Arabic and the Syriac Christians in Iraq: Three Levels of Loyalty to the Arabist Project (1920–1950)

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In the twenties and early thirties of the twentieth century, a group of Assyrians in Iraq was busy setting up their own intellectual and educational infrastructure revolving around a number of people inside the Assyrian Church of the East. Most of them had newly arrived as refugees from the Ottoman Empire and had started from scratch. They used a dialect of the Neo-Aramaic language which they called Swadaya, and which is also known as Modern Assyrian. If they employed Arabic at all it was because of the dominance of this language in the new state of Iraq, not because they were so keen on using it. On the other hand, around the same time the Patriarchate of the Chaldean Catholic Church in Iraq propagated the use of Arabic and adherence to the Arab nationalist identity of the state. Drawing upon long experience in writing in Arabic and teaching the language, the Chaldeans were eager to take it to the next level by endorsing it as their own. Yet another type of dealing with the Arabic language is found with the Syriac Orthodox of Iraq. In the late forties, high-ranking clergy from this church used the Arabic language with the same eagerness as the Chaldean clergy did, but at the same time stressed their transnational connections with their coreligionists in the Middle East, North America and India, whom they saw as members of one Syriac nation. All three Christian groups belong to the tradition of Syriac Christianity, and share a largely similar historical background. Nowadays they are usually regarded as belonging to the same ethnic group. Yet in the early state of Iraq, these three groups, which all had their centres in the city of Mosul, show enormous differences in their approaches to the Arabic language and the ideology of Arab nationalism.

The Syriac churches,[1] which constitute the great majority of Iraq's Christians, are connected by the traditional use of the Syriac language, a form of Aramaic.

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[1] The Syriac churches in Iraq are the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Syriac Catholic Church, the Assyrian Church of the East (historically known as the Nestorian Church) and the Chaldean Catholic Church. To this may be added the Ancient Church of the East, which was founded in 1968 and therefore has no relevance for this chapter, and the Maronite Church in Lebanon, which is of little relevance for the situation in Iraq.

Many Syriac Christians speak a form of Neo-Aramaic as their mother tongue, and both Syriac and Neo-Aramaic are deeply rooted in Syriac Christian identity. However, Aramaic has always had competition from other languages, of which Arabic is the most important. In Mandatory Iraq, we find strong evidence that part of the Syriac Christians not only used Arabic on a daily basis, but also made a strong commitment to the use of the Arabic language, which they often courteously called *lughat al-ḍād*. In some cases they even endorsed Arab nationalism. At the same time, other Syriac Christians stressed the necessity of studying the Syriac language because of its importance for their religion or their community, but in many cases expressed themselves in Arabic to do so. For yet other groups of Syriac Christians, it was not Arabic but Aramaic they identified with. These Syriac Christians saw Arabic merely as a language that was necessary to master in order to survive in or – more optimistically – to become part of Iraqi society, where Arabic was dominant.

The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement by George Antonius appeared in 1938.[2] This well-known work has since functioned as an introduction to Arab nationalism for a western audience, but it is deeply rooted in the context in which it was written.[3] Antonius, a Greek Orthodox Christian, born in Lebanon but throughout his life active in many different parts of the Arab Middle East, defined Arabs as people speaking Arabic, regardless of religion.[4] Most Christians in the Middle East – notably the Copts, the Greek Orthodox and Catholic, and the Maronites – were clearly part of this definition, while others, such as the Armenians, were not. For the Syriac Christians the situation was rather complicated. Antonius explicitly discusses the Assyrians as not belonging to the Arab nation,[5] whereas the other Syriac Christians are not mentioned. In line with Antonius' definition of an Arab as a native speaker of Arabic, he implicitly regards part of the Syriac Christians as Arabs and part as non-Arabs, because some are native speakers of Arabic,

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2   George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938).

3   Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "The Language of the Nation: The Rise of Arabic among Jews and Christians (1900–1950)," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43:2 (2016): 176–77.

