to the Palestinian nation, even though it has often be interpreted as such.[80] In Iraq, questions of multilingualism play a role, but in a different way than for the Catholic communities of Palestine. In Iraq too, French missionaries attempted to promote knowledge of French, but the impact of this appears to have been rather limited. The highly multilingual situation of the Syriac Christians of Iraq is more related to knowledge of liturgical languages (Syriac) on top of languages that are connected to national identification (primarily Arabic, but also Neo-Aramaic), and less to knowledge of languages that had a practical use for economic advancement, such as English or French. However, my argument is that also in this case, the knowledge and use of other languages than Arabic did not at all necessarily coincide with a diminished esteem of Arabic and that this was not a disadvantage for their incorporation in Iraq as an Arab nation either.

Previous research

The last decade saw the appearance of a substantial number of monographs dealing with Christianity in Iraq in the beginning of the twentieth century. Almost all these books are mainly about the Assyrians who had arrived from the Hakkari and Urmia regions as refugees. This includes Hannah Müller-Sommerfeld's unpublished *Habilitationsschrift* about the League of Nations policies concerning Jews, Assyrian Christians and Bahá'is in Iraq (2012); Sargon Donabed's *Reforging a Forgotten History* (2015), about the Assyrians in modern Iraqi historiography; and Laura Robson's *States of Separation* (2017), dealing with parallel minority policies towards the Zionists in Palestine, the Armenians in Syria and Lebanon and the Assyrians in Iraq in the Middle East in the interwar period. Apart from that, a monograph has appeared about the modern history of the Chaldean Catholic Church by

versity and Ideologies among the Catholic Minority in Mandate Palestine: Fear of Confusion or a Powerful Tool," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43:2 (2016): 191–205.

[80] Ibid., 203–204.

Kristian Girling (2018), but only a small portion of this book is about the first half of the twentieth century.

The focus on the Assyrians is understandable because of the relative political importance of this group that this group had both internally and internationally. However, the result of this is that the other Christian groups in Iraq have been gravely underrepresented in the country's Western-language historiography. A more serious problem is that the history of the other Christian groups has sometimes been conflated with that of the Iraqi Assyrians. The reason for this is that a wide interpretation of "Assyrian" allows for inclusion of the other Syriac Christian groups, even though this interpretation was not common in Iraq. This wide interpretation may be justified from an ideological or political point of view, but it is problematic if the experience of the other Christians does not get equal treatment at the same time. Both Donabed and Robson take the word Assyrian in this wide interpretation, but without making clear that their work deals only or mainly with a certain portion of these Assyrians. Donabed makes a distinction between Assyrians from the Hakkari and Urmia regions and the other Syriac Christians, but sees them both as Assyrians and stresses that the difference between the two groups is the result of colonialism. At some place in her book, Robson speaks of "longer-standing Assyrian communities" in contrast to the Assyrians from the Hakkari and Urmia regions, pointing at the Chaldeans. In both cases, identification as Assyrians was rare among those who did not come from Hakkari and Urmia.[81] I stress this point, because the fact that the Assyrians from Hakkari and Urmia identified as Assyrians while the other Syriac Christians did not is essential for the argument of this dissertation.

Oddly enough, in works that focus more on the general intellectual history of Iraq, of which a considerable number has appeared as well in the last decade, the non-Assyrian Christians are rather *overrepresented*. This is caused by the fact that these Christians were generally better integrated in the Iraqi public sphere. However, these works do not focus on the Christian aspects of these actors and almost seem to take their integrated position in Iraqi society for granted. The result is

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[81]Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, 54–55; Robson, *States of Separation*, 55–56.

that historiography of Christianity in Iraq currently has two faces: one
is the story of the Assyrians, which is a story of separateness from the
rest of Iraqi society, and the other is the story of Syriac Christian in-
tellectuals, where the connections between Muslims, Christians and
Jews are stressed. No authors seem to address this issue. In this dis-
sertation, I show how this paradox works and I point out that there
were groups of Christians in the middle of these two positions who
were not politically active and for that reason absent from almost all
historical accounts.

