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

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Chapter 1

Iraq and Syriac Christianity

Iraq has often been portrayed as an artificial country: a state without its own identity, based on the Sykes-Picot agreement rather than a preexisting cultural, social or political unit, which was doomed to eventually fall apart. While this narrative is not completely justified, the state of Iraq that was established in 1920 did not easily become a credible focal point of the loyalty of all of its citizens indeed, with all its religious and ethnic diversity. The issue became more pressing after 1925, when the former Ottoman province of Mosul was formally decided to become part of Iraq, which was not only the home of a large number of Kurds, but which was also an important area of much of Syriac Christianity. While forming less than four percent of the total population,[1] the Christians were not a large minority to deal with for the Iraqi government, but it was certainly one to keep in mind. Indeed, in the early formulations of Iraqi identity, Christians were explicitly included as a fundamental part of Iraqi society. In this chapter, I provide the historical, geographical and religious context in which the Syriac Christians of Iraq lived. This helps to put into context the great variety of texts that they wrote and published, which is discussed in the remainder of this dissertation.

I start this chapter with a historical overview of the state of Iraq from the last decades of Ottoman rule to the revolution in 1958. I put special emphasis here on the question what it meant to be an Iraqi and what the ethnic character of the state of Iraq was. The general his-

[1] See Appendix A for more information about demographics.

tory of modern Iraq is well studied. Several recent monographs provide a comprehensive overview of Iraqi history in Western languages, the most notable of which is Charles Tripp's *A History of Iraq*, which combines secondary sources in Arabic and Western languages to give a comprehensive account of Iraq's political history following the fall of the Ottoman Empire.[2] Other major works are Orit Bashkin's *The Other Iraq*, a history of intellectual activities based to great extent on accounts in newspapers and periodicals,[3] and Peter Sluglett's *Britain in Iraq*, a study of the British presence in Iraq drawing upon British archival sources.[4] Pierre-Jean Luizard's monograph *La formation de l'Irak contemporain* focuses on Shia politics, but is also of great interest for its accounts of the contexts of the Ottoman Empire and the Mandate in which the Shia political activity took place.[5]

After that, I continue with an overview of Syriac Christianity in Iraq. Here, I treat the Syriac Christians according to their ecclesial affiliation, even though this was not necessarily their primary form of identification. The reason for this categorization is that ecclesiastical history is the only aspect of Syriac Christian history for which—sometimes rudimentary—information is available. In practice, however, a categorization based on religious boundaries appears to be a functioning representation of the conceptions people had in this period. There seems to be one exception to this, namely the Assyrians who came from the Hakkari and Urmia regions as refugees. They were the only group with a clear ethnic or national identification in which multiple religious groups were unified. While the Assyrian Church of the East was by far the most dominant church among these people, some of these people belonged to the Chaldean Catholic Church, and some were Protestant Assyrians. The dominance of the Assyrian Church of the East (and the assumption of its Patriarch as the Assyrians' worldly leader), however, makes the distinction between the Assyrians as an ethnic or national group and as the adherents to the As-

[2] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, third edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[3] Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*.

[4] Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*.

[5] Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La formation de l'Irak contemporain : le rôle politique des ulémas chiites à la fin de la domination ottomane et au moment de la création de l'Etat irakien* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1991).

syrian Church of the East often difficult. In this section, I therefore consecutively discuss the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Church of the East (and at the same time the Assyrians as an ethnic or national group), the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Syriac Catholic Church.

The chapter continues with another form of religious activity: that of foreign missions. In the first place I discuss the Catholic mission in Mosul, which was run by French Dominicans. The second mission was an American Protestant mission, run by three different churches together of which the Presbyterians were the most important. The chapter ends with an overview of the educational policy as it was developed from the establishment of the state of Iraq onwards. The Syriac Christians, as well as the French and Protestant missionaries, undertook various private initiatives to provide education to specific groups of people, but at the same time the state education system was developing rapidly.

Creating the state of Iraq

The start of the mandatory authority in Iraq in 1920 marked the beginning of the modern state of Iraq as we know it today. The establishment of this state and the British authority were a direct consequence of Britain's military activities during World War I. The new ruling power did not only have to legitimize its own authority in the area, but also the existence of the country itself as a nation state. Iraq as a nation state could not be taken for granted, given the fact that it was the first time that the area became a political unity. The new country consisted of multiple ethnicities, religions and religious factions, and languages. But neither was it something completely new. Already before World War I, the word Iraq (Arabic: *al-ʿIrāq*) was used to designate the area that was known as Mesopotamia in the west, and some even described it as a homeland. In addition to that, the new British rulers came in the place of the unpopular Ottoman Empire, and the new state structure made limited Arab self-rule possible with a prospect of full independence. Indeed, while British rule was hated by many, the existence of Iraq as a state itself was remarkably well accepted, and many intellectuals from all religions even willingly contributed to the state-building

Figure 1.1: Map of Iraq, based on "Location map of Iraq" (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iraq_location_map.svg, by user NordNordWest – CC BY-SA 3.0

process, as we see further on in this dissertation.[6] That is not to say that the authorities ruling Iraq, British and local, did not have difficulties with developing their state identity. The Kurdish revolts and the Simele massacre of 1933 are good examples where the state failed to keep everybody on board. In this section, I show the different phases of state formation Iraq went through from the end of Ottoman rule to the revolution of 1958, as it formulated its identity as an Arab, and later

[6] Apart from this, there are more arguments to give against the "Sykes-Picot narrative," according to which modern Iraq was purely the result of this infamous pact. See Sara Pursley about the meaning of "Iraq" before the state was created: Sara Pursley, "'Lines Drawn on an Empty Map': Iraq's Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State," *Jadaliyya*, June 2nd, 2015, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/21759/.

pan-Arab, state with varying degrees of inclusivity for non-Arabs and non-Muslims.

Iraq is roughly built up from the former Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul. Of these provinces, Mosul had a different status compared to both Baghdad and Basra. This is visible in terms of demographics, where the Mosul province had a large Kurdish population and a significant Turkmen minority. Furthermore, the dominant Arabic dialect in the north was different from those of the rest of the country. From the start, forming the new state of Iraq out of the Baghdad and Basra provinces made more sense than forming it out of Mosul. There are indications that the word Iraq was already before World War I, long before the start of the Arab revolt or the British occupation, used as a determiner for Baghdad and Basra, but not for Mosul. In Baghdad in 1911, the famous Christian writer and linguist Anastās al-Karmilī, who is introduced in Chapter 5, together with the Muslim Kāẓim al-Dujaylī, founded the Arabic-language journal *Lughat al-ʿArab* "Language of the Arabs." In its introductory editorial, the editors show the idea of the existence of an Iraqi homeland, or *waṭan*:

> We transfer to our Iraqi patriots (*waṭaniyyinnā al-ʿIrāqiyyīn*) the things that were written about them by the Europeans (*al-ifranj*) and by others among the famous authors.[7]

In the same journal, an article in the next year (1912) written by Ibrāhīm Ḥalamī explicitly defines the borders of Iraq. While he recognizes that Iraq's borders have always changed over time, quoting Yāqūt's thirteenth-century *Kitāb muʿẓam buldān*[8] for its borders in medieval times, his definition of the current situation is clear:

> Today, Iraq is subdivided into two parts, and both these parts consist of a self-existent *vilayet* (*wilāya*), which are: the vilayet of Baghdad and the vilayet of Basra.[9]

[7] Anonymous, "*Lughat al-ʿArab: Majallat shahriyya adabiyya ʿilmiyya tārīkhiyya*" (introductory article), *Lughat al-ʿArab* 1:1 (1329/1911): 1. The journal gives the issuing dates both in the Islamic and the Gregorian calendar.

[8] Ibrāhīm Ḥalamī, "Al-ʿIrāq," *Lughat al-ʿArab* 2:1 (1330/1912): 2–9.

[9] Ibid.

These citations therefore show that in this journal Iraq was seen as a *waṭan* with clearly defined borders. The use of this word before the creation of the country parallels the use of this word by the propagators of an "integrated Syria" within the Ottoman Empire from the mid-1850s and fits Cem Emrence's definition of "concentric homelands" (see the Introduction). At the same time, the exclusion of the Mosul *vilayet* is significant, suggesting that "Iraq" and "Mesopotamia" did not have exactly the same meaning at this point. The view that Mosul was less Iraqi than Baghdad and Basra is supported by the fact that during the period of Turkish resistance from Ankara against the Treaty of Sèvres, Mosul was included in the *Misak-ı Millî* (National Pact) as an area that had to remain part of Turkey, while a referendum was proposed for the Arab-majority areas.[10]

Notwithstanding the earlier territorial identifications, the creation of the state itself can be explained as a direct consequence of British military intervention. In the Hijaz, Sharif Ḥusayn led the Arab revolt against the Ottoman authorities with the help of his sons, amongst whom Faisal, who became the de facto leader of the revolt and later King of Iraq. From a movement in favor of rights for the Arab provinces within the Ottoman Empire, its goal gradually shifted towards independence through contacts with Arab nationalists and British encouragement.[11] The revolt was a military success, and Faisal was able to install himself as king of a shortlived Arab Syrian state. Iraq was supposed to become part of the new Arab state, but it was no priority for the revolt. Instead, the British had strategic interests in the area. Already at the start of World War I, the British forces undertook an operation to get hold of the coastal city of Basra, the Ottoman Empire's only access to the Persian Gulf, to protect British interests concerning the trade with India and its oilfields in Persia.[12] Starting as a small operation organized though Britain's military infrastructure for India, the result was the occupation of all the Ottoman provinces

[10] "The Turkish National Pact, 28 January 1920," reproduced in *Arabian boundary disputes*, volume 9, *Part 1: Turkey–Iraq, 1920–1946, part 2: Iraq–Jordan, 1926–1992*, ed. Richard N. Schofield (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1992), 5. See also Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, third edition (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 133–65.

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

[12] Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 4.

of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul by the end of 1918—in other words, the state of Iraq as we know it today.