4   Antonius accepts the idea that those who in modern times form the Arab people are descendants of those who originally became Arab through what he calls "linguistic" and "racial Arabisation." This idea, which is significant given the value that was given to race in the 1930s, when the book appeared, explains why Antonius feels comfortable giving non-racial and non-fixed criteria such as speaking a particular language to determine if someone ought to be regarded as an Arab or not.

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

but others are not. The Syriac Christians are the only group of Christians in the Middle East whose situation carries this ambiguity.

The terms "Syriac Christian" and "Syriac Christianity,"[6] which I use throughout this chapter, are not unproblematic and need further clarification. The fact that all churches have a shared background and use the Syriac language for (at least) liturgical purposes justifies the usage of this term, at least in academic discourse, but also falsely suggests that there has always been a strong connection between the churches and their adherents which is unquestioned. Today the idea that all denominations of Syriac Christianity are connected to each other is indeed widely accepted, even if outside academia they are commonly known under different names, such as Assyrian and Aramean. This idea is known as *umthonoyutho*, a Syriac word that could be translated as "nationness," and which Naures Atto describes as "unity discourse."[7] Not much research has been done about the early development of this important idea, but it is clear that from 1915, the year of the Assyrian/Aramean genocide, it has found acceptance in many places in the Middle East and elsewhere. However, there was no general acceptance yet, and in Iraq it seems that the idea had only little influence until at least the end of the 1940s.

The existence of different Syriac Christian communities in Iraq that had relatively little contact with each other resulted in a great variety of ideas about the position of the Syriac Christians, both in Iraqi society and *vis-à-vis* the other Syriac Christians. These ideas caused different views on and practices in using the Arabic language, which had been the official language of the country since the establishment of the state of Iraq and was regarded as the major unifying factor of the Iraqi people.[8] Because the Syriac Christians had a long history of using Arabic and had many native speakers of the language, Arabic was not strange to them and their embracing of it could be justified, but at the same time they had their own Syriac and Neo-Aramaic languages, which potentially made them strangers. The choice whether or not to adopt Arabic as their own was likely to have huge consequences for the question whether the Syriac Christians were to be regarded as a minority or as part of

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6   "Syriac Christian" and "Syriac Christianity" are synonymous with the terms "Syrian Christian" and "Syrian Christianity," which have recently been replaced to avoid confusion with the state of Syria. The word "Syriac" does not exclusively refer to the language in this context.

7   Although it found broader acceptance in the Middle East after 1915, the year of the Sayfo or Aramean/Assyrian genocide, it seems not to have gained much influence in Iraq until at least the second half of the twentieth century. Naures Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses Among the Assyrian/Syriac Elites in the European Diaspora* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011), 279.

8   Ali A. Allawi, *Faisal I of Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 383.

the majority. In this chapter I will explain how church officials in Iraq in the period 1920–1950 put forward different ideas about the Arabic language, and how this related to their position regarding the Arab identity of the state. I will first give a short overview of the language situation of the Syriac Christians in Iraq, and briefly discuss the origins of Arab identities with Syriac Christians in Iraq, which were already established before the First World War. After that, I will successively discuss the different views on the Arabic language held by the Syriac Christians who belonged to the Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, and the Syriac Orthodox Church.

1   Arabic and the Syriac Christians

The use of Arabic by Syriac Christians is not something that only came up in the nineteenth or twentieth century. Already from the ninth century onwards there were Christians writing in Arabic, both Syriac Christians and authors from other traditions, such as the Copts.[9] The use of Arabic within both the West and East Syriac churches is therefore strongly rooted in the tradition of Syriac Christianity. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Syriac Christian manuscripts are known where Arabic is used alongside Syriac or on its own. In addition to that, the common practice of Garshuni – using the Syriac script for writing in another language, most of the times Arabic – shows that the language could even be used to express a Syriac Christian identity.[10]

However, it is exactly these features of the use of Arabic by Christians – mixing it with Syriac and the use of Garshuni – that make it stand apart from the Arabic that we see in use by the Muslim environment. Although by the time of the *nahḍa*, or Arab literary revival, there was a common ground for Christians and Muslims to use the Arabic language, the "traditional" use of Arabic with these features continues in Iraq, even in the twentieth century, and especially in manuscripts. In an earlier article I have given examples of this 'traditional' use of Arabic by Syriac Christians in Iraq that did *not* correspond to the standard use of the language that was prevalent in most of the Arab world since the *nahḍa*. Here, Arabic is either written in a mix between

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9   Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, part 1: *Die Übersetzungen* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944), 51.