Regarding research about identity of the Syriac Christians, the
most important work that deals with modern times is Naures Atto's
monograph *Hostages in the Homeland*, which is the result of anthro-
pological research among the Syriac Christian diaspora concerning
identity questions, with ample attention for the Assyrian-Aramean
name debate. In addition to its discussions on the contemporary sit-
uation, this book contains a considerable amount of original histori-
cal research about the development of Assyrian and Aramean identi-
ties. A major historical work on the nineteenth-century development
of Assyrian nationalism is Adam Becker's *Revival and Awakening*, but
apart from that and a number of smaller studies there are few works
that thoroughly cover identity questions of Syriac Christians in a par-
ticular historical period. As far as Iraq in the first half of the twenti-
eth century is concerned, many more general works mention, for in-
stance, that the Iraqi Chaldeans were close to the state and in favor of
the Arabic language, but do not give any more details than that. This
dissertation aims to fill in that lacuna.

Few major studies have been done on language use and language
policy in early twentieth-century Iraq. This is in sharp contrast to the
large amount of studies on Palestine, Turkey or Lebanon in the same
period. One reason for this may be an apparent lack of interest from
the British authorities in Iraqi language policies.[82] Contrary to Syria
or Palestine, Iraq gained its independence relatively quickly (in 1932),
and in addition to that, the British mandatory powers left the Iraqis
relatively free in the development of a national identity and educa-
tional policies. Language use and policy have best been studied for the

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[82]Many studies are mainly dependent on what Peter Sluglett writes in his author-
ative monograph on British power in Iraq. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, esp. 129–35.

case of the Jews, with ample attention in a few recent monographs.[83] In addition to that, there are a number of recent linguistic studies describing individual dialects of Arabic and Neo-Aramaic of towns and villages in Iraq, including a considerable number of Christian places.[84] Some of these studies provide details about sociolinguistic aspects of the languages.

Sources and methodology

This dissertation is largely based on an analysis of the publications and other writings of the Syriac Christians in Iraq between the years 1920 and 1950. The sources do not only include contributions to journals, but also material that is less often included to study this topic, most notably a selection from the large number of twentieth-century manuscripts and the fruits of Joseph de Kelaita's Assyrian printing press. The large range of material types give a varied view on Syriac Christian identification and language use in these years. I have attempted to reach this goal by inventorying everything that was produced for each type of source, with several selected sources that I discuss in detail. Other sources that I have accessed are various archives, most notably the archives of the French Dominican missionaries and the interconfessional American Protestant mission. My approach in analyzing these sources has been to find out which language was used where, and what was said about the meaning in using any of these languages. It is therefore a combination of the study of discourse about language and what it tells about Syriac Christian identitification, and an investigation of how the language was used. In Chapter 5, I use the memoirs of Rafāʾil Buṭṭī. The contents of these are illuminating on a number of issues, despite the fragmentary character of these particular memoirs and the lack of information about when they were written. By focusing on the productions of the involved actors themselves,

[83] Bashkin, *The New Babylonians*, throughout the book; Goldstein-Sabbah, *Baghdadi Jewish Networks in Hashemite Iraq.*

[84] This includes the towns of Telkepe, Baghdeda, Alqosh, and Bartallah, which are featured in this dissertation. See Eleonor Coghill, "The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Telkepe," in *Studies in Semitic Linguistics and Manuscripts: A Liber Discipulorum in Honour of Professor Geoffrey Khan*, ed. Nadia Vidro et al. (Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 2018), 235–36.

I am not dealing with language policy from above, but with how it was used from below. However, it should be noted that I am mainly dealing with language use by the elites and only little with colloquial language. This is the result of my choice to exclusively work with written sources, which could have been partly overcome by employing oral history, but which I refrained from doing because it would only have provided information about the final years of the period under consideration. Furthermore, this dissertation deals with the usage of language, but I am not a linguist and as such this dissertation is not a linguistic endeavor—I approach these questions from a historical point of view.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I paid a visit to Northern Iraq in the fall of 2013, where I was generously received by the late Dr. Saadi al-Malih, former director of the General Directorate of Syriac Culture and Arts of the Iraqi Kurdistan Government in Ankawa, and Dr. Robin Beth Shamuel, Benjamin Ḥaddād and Fr. Shlimon I. Khoshaba of Beth Mardutha d-Madhnḥā (*Dār al-mashriq al-thaqāfiyya*) in Duhok.[85] This visit was not the most fruitful in the sense that they brought be the sources I needed, which I eventually found elsewhere. However, the visit enabled me to get a grasp of the rich variety of Syriac Christian cultural expression. During my visit, a conference about the great Syriac Orthodox journalist Rafāʾil Buṭṭī was going on, but I also got to see the private manuscript collection of Benjamin Ḥaddād, to speak about Assyrian cultural expressions and to discover the religious journals of the Chaldean and Syriac Orthodox churches. Without this visit, I would have never been able to incorporate the variety of types of sources that I have used now, which are all necessary to draw a complete picture. I have obtained my sources at other places: the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir in Paris and the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia for the Dominican and American Protestant mission archives; the Cadbury Research Library in Birmingham (UK) for Mingana's archive and the Mingana collection of manuscripts; the Bibliothèque Orientale in Beirut and the Widener Library in Cambridge (Massachusetts) for Arabic-language journals and the Ashurbanipal Library in Chicago for a number of Assyrian sources. Many