From the beginning, the British presence in Iraq was characterized by an ambivalent stance towards the desired style of rule that was going to be established. During World War I, Mesopotamia was conquered relatively easily. Only the Basra province, which was of lasting strategic importance for the British, was planned to become a permanent part of the British Empire. The rest of the country was planned to be held after the war for an indefinite period.[13] However, the influence of the American president Wilson's idea of self-determination, made the creation of new colonies a geopolitical impossibility. These new ideas slowly influenced the actual policies that were pursued on the ground, despite instructions from the British government in London.[14] With the establishment of the League of Nations in 1920, the mandate system was created where Britain gained a mandate over Iraq. After a Shi'ite revolt in the south, the newly installed Sir Percy Cox became High Commissioner of Iraq and received the task to create an Arab state under British supervision.[15] Only at this point, the decision was made to turn the conquered lands into a state on its own, separate from the other Arab territories but as an Arab state.[16]

To make the necessary decisions about the form and the institutions of the state, the British held the Cairo Conference in March 1921, where it was decided that Iraq was to become a constitutional monarchy, based on the elements of any modern democracy (a constitution, head of state, a government, and a parliament), under British tutelage.[17] The ministers received British advisers, and the King remained in contact with the British High Commissioner.[18] As king, the British

[13] Toby Dodge, "International Obligation, Domestic Pressure and Colonial Nationalism: The Birth of the Iraqi State under the Mandate System," in *The British and French mandates in comparative perspectives*, ed. Nadine Méouchy, Peter Sluglett and Gérard D. Khoury (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 144.

[14] Ibid., 17, and Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 10.

[15] Dawisha, *Iraq*, 12.

[16] Dawisha cites Percy Cox, saying that he had the purpose of "setting up an Arab Government under the supervision of Great Britian."

[17] Dawisha, *Iraq*, 12–19.

[18] Dodge, "International Obligation, Domestic Pressure and Colonial Nationalism," 150.

had chosen Fayṣal bin Ḥusayn (hereafter Faisal), with whom they had cooperated before as the de facto leader of the Arab revolt in the Hijaz, and who was king of the Arab Kingdom of Syria for a short while before he was driven out by the French. The British had considered Faisal as a candidate since 1918, and the fact that he was from outside Iraq was seen as favorable because of the various sectarian and ethnic differences in Iraq.[19] While Faisal was not granted any real power as the British retained the final word on all decisions, he is usually considered to have been quite successful in leading Iraq towards independence.[20] In 1924 the Anglo-Iraqi treaty was ratified, which formalized the relationship between Britain and Iraq. By doing so, the unpopular mandate could formally be abolished, but the treaty did not bring Iraq closer to independence.[21] Both the signing and ratification of this treaty was met with great resistance, as anti-British sentiments were growing.

A Constituent Assembly was responsible for creating a constitution, laying out the institutions of the state and their responsibilities. The constitution that came into force in 1925 granted significant powers to the King, who obtained the right to issue royal decrees (*irādāt malakiyya*) for many decisive matters, in such a way that the King was always able to interfere if ministers or parliament did not act according to his will. Of course, the democratic character of the state was further limited by the British influence through the Anglo-Iraqi treaty. The constitution furthermore described Islam as the religion of the state but guaranteed full freedom to practice other religions. Arabic was mentioned as the only official language, but the constitution explicitly allowed the establishment of schools that used the languages of the non-Muslim religious groups (*ṭawāʾif*), provided that they followed the official curriculum. Furthermore, besides the civil courts the constitution defined religious courts, which were subdivided into sharia courts (*al-maḥākim al-sharʿiyya*) and "communal spiritual councils" (*al-majālis al-rūḥāniyya al-ṭāʾifiyya*).[22] The consti-

[19] Dawisha, *Iraq*, 14.

[20] Tripp, *A history of Iraq*, 48.

[21] Peter Sluglett described the treaty as "old wine in new bottles." Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 43. Iraqi historiography often continues using the term "mandate" for the period up to independence in 1932.

[22] *Al-qānūn al-asāsī al-ʿIrāqī li-ʿām 1925*, articles 13, 16, 17, 69, and 75. An official translation of the constitution in English is available in *British and Foreign State Pa-*

tution therefore codified a certain number of fundamental statements about the identity of the state, which was Arab with an Islamic element, as well as about the position of the non-Muslim groups and their languages. Non-Muslims gained the right to provide education in their own languages and to have their own religious courts. No mention was however made of non-Arab ethnic groups, such as the Kurds.

The early Iraqi state was thus pre-eminently an Arab state. What this meant becomes clear when looking at the ideas of the important Arab nationalist thinker Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī (1880–1968), who stood at the beginning of the development of Iraqi Arab nationalism.[23] His writings clarify two key points in early Iraqi Arab nationalism: how Iraqi patriotism was seen as compatible with the existence of a larger Arab nation, and the question how an Arab could be defined. In Arab nationalist discourse, a difference is recognized between *qawmiyya* (nationalism), pointing at a "group of human beings bound by mutually recognized ties of language and history," and *waṭaniyya* (patriotism), "related to a country with its defined borders." Peter Wien notes about this that while the standard narrative in Western discourse about Arab nationalism says that the wish for a unified Arab nation, or pan-Arab nationalism, only took off from the 1930s, new research has proven that "parallel and asynchronical developments in different Arab lands ... had brought about a clear image of the Arab nation in the late 1920s already." In Iraq, an "Iraqi homeland" and an "Arab nation" were distinguished because of the early establishment of a kingdom.[24] Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī also made this distinction. For him, there were two types of homeland (*waṭan*): the general homeland, or *al-waṭan al-ʿāmm*, which comprised the complete Arab nation, and the particular homeland, or *al-waṭan al-khāṣṣ*, which only comprised the state somebody lived in. Second, like George Antonius, the Arabic language is—next to history—the most important foundational element of Sāṭiʿ

pers, with which is incorporated Hertslet's Commercial Treaties, 1926 part I, vol. CXXIII (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1931), 383–402. The English translation "communal spiritual councils" is attested in archival records from the British Foreign Office. *Greek Orthodox Communities, Roman Catholic, Jacobite, Chaldean and Syrian Catholic Communities in the Levant and Iraq 1844–1955* (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 2007), 513–14.

[23] Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist*, 59–77.

[24] Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, totalitarian, and pro-fascist inclinations 1932–1941* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 6.

al-Ḥuṣrī's Arab nationalism. For him, all countries in which Arabic is spoken are Arab countries, and in these countries, all speakers of Arabic are Arabs.[25] Religion is not relevant here, and while Sāṭiʿ acknowledges a role for Islam in keeping the Arabs together, it is not fundamental to the Arab nation.[26] Nevertheless, there is no room for non-Arab groups in this formulation of Arab nationalism, which was a cause for difficulties with various groups, and especially Kurdish groups.

Troubles with the Kurds in the north indeed remained a continuous problem. Already in 1919 and 1920, there were Kurdish protests against the British. The constitution of 1925 did not mention the Kurds at all, and later versions of the constitutions did not change this.[27] The formal inclusion of Mosul within Iraq in 1925 put this question on the agenda yet another time. In July 1925, the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations decided that Mosul could remain part of Iraq if Britain presented a new Anglo-Iraqi treaty. In order to address the Kurdish wish for autonomy, which was followed closely by the League of Nations because of the minority protection provisions that were part of the mandate system, Britain was required to make sure that the Kurds were given a certain form of self-rule. The new Anglo-Iraqi treaty was to be signed for the next 25 years, with the possibility that Iraq became an independent state in the meantime. A new treaty, which contained a review process with a possibility for independence every four years, was quickly drafted, and signed and ratified in January 1926.[28] The new treaty did not contain any guarantees for Kurdish autonomy. It was in 1931 that Kurdish received some form of official recognition, when the Local Languages Law was signed in direct response to Kurdish petitions to the League of Nations.[29] According to this law, Kurdish became the official language in the cities of Erbil, Sulaymaniyya and some other areas, but not in important

[25] Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist*, 117–18.

[26] Ibid., 123–24.

[27] Shafiq Haji Khadar, "The Legal Status of the Kurdish Language in Iraq," *Niqash: Briefings from Inside and Across Iraq*, 7 November 2007, http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/2057/The-Legal-Status-of-the-Kurdish-Language-in-Iraq.htm.

[28] Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 85–6.

[29] Fuat Dundar, *"Statisquo": British Use of Statistics in the Iraqi Kurdish Question (1919–1932)* (Waltham: Crown Center for Middle East Studies, 2012), 35–36.

other areas for the Kurds like the city of Kirkuk.[30] In practice, the implementation of the law appears not to have been taken seriously either.[31]

Independence of Iraq came into sight in 1927, when 1932 was mentioned as the year of the recommendation of Iraq as a member of the League of Nations. This was conditionally agreed upon in a new treaty, which was signed in December 1927. It was not ratified due to opposition in the Iraqi parliament, because Britain was not going to leave the country under the terms of the treaty. Nevertheless, the British intention to end the mandate in 1932 was repeated in 1929, and in 1930 a new treaty was negotiated. The new treaty contained independence for Iraq in 1932, but the terms of independence were thus that Britain retained a considerable influence on Iraq, especially in foreign and military affairs.[32] While the treaty was criticized by many, parliament ratified it without much trouble in November of the same year, fixing the date of independence and the nature of the relations between Britain and Iraq after becoming a member of the League of Nations.[33] In the meantime, the years 1921–1932 had seen the consolidation of state institutions and the formation of a basic democratic style of politics. While the powers of the King and the British influence together made sure that the influence of the—mostly anti-British—political parties was limited, their existence was allowed and the government had to deal with them in a certain way.[34] While British influence continued through the treaty of 1930, Iraqi politicians were now at least able to decide upon their own internal affairs. Nevertheless, as Charles Tripp argues, "Iraq's achievement of independence [did not mean] a radical shift in the pattern of its politics," and the "period of the Mandate had been a defining period in many ways."[35] The foundations of the state, according to the borders we know today, and with an Arab-Islamic character and Sunni dominance in politics, had been laid and would not change anymore until at least the 1990s.

[30] Ibid., 42.
[31] Dawisha, *Iraq*, 28.
[32] Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 123.
[33] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 61–5.
[34] Dawisha, *Iraq*, 41.
[35] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 73.