10   F. del Río Sánchez, "El árabe karshūnī come preservación de la identidad siríaca," in *Lenguas en contacto: el testimonio escrito*, edited by P. Bádenas de la Peña et al. (Madrid: Editorial CSIC, 2004), 185–194.

the colloquial and the standard language,[11] or in Garshuni, or a combination of both. I argued that this use of Arabic is a continuation of earlier practices and a sign that the *nahḍa* had not yet fully penetrated to certain groups of Syriac Christians in Iraq. We see this practice in Iraq mainly in ecclesial manuscripts and closely related writings, such as letters about manuscripts.[12]

In this contribution the focus is on the use of Arabic in the 'modern,' standardized form, i.e. in what linguists call Modern Standard Arabic, which was still in development at the time. My hypothesis is that these traditional and modern uses of Arabic by the Syriac Christians run parallel to each other and do not rule out each other. Nevertheless, with a few exceptions most authors only engaged in one of the two possibilities. Using Arabic in the 'modern' way meant that it was not used anymore in the specific 'Syriac' mode with its long tradition. Indeed, the 'modern' use of Arabic was of no use to express a Syriac identity. What it could do, and sometimes did, was to express an Arab identity instead. Christian intellectuals in Baghdad and Mosul had already done this before the First World War. In the twentieth century, after the establishment of the state of Iraq, we see this also happening in the publications of some of the Syriac Churches.

2   The Origins of Iraqi and Arab Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire

After the establishment of the state of Iraq in 1920 as a kingdom under a British mandate, many intellectuals engaged in the state building process. The zeal with which Muslims, Christians and Jews took up this task is surprising, given the fact that Iraq has often been described as an artificial state: a state without its own identity, based on the Sykes-Picot agreement rather than pre-existing cultural, social or political units, which was deemed eventually to fall apart. But in the period after 1920, when the British occupation was very unpopular, the creation of Iraq as a state separate from the other Arab countries was

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11   This type of Arabic is sometimes called Middle Arabic, but usually not for the modern period. For a discussion if the term Middle Arabic can only be used for works written in premodern times, see Johannes den Heijer, "Introduction: Middle and Mixed Arabic, a New Trend in Arabic Studies," in Liesbeth Zack and Arie Schippers (eds.), *Middle Arabic and Mixed Arabic: Diachrony and Synchrony* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1–25.

12   T.C. Baarda, "Standardized Arabic as a Post-*Nahḍa* Common Ground: Mattai bar Paulus and His Use of Syriac, Arabic, and Garshuni," in *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East*, edited by S.R. Goldstein-Sabbah and H.L. Murre-van den Berg (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 71–95.

unquestioned,[13] and not seen as a merit of the British.[14] As we will see below, this zeal is also visible in part of the Syriac Christians. In order to put Syriac Christian engagement in Iraq with Arabic and Arab nationalism after the First World War in context, I will in this section describe its origins from before the war.

By the beginning of the *nahḍa*, or Arab(ic) literary revival, there was a common field of literary productions in Arabic for Muslims, Jews and Christians. Christian and Jewish usage of Arabic used to be characterized by features that set the language apart from Muslim usage, such as the frequent use of a different script (Hebrew script in the case of the Jews, and Syriac script in the case of the Syriac Christians), but around the start of the eighteenth century a number of authors started to use the Arabic language in the same way as Muslims did, and explicitly as part of the same cultural sphere. Abdulrazzak Patel calls this "the reintegration of Christian writers into the mainstream of Arabic literature."[15] Although usually acknowledging the connection between Arabic and Islam, non-Muslim authors began to appropriate the Arabic language as part of their culture.[16] For the Syriac Christians in the area that now constitutes the state of Iraq, we see that the effect of the *nahḍa* first became visible in the field of journalism: right after the declaration of the second Ottoman constitution, various authors with a Syriac Christian background started writing in Arabic-language journals in the cities of Mosul and Baghdad.[17] Some of these journals were openly critical of the Ottoman policy of Turkification, which was common with the Arabic-language press at the time. Other journals were less

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13   Political parties opposing the government and especially the British presence were created from the early 1920s, but even these parties used an Iraqi nationalist vocabulary. Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 60.