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[85]Robin Beth Shamuel is the current director of the General Directorate of Syriac Culture.

other resources have been digitized and were available online, including manuscripts and some complete runs of journals.

While analytical research about Syriac Christian language use and identification is scarce, this is not the case for specific studies about the literary and scholarly endeavors. This dissertation draws upon several previous descriptions of Syriac Christian literature and other works in Iraq. Already in 1943, the Syriac Orthodox patriarch Ignatius Ephrem I Barsoum (1887–1957) wrote his classic history of Syriac literature in Arabic. This history, which comprehensively covers Syriac Christian authors and their works, also includes many contemporary authors from Iraq.[86] Specifically dealing with literature in Neo-Aramaic and Classical Syriac from the last two centuries, Rudolf Macuch's literature history gives biographies and works of almost all Syriac Christian authors until its time of publication in 1976.[87] Both works deal with authors from all Syriac churches, but focus on literature in the Aramaic and Syriac languages. Arabic-language journalism is furthermore covered in Fāʾiq Buṭṭī's encyclopedia of "Syriac journalism."[88] Descriptions of many of the Syriac-heritage manuscripts in Iraq are available in a number of catalogues published in Iraq itself and elsewhere, which are listed in Chapter 2. These works combined provide a thorough overview of Syriac Christian authors who published in Iraq between 1920 and 1950. These works all cover only part of the total amount of written works by Syriac Christians in Iraq, and they are written in various languages. This can partially be explained by the variety in thoughts about Syriac Christian identity. In this dissertation, one of my goals is to provide a discussion of Syriac Christian literary and intellectual activity, and by doing so give picture of how language was used to express a Syriac Christian or other identity.

I have divided my sources into four categories. The categories do not correspond to the different Syriac churches in Iraq, but are different means of literary or intellectual expressions, which correspond to

[86]Ignatius Aphram I Barsaum, *Al-luʾluʾ al-manthūr fī tārīkh al-ʿulūm wa-al-ādāb al-suryāniyya* (reprint) (Baghdad: Majmaʿ al-lugha al-suryāniyya), 1976.
[87]Rudolf Macuch, *Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976).
[88]Fāʾiq Buṭṭī, *Mawsūʿat al-ṣaḥāfa al-suryāniyya fī al-ʿIrāq: tārīkh wa-shakhṣiyyāt* (Ankawa: Wizārat al-thaqāfa wa-l-shabāb, al-mudīriyya al-ʿāmma lil-thaqāfa wa-l-funūn al-suryāniyya, 2014).

a certain forms of Syriac Christian identification. The first category consists of manuscripts and other writings that can be considered traditional forms of publications. The material in this category is exclusively produced through the networks of the church, and the authors of these texts tend to identify themselves in the first place as part of their church. A variety of languages are used, often within the same manuscript, of which Arabic—often in Garshuni—and Syriac are the most important. The second category consists of printed books coming from the Assyrian printing press in Mosul. These books are all written in Neo-Aramaic, Syriac or both, and are specially meant for the Assyrian community, which is also explicitly identified as such. While the printing press is connected to the Assyrian Church of the East, and most books are religious, the identity that is expressed is of the ethnic or national type. The third category is formed by two Arabic-language journals that were published by respectively the Chaldean and Syriac Orthodox patriarchates. While the journals were probably meant for the members of the respective churches in the first place, they explicitly show that they regarded their communities to be part of the country they lived in, and the Chaldean journal went as far as supporting Arab nationalism. The fourth category consists of Arabic-language journals that were edited by Syriac Christian authors who did so not by means of their churches but through secular channels. A few of these journals had Muslim co-editors. While the Syriac heritage is not ignored by these authors, they saw themselves as Iraqi and Arab citizens in the first place and had a secular outlook.