In the summer of 1933, one year after independence, King Faisal died and was succeeded by his son Ghāzī. The Simele massacre took place in the same year (see below) and set the tone for a turbulent decade. A military coup d'état took place in 1936, led by army officer Bakr Ṣidqī, which brought the ideas of the *al-Ahālī* activist group to practice by forcing a change of government. The *al-Ahālī* influence caused a government that was more inclusive towards the non-Arab and non-Sunni groups in Iraq.[36] The fruits of the coup were however reversed in 1937 under pressure of the army, when Bakr Ṣidqī was killed. In 1939, King Ghāzī died in a car accident after ruling for six years. He was succeeded by the three-year-old Faisal II, and he was represented by regent Prince ʿAbd al-Ilāh, who was pro-British and not an Arab nationalist.[37] In September 1939, World War II broke out and the British expected Iraq to stand at their side against Germany. This was initially accepted by the government, but in 1940 Rashīd ʿAlī al-Kaylānī became prime minister and took on a pro-German attitude instead. He quit his position on the request of the British, but then in 1941 he organized another coup d'état with help of part of the Arab nationalist army officers. Prince ʿAbd al-Ilāh and others fled to Transjordan and a new government was formed with Rashīd ʿAlī as prime minister. The British then started an invasion and were able to remove the new government and restore the rule of Prince ʿAbd al-Ilāh. The subsequent period until 1958 was less tumultuous, but not without frequent changes in government. The monarchy came to an end in 1958, when a violent military revolution took place in which the King and many members of his family were killed. Iraq was then transformed into a republic.

Throughout the history of the Iraqi monarchy after independence, there was a struggle between two main schools of political ideology. The first, more popular and generally more successful school was the right-wing Arab nationalist and fiercely anti-British school, which obtained more influence from 1933 thanks to a greater role of the army and the nationalist ideas of the new King. One major representative of this ideology was a party called *Ḥizb al-ikhāʾ al-waṭanī*, which was founded in 1930 as a reaction to the Anglo-Iraqi treaty, continuing

[36] Dawisha, *Iraq*, 92–94; Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 82–87.
[37] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 96.

until 1941. The second school was a more inclusivist, leftist "Iraqist" school, which was more democratic and supported a more balanced distribution of power among the various demographic groups of the country, especially for Iraq's shi'ites.[38] This school is especially represented by the *al-Ahālī* group, which forced its ideas to the government for a short time after the military coup of 1936 by Bakr Ṣidqī. Apart from these two currents there was a continuous influence of British interests, which were mainly represented by Nūrī al-Saʿīd, who supported British interests to keep the situation in control: sometimes as prime minister, and at other times behind the scenes. Within any of these main political currents, the general Arab character of the state was not contested.

While the details of the political events in Iraq do not concern us here, certain trends about the development of the style of politics and state identity in the period from 1920 to 1958 are important. The official political system of Iraq was always a constitutional monarchy until the revolution, but the degree in which a truly democratic process could take place varied from time to time. Whenever this was deemed necessary, the King could dismiss the government and parliament and install a new government, often in order to implement unpopular measures, mostly at British request. In these cases, the former Ottoman army officer and participant in the Arab revolt Nūrī al-Saʿīd usually took the position of prime minister, stepping back as soon as a more democratic attitude was deemed possible.[39] The general trend was a steady growth and eventual radicalization of anti-British Arab nationalism. This growth can partly be explained by the demographics within the army, which were by far dominated by Sunni Arabs.[40] At times, Arab nationalist army officers would impose their ideas on the civil government. There were however periods when more inclusivist ideas were prevalent, such as the year of Bakr Ṣidqī's goverment under the influence of the *al-Ahālī* group in 1936–1937, which however abruptly ended after Sunni Arab nationalists started complaining. From 1932 there was furthermore a growing influence of Nazi propaganda and anti-Semitism, culminating in the *Farhūd*, when hundreds

[38] Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 10.
[39] Dawisha, *Iraq*, 25.
[40] Ibid., 90–91.

of Jews were killed.[41] These Arab and later pan-Arab nationalist tendencies were often hindered by the British, fearing German interference.

The Chaldean Catholic Church

Since the creation of the state, the Chaldean Catholic Church was the largest church of Iraq. It comprised about 50% of the total Christian population around 1950, with probably around 80,000–100,000 adherents.[42] It is the Catholic counterpart of the Assyrian Church of the East, and together they are commonly known as the East Syriac churches. As an autocephalous or uniate Catholic Church, the Chaldeans have their own hierarchy and liturgy, based on that of the Church of the East, while accepting the Catholic faith and the authority of the Pope. The see of the Chaldean patriarchate, called the Patriarchate of Babylon, had been located in Mosul since 1830, and was transferred to Baghdad in 1947.[43] The Chaldeans are known in Arabic as *al-Kaldān*. Most of the Chaldeans in Iraq were already in the country before the state was founded, but some of them arrived from the Hakkari mountains and Urmia plains as refugees, together with Christians who belonged to the Assyrian Church of the East. Like those who belonged to the Assyrian Church of the East, these Chaldeans from the Hakkari and Urmia regions may have identified as Assyrians. Unfortunately, the sources about these "Chaldean Assyrians" are sparse, and therefore they are not discussed much in the remainder of this dissertation. The Chaldeans who were originally in Iraq did usually not identify as Assyrian, although this changed in the later period.

A union between the Church of the East and the Catholic Church was first put into place in 1553, made possible by electing a rival patriarch by the Catholic party. In the next few centuries, a separate Chaldean hierarchy was gradually set up as was the case with the other Uniate churches in the Middle East. Eventually it took until 1830 before the situation became stable with the confirmation of John

[41] Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 112–25.

[42] See Appendix A for statistical information about the Syriac Christians.

[43] Herman Teule, *Les Assyro-Chaldéens : Chrétiens d'Irak, d'Iran et de Turquie* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 153.

Hormizd as the Patriarch of Babylon, which is also the year when the patriarchate was located in Mosul.[44] Conversion to Catholicism worked well in Mosul and the area around, while most people in the Hakkari mountains and Urmia plains remained with the Church of the East.[45] By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Church of the East had therefore all but disappeared from what would later become Iraq. The conversions were actively supported by missionaries, led by the Dominicans since 1748. The word "Chaldean" seems to have been popularized by the European Catholics, who used this designation at least from the fifteenth century onwards. Initially, it could be used for all Syriac Christians, but later it only referred to those from the Church of the East who had become Catholic.[46]

While the history of the Chaldean Church before the twentieth century is well studied, this is—as for the other churches except the Assyrian Church of the East—not the case for its twentieth-century history. A recent study is Kristian Girling's monograph on modern societal history of the Church of the East in Iraq, but even here the period 1900–1950 is sparsely described.[47] I give a general outline here based on the secondary studies. In 1900 Joseph VI Emmanuel II Thomas had become Patriarch of Babylon with Mosul as his see. He would remain patriarch until his death in 1947. In the period 1915–1918, the Chaldeans of the Hakkari and Urmia regions suffered under the same circumstances as those who belonged to the Assyrian Church of the East, and several managed to flee to the refugee camps in Iraq with British help in 1918. In the meantime, the original Chaldean inhabitants of Iraq witnessed the British conquest of this area and the establishment of the state. The Patriarchate was initially supportive of British influence and the Patriarch received a position in the Iraqi

[44] For the early development of the Chaldean Church, see Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and scriptures*, 44–54; David Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organization of the Church of the East, 1318–1913* (Louvain: Peeters, 2000); and Anthony O'Mahony, "Patriarchs and Politics: The Chaldean Catholic Church in Modern Iraq," in *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology, and Politics*, ed. Anthony O'Mahony and Sebastian P. Brock (London: Melisende, 2008), 105.

[45] Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures*, 68–73.

[46] O'Mahony, "Patriarchs and Politics," 105–7.

[47] Kristian Girling, *The Chaldean Catholic Church: Modern History, Ecclesiology and Church-State Relationships* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

senate.[48] Like the Copts of Egypt in the same period, the Chaldean Church did not favor proportional representation in Parliament for the country's religious minorities, and instead participate in the country's democracy on equal par with the Muslims without separate political parties for Christian groups.[49] This is aligned with the wish of the Patriarchate that the Chaldeans be seen as part of the Arab majority, rather than as a Christian minority. In general, the Patriarch's approach has been described as flexible and cooperative as possible vis-à-vis the society and politics in which Muslim Arabs were dominant.[50] This is illustrated further in Chapter 4. After the Patriarch's death in 1947, he was succeeded by Joseph VII Ghanīma, who stayed in power until his death in 1958. The new Patriarch moved his residence to Baghdad, which had become a more and more important city for the Chaldeans since 1920 due to migration to the capital.[51]

From the moment that the state of Iraq was founded, the Chaldean Church had de facto become the national church of Iraq. It was not only the largest church of the country, its scope was also largely restricted to Iraqi territory—the other churches were more transnational. The removal of the Chaldeans from the Hakkari mountains meant that there were very few Chaldeans left in Turkey. The only significant place outside Iraq where Chaldeans were present was Urmia in Iran. Within Iraq, the center of the Chaldean Church was initially in the city of Mosul. Most of the Chaldean population lived there, and it was the location of the patriarchal see. Outside Mosul, most Chaldeans lived in an area called the Nineve plains, which is located to the north-east of Mosul. In this area we find numerous predominantly Christian villages and some towns, in most of which one of the Syriac churches is dominant. Of these, Telkepe and Alqosh are the most important Chaldean towns.[52] The center of Chaldean life gradually moved to Baghdad as more and more Chaldeans moved there, partly as a result of general urbanization.[53] The migration to Baghdad was to

[48] Ibid., 69.

[49] Ibid. For the Coptic position, see the introduction on page 13.

[50] Ibid., 67, 71, 73.

[51] Ibid., 77.

[52] See J.-M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne : Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire et de la géographie ecclésiastiques et monastiques du nord de l'Iraq*, volume 2 (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1965), 355 and 387.

[53] Girling, *The Chaldean Catholic Church*, 74.

such an extent that by the end of the 1940s, the balance between the Chaldean population of Mosul and Baghdad was more or less equal.[54] In the interwar period, migration to foreign countries started, most notably to the United States and for economic reasons,[55] Administratively, the church was divided into the six Iraqi dioceses Amadia, Aqra, Baghdad, Kirkuk, Mosul, and Zakho. Important monasteries were the Rabbān Hormizd monastery on the mountain of Alqosh, and the Mār Orāhā monastery close to Batnaya, both in the Nineve plains. The Chaldeans had two institutions at their disposal for the education of priests. One was the Syro-Chaldean seminary dedicated to Saint John in Mosul, which was run by the Dominican missionaries (see below). The other was the patriarchal "priest school," also located in Mosul and dedicated to Saint Peter, about which unfortunately little is known.[56]

The Assyrians

Most authors who have written about Christianity in Iraq in the early twentieth century have been focusing on the Assyrians. This is not only the case for the general historians of Iraq, such as Charles Tripp, but also for authors specializing on Christianity in the country. Hannah Müller-Sommerfeld, who wrote extensively about the Assyrians in her Habilitationsschrift on governmental religion policies in Iraq, gives the reason for this which remains omitted by most other authors, justifying why she wrote about the Assyrians while the larger community of Chaldeans has no place in her book: the Assyrians are simply the only group that appears often enough in the archives to write sub-

[54] See statistics in Appendix A.

[55] Girling, *The Chaldean Catholic Church*, 75.

[56] It was known in Arabic as *al-Madrasa al-kahnūtiyya al-paṭriyarkiyya* (Priestly School of the Patriarchate) and in Syriac as *Bet drāshā kāhnāyā kaldāyā d-pāṭriyārkutā*, and it is mentioned a few times in the Chaldean journal *al-Najm*, including a report about an exam in the Hebrew and Greek languages from 1930. "*Akhbār ṭā'ifiyya*," in *al-Najm* 2 (1929–1930), issue 3: 131. See also J.F. Coakley and David G.K. Taylor, "Syriac Books Printed at the Dominican Press, Mosul," in *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock*, ed. George Kiraz (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008): 73–74.

stantially about them.[57] I want to stress again that contrary to some other authors, I use Assyrians in the strict sense of those who identified as such. This generally excludes the Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, and most of the Chaldean population of Iraq. For the period about which we are talking and in Iraq, identification as Assyrian seems to have been restricted to the Christians, all of East Syriac background, who came as refugees from the Hakkari mountains and Urmia plains. The majority of these belonged to the Church of the East, and a minority to the Chaldean Catholic Church. There may have been a minor Assyrian Protestant group among these people as the result of recent missionary activity in the area. In addition to that, there was also a relatively small amount of adherents to the Church of the East in Iraq already before World War I. Because most of the Assyrians belonged to the Church of the East, and because its Patriarch assumed a key role among these people, their history in Iraq often falls together with that of the church. This section therefore at the same time describes the history of a people within Iraq and the history of a church. It should be kept in mind, though, that outside the purview of this dissertation, i.e. outside Iraq and/or after 1950, the range of Syriac Christians who identified as Assyrians was and is often broader.

The Assyrians in Iraq, or at least those who played a role in the political arena, positioned themselves as a minority. In that sense they assumed a stance towards the Iraqi government that was the reverse of that of the Chaldean Catholic Church, which wanted to be seen as an integral part of the Iraqi-Arab nation. Minorities were a new concern in geopolitics of the early twentieth century, related to the new ideas surrounding self-determination.[58] According to Laura Robson, the British deliberately reinterpreted the Assyrians as a minority in order to make a claim for British control of the Mosul province.[59] In the new world order after World War I, nation-states with a homogeneous demography were more important than before. Sweeping measures such as the Greek-Turkish population exchange were seen as justifiable and appropriate to this end. However, it was admitted

[57] H. Müller-Sommerfeld, *Staatliche Religionspolitik im Irak gegenüber Juden, Assyrischen Christen und Bahá'i (1920–1958)*, unpublished Habilitationsschrift (Leipzig, 2012).

[58] White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East*, 2.

[59] Robson, *States of Separation*, 52.

that there would always be groups that would could not be situated in an appropriate nation-state, for example because their size was too small. As a second-best solution, these groups would have to reside in a nation-state that was not theirs, as minorities living among a majority. To guarantee the wellbeing of these minorities, they had to be granted special rights, and the Wilson-backed League of Nations was one of the institutions that was supposed to guarantee this. Research by Müller-Sommerfeld has provided details on how this mechanism worked in the case of the Assyrians. Minority rights as they were established after World War I were unique in the sense that the minorities were placed under international law. According to Müller-Sommerfeld, "[i]t was based on the principle of equality before the law," but it also "conferred them additional special cultural and religious rights." New nation-states that came into existence after World War I with minorities had to "sign treaties or make declarations with special provisions for the protection of minorities," but more importantly, the League of Nations as the guarantor of these rights could interfere with the state if necessary, which could happen after minority members filed a petition.[60] In a way, under this system the nation-states that had to sign these agreements were only sovereign over the nation they represented, always leaving the possibility open that the League of Nations would interfere when it was unsatisfied with the minorities' treatment. For some countries this was problematic to accept, and Iraq as it became independent was one of them. Responsible for transforming Iraq into a nation-state as holder of the League of Nations mandate, Britain had to guarantee the rights of minorities in the future independent state of Iraq. This process was not only followed closely by the League of Nations, but also public opinion expected from the British authorities that it force Iraq to respect minorities' rights, especially concerning the Assyrians, as a Christian group for which the Archbishop of Canterbury had a special interest.[61] These

[60] H. Müller-Sommerfeld, "The League of Nations, A-Mandates and Minority Rights during the Mandate Period (1920–1932)," in *Modernity, Minority, and the Common Ground: Jews and Christians in the Middle East*, ed. Sasha R. Goldstein and Heleen Murre-van den Berg (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 263–65. On this topic, see also Robson, *States of Separation*.

[61] For the old relationship between the Assyrians and the Church of England, see J.F. Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

factors made the question of the Assyrians in an independent Arab-led Iraq so pressing and political.

Most of the Assyrians who came to Iraq belonged to the Church of the East,[62] which is the non-Catholic counterpart of the Chaldean Catholic Church, holding to its traditional dyophysite faith that was rejected during the Council of Ephesus in 431. Therefore the church is often (sometimes pejoratively) referred to as the Nestorian church, which was for instance the custom of the Dominican missionaries. Since the rule of the Mongols in the thirteenth century, its center had been in Northern Mesopotamia and around, but the success of Catholicism there made that, from the twentieth century onwards, it was largely restricted to the Hakkari mountains in the Ottoman Empire (now the extreme south east of Turkey) and the Urmia plains in Persia (now Iran). Until World War I, the adherents of the church who lived in the Hakkari mountains had a tribal lifestyle, while those in the Urmia plains lived in towns and villages as subjects of other groups.[63] Their language was Neo-Aramaic or Swadaya and Arabic was of little relevance for them. The Patriarch of the Church of the East, Mar Shimʿun XIX Benjamin, was their spiritual and temporal leader, exercising his authority as "chieftain over the mountain tribes as well as the local subject (raʿyat) population."[64] Until World War I, the Ottoman and Persian states had little influence over these people.

From 1915, the genocide against Armenian, Greek and Syriac Christians took place. The area that was to become Iraq was spared, but both the West Syriac Christians in the area of Ṭūr ʾAbdīn around Mardin and Midyat, and the East Syriac Christians of the Hakkari mountains and the Urmia plains suffered tremendously.[65] While the West Syriac Christians were targeted as part of the general anti-Christian measures in Eastern Anatolia, where the Armenians were the main target, the story of the East Syriac Christians of the Hakkari

[62] Nowadays known as the Assyrian Church of the East.

[63] Becker, *Revival and Awakening*, 45–46.

[64] Ibid., 55.

[65] The genocide against West Syriac Christians is usually known as the Sayfo or "sword." The work that covers the Sayfo most extensively is David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006).

and Urmia area is different.[66] Urmia (Persia) had been under Russian control since 1909, but in the beginning of 1915 it was occupied by the Ottoman Empire. During the time of the occupation, many Assyrians were massacred in the villages of the Urmia mountains and in the cities of Dilman (Salmas). The situation also became unsafe within the Ottoman Empire as soon as the Russians fought back and occupied part of Eastern Anatolia. At this point, the Assyrians of Hakkari, where they were the most numerous and where the Patriarch was, fled to Urmia, which was again under Russian control. In 1917 however, the Russians ended their war efforts, leaving the Assyrians alone. Together with the British, who had promised autonomy in return, they defended the area for some time under the military leadership of the Patriarch. In 1918, the Patriarch was killed by a Kurdish leader who had his trust, and in the same year further defence became impossible because the Ottomans had become stronger, forcing the Assyrians to leave the area. Collectively, both the Assyrians from the Hakkari mountains and those who were originally from the Urmia plains fled to the Persian city of Hamadan, which was under control of British forces, more than 300 kilometers to the southeast of Urmia. The British army officer Ronald Sempill Stafford writes that "[m]ore than seventy thousand Assyrians started out on this dreadful retreat; fewer than fifty thousand reached Hamadan."[67]

Hamadan was a temporary destination, and in the same year almost all Assyrian refugees went to the Baʿqūba refugee camp close to Baghdad, while some came in service of the British army. The Baʿqūba refugee camp was set up by the British in cooperation with Assyrian military leadership. After the death of the Patriarch, his younger brother took up office under the name of Mar Shimʿun XX Paul, but the military responsibilities came in the hands of Agha Petros de Baz, who had assumed an important role during the war. Except for Assyrians (around 25,000 people), there were also a large number of Armenians

[66] Many West Syriac Christians in Eastern Anatolia who fled ended up in Syria with French help. As such, their story does not play a large role in this dissertation. The suffering of the East Syriac Christians is best covered in Florence Hellot-Bellier, *Chroniques de massacres annoncés: Les Assyro-Chaldéens d'Iran et du Hakkari face aux ambitions des empires (1896–1920)* (Paris: Editions Geuthner, 2014), 411–78.

[67] R.S. Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935), 25.

in the camp (around 15,000).[68] The refugee camp functioned to reinforce the ethnic and tribal configurations of the situation before World War I, by not only spatially separating the Armenians and Assyrians in the camp, but even by grouping people on the basis of their tribal affiliations. Mar Shimʿun XX Paul died in 1920 in the camp, and he was succeeded by his nephew, who was consecrated Mar Shimʿun XXI Eshai at the age of eleven or twelve.[69] Because of his young age, he came to be represented by his aunt Sūrmā d-Bet Mār Shimʿun ("Lady Surma") as leader of the community. J.F. Coakley mentions grave leadership problems in this period, with the Patriarch and Lady Surma lacking wide support from the community and with the metropolitan Mār Yosip Khnanishoʿ of Shamsdin and the bishop Mār Abimalek Timotheus of Malabar, who were responsible for religious affairs.[70] Despite the terrible events and the great number of victims during the war, however, the Assyrians from the Hakkari mountains and the Urmia region stayed together as a group, having lost their homeland but not dispersed. The increased solidarity is furthermore said to have reinforced Assyrian nationalism.[71]

After the establishment of the state of Iraq, the long and painful process of settlement of the Assyrians took place. One of the reasons that this was a slow process was that it only gradually became clear that most Assyrians could not return to their homes or emigrate as a group. The Assyrians from the Urmia region, as Persian citizens, could return to their homeland as soon as the government regained authority over the area. For the Assyrians from the Hakkari mountains this was not possible, because after reassertion of authority in the area by the Turkish authorities, Turkey refused their return and evicted those who

[68] Laura Robson, "Refugee Camps and the Spatialization of Assyrian Nationalism in Iraq," in *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East*, ed. Sasha R. Goldstein and Heleen Murre-van den Berg (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 244.