Chapter overview

This dissertation consists of five chapters, of which the main part consists of a discussion of the above-mentioned four categories of sources. Chapter 1 provides the historical context for the rest of the dissertation. It starts with the development of Iraqi Arab identification within the context of the political changes from the end of the nineteenth century to the revolution in 1958. It then provides a historical and geographical overview of the situation of the four Syriac churches in Iraq. Finally, it covers the development of the Iraqi school system and the French Dominican and American Protestant missions to Iraq.

Chapter 2 focuses on the scribes and authors who were involved in the production of manuscripts. Despite the introduction of the printing press and the popularity of modern genres like journal articles, manuscripts did not cease from being published. Apart from the Assyrian Church of the East, which was in the possession of a printing press, manuscripts remained the most important medium to multiply religious texts. This chapter first gives an overview of the manuscripts that were produced in Iraq between 1920 and 1950, and then discusses a few collections of manuscripts in detail based on the choice of languages and their colophons. These often provide interesting information about the way these authors looked at themselves as religious groups and as part of Iraqi society. Most of the times the authors only refer to the specific church they belonged to, without signs of a sense of unity between the four Syriac churches. The chapter ends with a discussion on the collaboration between the Syriac Orthodox scribe Mattai bar Paulus and the British Orientalist Alphonse Mingana, the latter of which used his Middle Eastern background to purchase existing manuscripts, as well as to commission for new copies of older texts.

Chapter 3 discusses the endeavors of Joseph de Kelaita and the people around him. Joseph de Kelaita was a priest of the Assyrian Church of the East, who had a pioneering role in the development of Assyrian intellectual life. Originally coming from Urmia but having spent the years of World War I in the United States, he brought a printing press to Iraq with movable Syriac types, helping the Assyrian refugees set up their intellectual infrastructure from scratch. The chapter first discusses the context of Assyrian publishing in the Ottoman Empire and the United States. It then continues with the fruits of Joseph de Kelaita's printing press. These productions have in common that they are all books printed in Classical Syriac or Neo-Aramaic (Swadaya) and specifically meant to serve the Assyrian community in Iraq and possibly abroad. Being at the same time explicitly connected to the Assyrian Church of the East, these publications show an Assyrian ethnic or national identification, where it is ambiguous whether the other Syriac churches are considered part of this. Finally, the chapter surveys the Assyrian schools that were set up in the early years after World War I.

Chapter 4 consecutively discusses three Arabic-language religious journals with a strong connection to the churches of their editors. The first one is *al-Najm* (The Star), which was published between 1928 and 1938 by the Chaldean Patriarchate in Mosul itself. While this journal had a Chaldean readership in mind, it proudly posits this church and their members as part of the Iraqi nation with an Arab identity. This Arab identity is not only expressed by using the Arabic language throughout the journal, but also by explicitly referring to the Iraqi-Arab nation as their own. As such, there are no signs of unity discourse. The other two are the closely related journals *al-Mashriq* and *Lisān al-Mashriq*, which were published consecutively in the years 1946–1950 by a Syriac Orthodox priest. While these journals are entirely written in Arabic, too, they speak about a transnational *Suryānī* (Syriac) nation, seeing themselves as loyal Iraqi citizens but not as Arabs. There are clear signs of a sense of national unity among the Syriac Christians in these two journals.

Chapter 5 also concerns Arabic-language journals, but those that were published in networks outside one of the Syriac churches. After an inventarization of this diverse group of authors, three active authors are discussed in detail. The first one is Anastās al-Karmilī, whose mother was Chaldean Catholic but whose father was a Maronite from Lebanon. This famous author was a priest, but his publications were of a secular nature with a strong interest in the Arabic language. The second is Rafāʿīl Buṭṭī, a Syriac Orthodox journalist who explicitly identified as an Arab. He wrote in various places about issues relating to Iraqi society and identities, fighting against sectarian differences in the country. The third one is Paulina Ḥassūn, who published a women's journal for many years and then left the country after this became impossible.