[69] From 1940, he was known under the regnal number XXIII. J.F. Coakley, "The Church of the East since 1914," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78 (1996): 181.

[70] Ibid.: 181–3.

[71] Dietmar W. Winkler, "The Twentieth Century," in *The Church of the East: A Concise History*, by Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2003), 138.

had already returned at their own initiative.[72] In 1921, the Baʿqūba camp was closed because of anti-British sentiments in the capital,[73] and a new refugee camp was opened in Mindan, not far from Mosul. The British soon decided that the Assyrians were to be located in villages in Northern Iraq. The reason Northern Iraq was chosen was, as Laura Robson describes, to provide a buffer between the rest of Iraq and Turkey and to "creat[e] a new ethnographic claim to Mosul," to convince the League of Nations to grant the Mosul province to Iraq instead of Turkey.[74] The Assyrians were deliberately not located together but spread out across villages despite protests from the Patriarch.[75] In 1925, when the border between Turkey and Iraq was fixed, Turkey's authority over Hakkari became definitive and long-term settlement in Iraq as citizens was the only option left, despite several failed attempts for an autonomous region within Iraq or settlement elsewhere. Different factions came into existence, of which the faction of Patriarch Mār Shimʿun (still represented by Lady Surma) was probably the most influential. This faction fiercely opposed integration in Iraq, as it would let the higher goal go out of sight, i.e. return to the Hakkari mountains, or at least their autonomy from any higher government within the territory of Iraq.[76] Other Assyrians had more positive feelings towards the state of Iraq, especially the smaller group of Assyrians who were not displaced during World War I and were already living in Iraqi territory when the country was created. Settlement took place slowly and was still not finished by 1930.[77] The settled Assyrians were still refugees at this point, as a proposal to grant citizenship to the Assyrians came after Iraqi independence. One of the reasons that settlement was complicated consisted of the military activities Assyrians engaged in on behalf of the British forces. From 1921, the British had recruited large numbers of Assyrians in the Iraq Levies, a British ground force in Iraq that was created in 1915 to support the Royal Air Force. In contrast to the Iraqi army that was being

[72] R.S. Stafford, "Iraq and the Problem of the Assyrians," *International Affairs* 13:2 (1934): 161–62.

[73] Robson, *States of Separation*, 49.

[74] Ibid., 52.

[75] Ibid., 54–55.

[76] Zubaida, "Contested nations": 367.

[77] Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, 43–44; Robson, *States of Separation*, 83.

created since the formation of the Iraqi state, the Levies were under direct control of the British. While the Levies consisted originally of Arabs, the British started to recruit soon members of Iraq's minorities, and eventually it became entirely Assyrian. In combination with the anti-British sentiments, which were present since the beginning of the British occupation, the Assyrian military activities for the British are widely cited as a reason for some people in Iraq and occasionally the Iraqi government to be hostile to them.

The issue became worse after independence, culminating in the Simele massacre of 1933 in which more than 600 Assyrians lost their lives. Many Assyrians were afraid that independence would mean the end of their protection by the British, making their life in Iraq impossible. The proposed permanent settlement in the north of Iraq, including Iraqi citizenship and the same rights as the other non-Muslim groups, was rejected by many, including the Patriarch. One solution that came up during this period was the Assyrians' mass emigration to Syria, which was still under French control without imminent prospects of independence. Mār Shimʿun's party presented this wish to the League of Nation's Permanent Mandates Commission in 1931.[78] This and other requests were rejected, but the idea of migrating to Syria remained as Iraq's independence remained alive. After independence, one of the changes was that the Assyrian Levies, the British ground troops in Iraq who had been recruited among the local population, were disbanded in 1933. These former soldiers were allowed to retain and carry weapons in order to be able to defend themselves against the Kurds among whom they lived.[79]

In early 1933, an Assyrian tribal leader called Mālik Yāqū, son of Mālik Ismael, started a campaign to propagate the opinion that the Assyrians should not integrate into Iraq as citizens with the same rights as other minorities. He did this in cooperation with the Patriarch and by touring with armed men around the villages in the north.[80] This

[78] Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten Nation*, 95–97. In this document, emigration to Syria was presented as an alternative, should "arrang[ing] our emigration to one of the countries under the rule of one of the Western Nations" fail.

[79] Khaldun S. Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5:2 (1974): 172.

[80] Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, 110–11; Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I)": 170; Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, 100.

led to a hostile response of the Iraqi government and a deterioration of public opinion about the Assyrians.[81] At this point Iraqi soldiers were sent to the area, partly at the advice of the British, who foresaw a possibility that military intervention was necessary.[82] The Patriarch was furthermore forced to leave the north and stay in Baghdad, to prevent him from stirring up the situation.[83] When negotiations between Yāqū and the army did not succeed, Yāqū with a group of armed men decided to leave the country and cross the border into Syria, which was still under French control. They were reportedly joined by 800 other Assyrians from various tribes. They were sent back and taken into Iraq under the condition of being disarmed by the authorities in Syria; however, the disarmament did not happen.[84] When the Assyrians crossed the border back to Iraq in the beginning of August, fierce fighting broke out between the Assyrians and the Iraqi army, which took almost a full day. It is undecided who started fighting—the Iraqi army might have started when they saw that the Assyrians were unexpectedly armed, but official British reports suggest that the Assyrians started fighting.[85] Initially, the battle passed off to the advantage of the Assyrians, during which the Iraqi army suffered many casualties, but eventually the battle was won by the army.[86] Afterwards, most Assyrians fled back to Syria, while others fled, trying to go back to their villages. The army then started a campaign to capture the fleeing Assyrians, because they were still armed. During the chaotic days that followed, many of them were killed and some villages were looted as they were left unprotected. Because of the events, many villagers fled to the Assyrian town of Simele on 8 August. On the same day, the

[81] Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, 129.

[82] Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I)": 172; Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, 101.

[83] Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I)": 173; Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, 99. Donabed places the detention of the Patriarch before the touring of Yāqū.

[84] It is unclear why the French had not disarmed the Assyrians or even had given back the weapons. Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I)": 174. Donabed adds that the French did so because the weapons were given by the Iraqi state in the first place. Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, 106.

[85] For the argument that the fighting was started by Yāqū and his party, see Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I)": 175. Donabed holds that the army started fighting as soon as they saw the Assyrians return. Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History, 106.*

[86] Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, 131–32; Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, 106.

army arrived in Simele, and the Assyrians in town were led to the police post and disarmed under the pretext that they would be protected by the state. But after three days, they suddenly had to leave the police post. All men in Simele were then massacred, while women and children were led to the police post and thus spared.[87]

After the events in July and August 1933, the Iraqi army received a very warm welcome in Baghdad at the end of August upon their return from the north.[88] It should be noted that at this point the massacre in Simele was not acknowledged, and that the people were cheering for the defeat of the Assyrians who fought the army.[89] The episode was popularly seen as a deed of resistance against the remainders of British rule,[90] as the actions of Yāqū were thought to be supported by them. Further atrocities were prevented, however, with pressure from the British, and the survivors of the Simele massacre were moved to camps in Mosul. While the British tried to make the Iraqi authorities punish the army elements responsible for the massacre, the nationalist mood following the events made this impossible, fearing an anti-British coup.[91] In August, in various places in Iraq, especially Mosul, anti-Assyrian attacks took place, as well as attacks against the British and French residents.[92] According to Stafford, it took until the end of October for the situation to calm down.[93]

In the period between 1933 and 1937, a collective movement of the Assyrian out of Iraq was back on the table, which was reportedly supported by around 90% of the Assyrians at the time.[94] With support by the League of Nations, preparations for a collective movement were made. The first attempt was a transfer to Brazil in 1934, but this failed after public opposition to the plan. The second attempt, in the same

[87] Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, 144–46; Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, 109–16.

[88] Stafford writes, though, that the crowds welcoming the army in Baghdad were organized by the government "by the spending of a few pounds," but that similar demonstrations took place in Mosul that were genuinely popular. Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, 162 and 164.

[89] Zubaida, "Contested Nations": 371.

[90] Husry, "The ssyrian Affair of 1933 (II)": 352; Robson, *States of Separation*, 89.

[91] Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II)": 359; Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten Nation*, 122–23.

[92] Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, 165.

[93] Ibid., 167 and 171.

[94] Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, 176.

year, was migration to British Guiana, which was held up by practical drawbacks. The third attempt, between 1935 and 1937, was collective settlement in Syria, but this plan faced staunch nationalist opposition and was partially executed. When further execution of the plan was cancelled, the 9,000 Assyrians who had moved wanted to go back, but this was not allowed by the Iraqi government.[95] In 1937 this idea was eventually abandoned, when the Iraqi government declared to the League of Nations that the Assyrians had the same status as any other minority in Iraq.[96] The position of the Assyrians in Iraq had changed for good. It was the end of their years in a tribal formation and the Assyrians were not allowed to carry arms anymore. The Patriarch was forced to leave the country out of fear of armed resistance and went to Cyprus with his family. He was not allowed to return to Iraq or even to visit the country, and neither did he get permission to go to Syria. After the departure of Mār Shimʿun to Cyprus, the most important figure in Iraq representing the Church of the East was Mār Yōsip Khnanīshōʿ, who had been the Metropolitan of the Shemsdin province since 1918, holding the second most important office in the hierarchy. As such, he had the responsibility to represent the church for the sake of communication with the Iraqi government.[97] In 1940, the Patriarch accepted an invitation to go to Chicago in the United States by the diaspora community there. He was to stay in the United States for the rest of his life, laying the foundation of Chicago as the international center of the Assyrian Church of the East. The official policy of the Assyrian Church of the East to aim for a state on their own or autonomy finally changed in 1948, when the Patriarch wrote a piece in the first issue of a journal called *Light from the East*, writing that the Assyrians in the Middle East should be loyal citizens in the various countries they lived in. This is a completely new policy in comparison to the Patriarch's earlier countless endeavors to create a separate state. At the same time, it corresponds well to what the Assyrians had already been doing for a long time in Iraq, and it makes sense given that the Assyrians had spread out over the world during

[95] Robson, *States of Separation*, 92–99. The Assyrians who stayed in Syria were granted Syrian citizenship. Müller-Sommerfeld, *Staatliche Religionspolitik im Irak*, 437.

[96] Ibid., 437–438.

[97] Müller-Sommerfeld, *Staatliche Religionspolitik im Irak*, 178.

the preceding decades. Heleen Murre-van den Berg has interpreted this shift in policy as a "deterritorialization" of the Assyrian Church of the East, from a church that was inherently linked to a particular territory to a global church.[98] In addition to the removal of the strive for an Assyrian state, this de-territorialization included that the ethnic component of Assyrian Christianity became less important (but not absent), and it came with less negative feelings for Islam.[99] At the same time, the Patriarch gave up his claims to political leadership of the Assyrians as a nation.[100] The Patriarch was allowed by the Iraqi government to go back to Iraq in the same year, which must have had something to do with the new policy.[101] Since the publication, the relationship between the government and the Assyrians in Iraq had eased as well.[102]

The story of the Assyrians in Iraq, and especially of the Simele massacre, remains quite controversial. The main narrative of the Simele massacre has been provided by Lieutenant-Colonel Stafford, the British administrative inspector for Mosul, who witnessed the events from closeby. Later additions and alterations have been added by Khaldun Husry, son of Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī and in defense of the Iraqi government, as well as by Sami Zubaida, mainly based on British Foreign Office documents, and more recently by Sargon Donabed, who added more Assyrian sources, including oral reports. Some questions have never been resolved, and questions about who bears guilt for parts of the events remain on the table. Although the massacre was initially officially denied by the Iraqi government,[103] there is no doubt among historians about what took place inside Simele and that this was an unforgivable atrocity. The controversies surrounding the Simele mas-

[98] Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "Light from the East (1948–1954) and the Deterritorialization of the Assyrian Church of the East," in *Religion beyond its Private Role in Modern Society*, ed. Wim Hofstee en Arie van der Kooij (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 121–8.

[99] Ibid., 125–26. The link between the church and the Assyrian nation did not disappear, as pointed out by Murre-van den Berg, which is even demonstrated in the official name of the church, "Assyrian Church of the East" (see page 132).

[100] Ibid., 129.

[101] Ibid., 121.

[102] Müller-Sommerfeld, *Staatliche Religionspolitik im Irak*, 186.

[103] Khaldun S. Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5:3 (1974): 345.

sacre concern two issues.[104] First, a major question is whether the Iraqi government intended to commit a massacre on the Assyrians, either to address awakening nationalist feelings or as a form of genocide.[105] The question which party started fighting after the Assyrians crossed the river back into Iraq is important here, but also whether the massacre in Simele was planned or an act of individuals within the army.[106] The anti-Assyrian feelings of army general Bakr Ṣidqī, who was stationed in Mosul, are often mentioned in this respect.[107] The second issue is whether the Assyrian leadership could justify its refusal to accept the government's settlement and integration proposal. Husry is extremely severe at this point, and holds that the Assyrians had a comfortable life in Iraq and should not complain.[108] Stafford shows more sympathy for the Assyrians, but concentrates on the unrealistic expectations of the Patriarch and the sincere efforts of the Iraqi government. Donabed rightly stresses the anti-Assyrian sentiments in Iraq, as well as unrealistic housing plans, justifying the anti-integration campaign and the emigration attempt.[109] A key part of Stafford's argument is that, while it should have never ended in a massacre, the way in which the government treated the Assyrians in general was fair and even more than that.[110] This is in line with the fact that in general, the British supported the Iraqi government in their treatment of the Assyrians and their refusal to grant the Assyrians

[104] For the development of the academic discourse surrounding the Simele massacre, see Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "Writing Assyrian History: The Military, the Patriarch and the British in Yaqu bar Malek Ismael's Assyrians in Two World Wars (Tehran 1964)," in *Sayfo 1915: An Anthology of Essays on the Genocide of Assyrians/Arameans during the First World War*, ed. Shabo Talay and Soner Barthoma (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2018), 221–24.

[105] The term genocide is frequently mentioned in relation to the Simele massacre. For the controversy regarding the intentions of the government, see Zubaida, "Contested Nations": 374–75.

[106] Stafford claims that it was planned by Bakr Ṣidqī, while Husry (in response to Stafford) writes that it is more probable that it was an irregular action by the respective army division.

[107] Sargon George Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History: Iraq and the Assyrians in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 117–18; Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I)," 173.

[108] Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I)": 164.

[109] Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, 99–100.

[110] Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, 128.

special rights or autonomy,[111] despite the suspicions in Iraq that the British were aiding the Assyrians against Iraq in order to delay independence.[112] Recent research is especially critical of the British treatment of the Assyrians in a more general sense. In relation to this, it is Laura Robson's argument that the Assyrians were used in order to secure the continued British control over Mosul, among other things, and then let down.[113]

A major question during the immediate aftermath of the massacre was whether the events were to be interpreted as an attack against the Christians of the country or as a political matter. The fact that the response of the army was wrong was not questioned, and was explained by the now independent government as actions of several individuals within the army. However, the government wanted to stress that the situation was caused by a political situation and not by general anti-Christian sentiments, which was a main concern for the minority protection scheme of the League of Nations, on the basis of which independence was granted. In October 1933, following the Simele massacre, the League of Nations organized a session about the protection of minorities in Iraq at which British and Iraqi delegations were present. The Iraqi delegation was anxious to note that the conflict was not religious but political—this view is strongly expressed by Stafford at various times in his book. The massacre itself was condemned and was explained by stating that "certain elements of the army had behaved with unjustifiable severity," and the government proposed that the League of Nations take initiative to find a place for the Assyrians to move collectively.[114] Keeping in mind that the Assyrians were a group set off in many aspects from the other (Syriac) Christians in the country, the Assyrian issue can well be interpreted as purely a political issue, and indeed many people from the west who saw the issue from the ground did so. However, understandably, many observers from Europe saw the events as an anti-Christian attack.[115] There is some evidence that the anti-Assyrian sentiments during the aftermath of the

[111] Zubaida, "Contested Nations," 377.

[112] Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, 93; Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II)," 346 and 350.

[113] Robson, *States of Separation*, 52.

[114] Müller-Sommerfeld, *Staatliche Religionspolitik im Irak*, 420.

[115] Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II)": 353.

Simele massacre also reached the Christian population in general.[116] In the next chapters, it becomes clear how the other Syriac Christians in Iraq interpreted the events.

The Syriac Catholic and the Syriac Orthodox Churches

Both the Syriac Catholic Church and the Syriac Orthodox Church were present from the beginning of the state of Iraq, but in smaller numbers than the Chaldeans and those belonging to the Church of the East. The Syriac Catholic Church was the bigger of these two, but the Syriac Orthodox were more active in public life and in publishing, so that we know more about the latter, which is reflected in this dissertation. Like the Chaldean Catholic Church and the Church of the East, the Syriac Catholic Church and the Syriac Orthodox Church are sister churches. Together they represent the West Syriac ecclesial and ritual tradition. The Syriac Orthodox Church holds the miaphysite christological position and is sometimes known under the name of Jacobite Church, after the sixth-century Jacob Baradaeus, who was responsible for the creation of a separate Syriac Orthodox hierarchy and the formal break with the Byzantine church. The Syriac Catholic Church is an autocephalous church in the same way as the Chaldean Catholic Church. The usual designation of both churches and their people in Arabic is *Suryānī* (adjective) and *al-Suryān* (collective noun for the people), which can be translated as Syrian or Syriac.[117] While today these words refer to East Syriac Christianity as well, in the period until 1950 its usage in Arabic was restricted to the West Syriac Church. This confusing issue is explored in detail in the following chapters. In Syriac the word for both the language and the people is *Suryoyo*.

[116] Sargon Donabed mentions that some people were threatened to be killed if they did not convert to Islam immediately. Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, 110–11. Stafford also mentions the general anti-Christian sentiments, without however providing details. Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, 167.

[117] "Syriac" was originally only the word for the Syriac language, but recently it has become more common to use this word to refer to the Syriac churches and people as well to avoid confusion with the modern Syrian state. However, both Syrian and Syriac are in use.

The West Syriac church was established as a separate church in the sixth century, when the bishop Jacob Baradaeus created an independent miaphysite hierarchy in Syria. From the early seventh century, this church expanded to the east, inside Persian territory.[118] Thanks to this expansion, the West Syriac churches also have a presence in what is now Iraq, together with the East Syriac churches. Catholicism started to influence the West Syriac church from the eleventh century, during the First Crusade. A separate Catholic hierarchy emerged in the sixteenth century, after which we can speak of a Syriac Orthodox and a Syriac Catholic Church. The Ottoman government recognized the Syriac Orthodox Church in 1831.[119] In the nineteenth century, the West Syriac churches were smaller in what is now Iraq than elsewhere. For both the Syriac Catholic and the Syriac Orthodox church, the Ṭūr ʾAbdīn region, now in Southeastern Turkey, had become the heartland. The see of the Syriac Catholic Patriarchate was in Mardin since 1854, and that of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the Dayr al-Zaʿfarān monastery close to Mardin already since 1293. This was to change completely during World War I because of the genocide in Eastern Anatolia (see above). The genocide caused a great stream of refugees, especially to Syria, and to a lesser extent to Iraq. The see of the Syriac Catholic patriarchate was moved to Beirut, and that of the Syriac Orthodox patriarchate to Syria in 1924 (since 1959 in Damascus).

In contrast to the East Syriac churches, both West Syriac churches in Iraq had their patriarchates outside the country. The Syriac Catholic church had its most important center in Mosul. Other centers were located in the Nineve plains, an area that was also important for the Chaldeans and the Syriac Orthodox. Here the towns of Bartallah and Baghdeda (Qaraqosh) are located, with had a majority mixed West Syriac population. Iraq is furthermore home to the Monastery of Mar Behnam (*Dayr Mār Bihnām*), to the southeast of Mosul.[120] Mosul

[118] Claude Sélis, *Les Syriens orthodoxes et catholiques* (Turnhout: Editions Brepols, 1988), 27–30.

[119] For this history see John Flannery, "The Syrian Catholic Church: Martyrdom, Mission, Identity and Ecumenism in Modern History," in *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology, and Politics*, ed. Anthony O'Mahony and Sebastian P. Brock (London: Melisende, 2008), 146–51.

[120] See B. Snelders, "Behnam, Dayro d-Mor Behnam," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition*, ed. Sebastian P. Brock et al., last modified 2016-09-22, http://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Behnam-Dayro-d-Mor.

was also the place where Ignatus Ephrem II Raḥmānī (1848–1929) was born, who was Patriarch from 1897 until his death. He studied at the above-mentioned Syro-Chaldean seminary of the Dominican mission. Despite his birth and early life in Mosul, he did not go back to Iraq after the establishment of the state.[121] The same can be said about Gabriel Tappuni (1879–1968), who was patriarch between 1929 until his death. He too was born in Mosul and attended the Syro-Chaldean seminary, but left the place when he became patriarchal vicar in Mardin.[122] The ecclesiastical structure of the Syriac Catholic Church in Iraq is relatively simple, with an archdiocese in Mosul and one in Baghdad. The Syriac Catholic Church did not have any significant publications in Iraq in the period 1920–1950. The church did however produce a significant number of manuscripts. A significant person with links to the church was Anastās al-Karmilī, who had a Syriac Catholic mother. He is discussed in Chapter 5.

The geographical features of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Iraq since the establishment of the state were similar. Its center was equally in Mosul, and the towns of Bartallah and Baghdeda were also inhabited by the Syriac Orthodox. The Syriac Orthodox monastery of Mar Mattai (*Dayr Mār Matay*) is located close to Bartallah. When Iraq was established as a state, the Syriac Orthodox Church had just received a new patriarch in the person of Ignatius Elias III (1867–1932) from Mardin, who was elected in 1917 and, despite the circumstances, officially accepted by the Ottoman sultan. In 1924, soon after his consecration, he had to move the patriarchal see from Turkey to Syria. Contrary to the Syriac Catholic patriarchs, Ignatius Elias III actively dealt with issues concerning Iraq. In 1930 he held a synod in the Mar Mattai monastery, during which the ecclesiastical structure of the Syriac Orthodox Church in general was renewed. After his death in 1932, he was succeeded by Ignatus Ephrem I Barsoum (1887–1957) in 1933, who was born in Mosul. Like many other clergy of the Syriac churches, Barsoum had a deep interest in scholarship, and he produced many works on Syriac literature, language and church history. His bio-

[121] S.P. Brock and G.A. Kiraz, "Raḥmani, Ignatius Ephrem II," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Sebastian P. Brock et al. (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011), 350.

[122] A. Harrak, "Tappuni, Gabriel," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Sebastian P. Brock et al. (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011), 396.

bibliographical overview of Syriac literature, which includes contemporary authors, is especially important in this respect.[123] Much of the training of priests and other clergy initially took place at the Mar Mattai monastery. From 1946 onwards, most clergy were educated in the Saint Ephrem Institute in Mosul (Syriac: *Beth sefro Efremoyo*, Arabic: *al-Maʿhad al-Aframī*), which was founded in Lebanon by Barsoum in 1939 and transferred to Mosul in 1946.[124] Apart from their manuscripts, the Syriac Orthodox Church did not publish anything inside Iraq until 1946, when it started the Arabic-language journal *al-Mashriq*. This journal is discussed in Chapter 4.

Western missions

Two Western missions were present in Iraq in the early twentieth century: a Catholic mission, run by French Dominicans, and a Protestant mission, led by three American Protestant churches together. The Dominican mission was the oldest of the two, and was the continuation of an older Italian mission. The Protestant mission was a new mission established in 1924. Not much historical research has been conducted on missionary work in Iraq as far as the twentieth century is concerned, but the archives of these two missions are a good starting point. The archive of the Dominican mission to Mosul is present in the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir in Paris. The material is well accessible and contains letters, reports, and other documents produced by the missionaries. The archive consists for a remarkably large part of secondary material in the form of historical narratives of the mission. The archive contains relatively few primary documents, such as personal letters by the missionaries, and relatively many formal documents such as reports. Like the Dominican mission, the American mission has an extensive, well-kept archive, providing a good overview of the mission's history. The archive, containing the secretaries' files covering the full period in which the mission was active, is freely accessible for researchers at the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), with a restriction on material that is less than 50 years

[123] Barsaum, *Al-luʾluʾ al-manthūr fī tārīkh al-ʿulūm wa-al-ādāb al-suryāniyya*.

[124] Anonymous, *Dayr Mār Afrām al-Suryānī – al-kulliyya al-lāhūtiyya*, Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, http://syrian-orthodox.com/page.php?id=5.

old. Contrary to the archive of the Dominican mission, in the American archive original letters written by the missionaries make up a large share, providing an insight in their personal perspectives.

The official start of the Dominican mission was in 1748 when Pope Benedict XIV made the Order of Preachers responsible for the project to convert the non-Chalcedonian Christians in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan. The first missionaries were sent out in 1750.[125] Catholic sources often speak about a "return to Catholic unity," based on the idea that before the dogmatic conflicts of the fourth and fifth century there was a unified Church of which the Catholics are heirs.[126] The first Dominicans who were sent out to Mosul, where the mission was to be based, were Italians, and the mission's governance remained in Italian hands for more than a hundred years. The Italian period came to an end in 1856 because of political unrest in Italy. In that year the first French Dominican was sent to Mosul, taking over the leadership of the mission immediately. The last Italian left Mosul in 1857.[127] From the moment that the French took over, the mission was headed by French Dominicans, each of them staying for a considerable number of years. It was in this period that the main institutions of the mission were established and consolidated. The only rupture was World War I, when the French were forced to leave the country by the Ottomans.[128] Three local members of the mission remained, among whom Sulaymān Ṣā'igh, who was active as a well-known Chaldean writer. The mission came to a complete standstill, and was reestablished in the beginning of 1920 with a largely renewed staff. The work of the Dominican missionaries was organized in various "œuvres" (works), of which the educational works were the most important, judging from how often they appear in the archives of the mission. In fact, the information on the non-educational works inside the mission in the period after World War I is very scarce and is mostly limited to irregular remarks. Before 1914, the mission had its own printing press, but at the start of World War I

[125] Bernard Goormachtigh, *Histoire de la Mission Dominicaine de Mésopotamie et en Kurdistan depuis ses premières origines jusques à nos jours* (Mosul: 1873), 12.

[126] Mannès Brelet, *Deux siècles de mission dominicaine à Mossoul* (Mossoul: 1950), 1. Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, Paris, Mosul mission archive, Z-11.

[127] Ibid., 14–15.

[128] Ibid., 41.

it was confiscated. Attempts to reestablish the printing press failed.[129] A document of 1923 indicates the wish to reestablish a hospital, and the creation of an eye clinic, but this seems to have been without success.[130]

The best-known *œuvre* of the Dominican missionaries was their seminary, the Syro-Chaldean seminary devoted to Saint John. It was opened as part of the Dominican mission in 1878 and its goal was to educate local priests for the Chaldean and Syriac Catholic Church. The Dominican seminary was not the only one, since the Chaldeans also had their own seminary devoted to Saint Peter (see above), but the Dominicans felt the need to establish a separate seminary because they were not satisfied with its quality.[131] Similar to other Catholic seminaries, the students enrolled in the seminary at the age of 12 or 13,[132] and first fulfilled a preparatory track of six years called "petit séminaire," devoting most of their time to languages. After that, the actual education to become a priest took place during another six years of "grand séminaire." From the beginning the Dominicans placed great importance on making the program suit the needs of the two Syriac churches, spending a great amount of time in teaching Arabic, Syriac and Turkish, besides French and Latin.[133] Turkish was removed from the curriculum after World War I. Initially a sharp distinction existed between morning sessions in which French and Latin were taught and used, and afternoon sessions that were reserved for

[129] See the following short booklet in the possession of the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir: Biskupski, *L'imprimerie des pères dominicains de Mossoul et son activité linguistique et littéraire* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1955).

[130] Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, Paris, Arch op Paris Mossoul IV-Z-95, "Mission de Mossoul : 1914– 52," 11. Eye diseases were a common problem in Iraq. An education report shows that in 1943–1944 almost 30% of the school pupils had trachoma or another eye disease. Roderic D. Matthews and Matta Akrawi, *Education in Arab Countries of the Near East: Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon* (Washington: American Council on Education, 1949), 124.

[131] Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, Paris, Arch op Paris Mossoul IV-Z-95, "Mission de Mossoul : 1914–52," 89: "Les Chaldéens avaient fondé, quelque dix ans avant nous, un séminaire sous le patronage de S. Pierre : ce fut plutôt originairement une simple école épiscopale qui procurait à la cathédrale les enfants dont elle avait besoin pour les chants et les cérémonies."

[132] Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, Paris, Arch op Mossoul IV-N13-2-11, anonymous document called "Rapport sur le Séminaire Syro-Chaldéen de S. Jean l'Evangéliste à Mossoul" (dated 1929 by the archivist with uncertainty).

[133] Brelet, *Histoire de la mission de Mossoul*, file F, 41.

eastern languages.[134] After the war, nothing of this policy was left and a report that was probably written in 1929 mentions that from the third year all classes were in French.[135]

For the school year 1946–1947, the archive at the Saulchoir library contains a document which describes the program for each of the 12 grades at the seminary.[136] The document does not give extensive information about the contents of the lessons, but provides the number of hours that were spent on different subjects, as well as the textbooks that were used. This reveals some interesting details about the seminary's language policy. During the first six grades of "petit séminaire," the languages were by far the most important. In the "grand séminaire," the amount of time devoted to languages gradually decreased. The languages that were mentioned in this program are the same as in earlier years of the seminary: Arabic, French, and Latin. Turkish was not mentioned anymore and was obviously much less important since the assignment of Mosul and its surroundings to Iraq. English was not part of the program at all. Of the languages that were being taught, Aramaic ("araméen")Aramaic, was the only language that was present in the program of the grades of "théologie" for two hours per week, except for the final grade, when no language was being taught at all. The program mentions a division of Aramaic into "syrien" and "chaldéen," for respectively the Syriac Catholic and Chaldean students. Most probably this was to distinguish the two pronunciation traditions of Classical Syriac and not to different dialects of Neo-Aramaic. Aramaic was not grouped together with the other languages, but considered part of the theological subjects. Arabic was being taught during the first eight years, and it was the language which the largest total number of hours were spent on: from eight and a half hours in the first grade to one hour in the eighth grade. French was part of the program for all six grades of the "petit séminaire," with normally three to four hours per week, except for the second grade when eight hours were spent on this language. With all classes being taught in French from

[134] Ibid., 42.

[135] Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, Paris, Arch op Mossoul IV-N13-2-11, anonymous document called "Rapport sur le Séminaire Syro-Chaldéen de S. Jean l'Evangéliste à Mossoul" (dated 1929 by the archivist with uncertainty).

[136] Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, Paris, Arch op Mossoul IV-N13-2-11, "Séminaire Syro-Chaldéen, Programmes des Etudes, 1946–1947."

the beginning of the "grand séminaire," knowledge of French could be taken for granted after six years of instruction. Finally, the students learned Latin with four hours a week for four years, from the fifth to the eighth grade. After that, knowledge of this language was probably deepened with theological readings for the other subjects.

The Protestant mission was led by three American Protestant churches: the Presbyterian Church of the USA, the Reformed Church in America, and the Reformed Church in the United States. While Presbyterians had been present in Iraq since 1834, the United Mission in Mesopotamia started in 1924 as a cooperation between the three abovementioned churches, and was renamed in 1935 to "United Mission in Iraq," following the independence of the state of Iraq in 1932. After 1950, the denominational makeup of the mission's organization changed a couple of times, and in 1970 the mission came to an end after seizure of its schools by the government of Iraq.[137] Contrary to the Dominican mission, which mainly aimed at converting non-Catholic Christians to Catholicism and helping the autocephalous Catholic churches organizing themselves, the goal of the United Mission was to convert Muslims and other non-Christians. A report of 1925 describes it as follows:

> The aim of the Mission is to evangelize the Mohammedans in the unoccupied area of Mesopotamia, officially designated as Irak. Mosul is a gateway to work among the Moslem Kurds who constitute a new field. Work is to be done among the returning refugees and among the remnant of Jacobite and Chaldean Christians.[138]

Nevertheless, other documents in the archive suggest that in practice most of the work was being performed amongst Christians, and

[137] "Guide to the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations. Secretaries' files: United Mission in Iraq," Presbyterian Historical Society, accessed 20 October 2014, http://history.pcusa.org/collections/research-tools/guides-archival-collections/rg-89.

[138] Presbyterian Historical Society, RG89–1–4 (1925), "Pen Picture of Mosul Station," Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, Department for Specific Work. This document is undated but is placed in the 1925 section of the archive.

sometimes it is emphasized that work should also be done to convert Muslims and other non-Christians.[139] The mission was divided into five cities ("stations") from which the work was conducted. The Mosul station appears to have been the most important one, and together with the stations in Hilla (south of Baghdad) and Duhok they fell under the responsibility of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. The other stations, Baghdad and Kirkuk, fell under the Reformed Church in America and the Reformed Church in the United States respectively.[140] The 1925 report quoted above mentions as its "equipment": "An organized church; a city school for girls; a night school for young men; a kindergarten and kindergarten training school; 8 village schools; and a widespread work among the Assyrian Christians to the North."[141]

Where the Dominicans used to group the country's Christians according to their denomination, the Americans preferred ethnic categories. In the early phase, each missionary was responsible for one ethnic group. In a letter written in 1924 to the Board in New York, the Rev. Roger C. Cumberland, who worked in the village of Simele mentioned the general features of a number of ethnical groups in Northern Iraq, in the essentialist way that characterizes the contemporary British accounts of the situation in Iraq too. He starts with the Assyrians, referring to the Christians from "the mountains of Kurdistan, and the Urumia plain in Persia." The fact that the British used them to form a protective army (the Assyrian Levies) "speaks well and truthfully for their manly qualities." He continues with the "Christians of the Mosul plain" whom he refers to as the "Niseramies," an otherwise unknown word which probably refers to the Arabic word *naṣrānī* "Christian." He is negative about their faith, to the extent that "so far as living a life fit for eternity is concerned, they are little if any nearer to it than the Moslems among whom they live," because, according to Cumberland, they did everything they could to keep the dominant Muslims on their side. Cumberland then praises the Arab tribes, but mentions that about the Arabs in cities "it is impossible to find a good work." Cum-

[139] Presbyterian Historical Society, RG89–1–3 (1924), letter by the Rev. Roger C. Cumberland to Dr. Robert E. Speer, dated 21 June 1924.

[140] "Guide to the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations."

[141] "Pen Picture of Mosul Station."

berland is finally quite neutral about the Kurds, but adds that "[t]heir reputation as freebotters of a bold and picturesque type needs no reiteration."[142] The American missionaries had particular interest in the Assyrians, Protestant members of which formed the majority of their staff. In 1926, they founded a formal Assyrian evangelical congregation.[143]

When comparing the two missions, we see several striking differences. The most important one concerns the way in which they organized the people they were working for. The Dominicans were in the position that an ecclesiastical structure for Catholicism was already present in the form of two autocephalous churches thanks to the efforts of their predecessors and the local Catholic Christians, and their main aim was—apart from converting more Christians to Catholicism, which seems not to have been their main concern in the period after the World War I—to reinforce the organization of the Chaldean and Syriac Catholic churches, especially by providing education. The United Mission had to start from scratch, and while they also had to set up organizational structures for the people they were working with, the archival documents suggest that their main concern was with the conversion of non-Protestant Christians and non-Christians, especially Muslims and Yezidis. While the Dominicans were equipped with their own church following the Latin rite, this church was not intended to be used by the people they worked for, who had their own churches, but for the sake of the missionaries themselves. The United Mission, with its "fully equipped church" (see before), used this to provide services for the sake of the people they worked for—in their case converts to Protestantism. They preached as far as possible in the local Arabic and Neo-Aramaic languages.

Educational policies

Education in Iraq developed rapidly in the period 1920–1950 with considerable consequences for the Syriac Christians of the country. From

[142] Presbyterian Historical Society, RG89–1–3, "Selections from a letter written by Rev. Roger C. Cumberland of Semel, Iraq, dated January 9, 1924," 5 March 1924.

[143] Presbyterian Historical Society, RG–1–5 (1926), Report on the Assyrian work, 1925-26.

a situation in which almost no education was provided by the state in the early 1920s, it changed to a system in which virtually all schools were state-regulated. While the improvement of education was an obvious advantage for everybody in the country, this development went hand in hand with decreasing room for education that was specifically meant for ethnic or religious groups, such as the Syriac Christians.

State education in Iraq right after World War I was extremely limited, and during the decades that followed, a modern educational system was slowly developed. The initial slow development of the educational system has probably something to do with the lack of importance the British connected to it during their short but decisive rule. In this period, communal schools affiliated to one of the Christian denominations played a relatively important role.[144] Peter Sluglett writes extensively about the British educational policy in his book *Britain in Iraq*. While the need for education to allow the Iraqis to administer their country themselves was recognized, education remained a low priority, as it was apparently the case in general that little was done to prepare Iraq for independence.[145] Another reason for the slow development of education was a fear that educating a great number of young people would not be in accordance to the availability of jobs, which the danger of creating a potentially harmful politically active youth.[146] In contrast to the lack of interest in education from the side of the British, the topic was very serious for Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī, the architect of Arab nationalism in Iraq, who was Iraq's Director General of Education in the period 1923–27. He made the educational system concentrate on the Arabic language and the history of the Arabs.[147] In line with this policy, Christian schools run by the various Syriac Christian denominations in Mosul were taken over by the government in 1920, giving them a function in the dissemination of Arab nationalism.[148]

[144] An overview of the situation in 1923 is given in Walther Björkman, "Das irakische Bildungswesen und seine Probleme bis zum zweiten Weltkrieg," *Die Welt des Islams* 1 (1951): 190–91.

[145] Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 193.

[146] Ibid., 194.

[147] Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist*, 61–65.

[148] Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History*, 74–75.

After independence, public education in Iraq grew rapidly.[149] In 1945, a commission was established by the American Council on Education in order to investigate the status of education in the Arab Middle East. The result after nine months of visits to educational institutions and schools by the commission was an over 500-page book with detailed information about school systems in the Arab countries under discussion.[150] Contrary to the situation under the British mandate, the report of 1945 shows an elaborate centralized public school system under the Ministry of Education, comparable to that of contemporary Western countries. The budget for the Ministry had risen to 12.9% of the total state budget in 1938–1939, although there was a relative (but not absolute) decline in the following few years.[151] By 1945, the school system that had developed provided six years of primary education, which was compulsory and free of charge wherever available, with a nationwide exam at the end.[152] The curriculum was centrally determined and even the daily schedule was fixed for the whole country. Much attention was given to the Arabic language, and English was part of it as well.[153] Boys were usually separated from girls, but the report notes an early movement towards mixed-gender education.[154] About religion, the report marks that the schools followed Islamic holidays and that the curriculum included Islamic religious instruction, but that students with minority religions were permitted to be absent during important feasts and to stay away from religious instruction. Secondary education was not obligatory, but also centrally organized. The curriculum for secondary schools was first established in 1926 and revised multiple times. The revision of 1943 shows that English and Arabic were relatively important, with translation as a separate subject in the last two years of preparatory school. Religious instruction was limited to one class per week, only at the intermediate

[149] Björkman, "Das irakische Bildungswesen": 179.

[150] Matthews and Akrawi, *Education in Arab Countries of the Near East*. Part 2 (pages 119–213) is about Iraq. The American Council on Education is a representative organization for public and private higher education in the United States.

[151] Ibid., 127.

[152] Ibid., 131.

[153] Ibid., 147.

[154] Ibid., 146. In 1926, the Syriac Orthodox journalist Rafāʾīl Buṭṭī already complains about the separation of genders at schools—see Chapter 5 for this.

school. Higher education was limited to a number of colleges providing preparation for certain professions.

Private education in this period was subject to various laws, such as an obligation to have government approval of the school's curriculum and textbooks. Private schools followed the school system of public schools with its structure of primary, intermediate, and preparatory schools. Their students were required by law to possess the same diplomas as students of public schools. Foreign schools formed a separate category with its own laws. Part of the Iraqi private schools were sectarian schools, including a particularly well-developed system of Jewish schools, but this category also included Christian schools of different denominations. The development of a complex school system by the government therefore had serious consequences for the schools operating outside this system, such as the Syro-Chaldean seminary of the Dominicans. Where the missionary and communal schools seem to have had almost complete freedom in their organizational structures and programs in the years right after World War I, in the later decades they were more pressured to comply with the rules of the government. In some cases schools were forced to close. This included the enforcement of a standard school curriculum on private primary and secondary schools in 1929.[155] The Public Education Law of 1940 included a policy that Iraqi citizens were not allowed to attend foreign primary schools, which posed particular difficulties.[156] This meant the end of the primary school in Mosul that was reestablished by the Dominicans in 1935.[157] This decline of freedom corresponds to a more general increase of the state bureaucracy, which was at a minimum during the first years of the mandate.

[155] Khalil Osman, *Sectarianism in Iraq: The Making of State and Nation Since 1920* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), 174.

[156] Ibid., 128 and 131.

[157] Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, Paris, Arch op Paris Mossoul IV-Z-95, "Mission de Mossoul : 1914–52," 66.