14   Rather, Arabic sources tend to make a distinction between the liberation of Iraq and the subsequent occupation by the British, for instance the Chaldean author Sulaymān Ṣāʾigh, who devotes a chapter to the "independence of Iraq" (*istiqlāl al-ʿIrāq*) and then another chapter to the establishment of Faisal as King of Iraq. Al-Qass Sulaymān Ṣāʾigh, *Tārīkh al-Mawṣil*, part one: 1342–1923 (Cairo: *al-Maṭbaʿa al-salafiyya bi-Miṣr*, 1923), 326–32.

15   Abdulrazzak Patel, *The Arab Nahḍah: The Making of the Intellectual and Humanist Movement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 69.

16   An explicit example of this is Buṭrus al-Bustānī's *Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ*, an Arabic lexicographical work in which he based his discussion of the Arabic lexicon on Christian texts. This author was also a proponent of "Syrianism," which I will discuss below. Rana Issa, "The Arabic Language and Syro-Lebanese National Identity: Searching in Buṭrus al-Bustānī's *Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ*," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 62:2 (2017): 465–84.

17   An overview of journals published by Syriac Christian authors in Iraq, both before and after the First World War, is given in Fāʾiq Buṭṭī, *Mawsūʿat al-ṣaḥāfa al-suryāniyya fī al-ʿIrāq: taʾrīkh wa-shakhṣiyyāt* (Erbil: *Wizārat al-thaqāfa wa-l-shabāb, al-mudīriyya al-ʿāmma li-l-thaqāfa wa-l-funūn al-suryāniyya*, 2013). Note that for the period before the First World War, Buṭṭī speaks about Iraq with Baghdad as its capital as if the state already existed; see for instance page 12, where he writes that Dawīd Ṣalīwa went "to the capital, Baghdad" (*al-ʿāṣima Baghdād*).

political, but there, too, the boundaries of what was to become Iraq were already visible.

One of the journals in which this can be seen is the Baghdad-published newspaper *Lughat al-ʿArab* "Language of the Arabs." The famous Christian writer Anastās al-Karmilī from Baghdad was co-editor of this journal, the other co-editor being the Muslim Kāẓim al-Dujaylī. The main interests of these journals were Arabic literature, history and archaeology, and one of their official objectives was to make known the knowledge of Western Orientalists to the audience in Iraq:

> We will 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.[18]

In a loose French translation of the journal's goals the impression is given that the author expected the Western audience to be unaware of Iraq as a region with fixed boundaries and political significance, as the following quotation shows:

> Elle renseignera le monde savant tant d'orient que d'occident sur les contrées de l'Arabie, de la Mésopotamie et sur les provinces avoisinantes.[19]

Although it is not surprising that in the French version *Mésopotamie* is used rather than *Irak*, which was a common way to refer to this area in the West until long after the formal creation of the country as a mandate,[20] the fact that "Mesopotamia" alone was not enough to describe Iraq and "Arabia" was mentioned as well, shows that for the author the two words were not yet synonymous.[21] The use of the word "homeland" (*waṭan*) before the creation of the country parallels the use of this word by the propagators of an "integrated

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18   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 in both the Islamic and the Gregorian calendar.

19   Anonymous, "Loghat – el – ʿArab" (French version of introductory article), *Lughat al-ʿArab* 1:1 (1329/1911): 39.

20   Compare also the name of the Protestant mission to Iraq after the First World War: this was initially called the United Mission in Mesopotamia, although it was created after the establishment of the state of Iraq.

21   The phrase *les provinces avoisinantes* is reflected in the Arabic phrase *al-ʿIrāq wa-mā jāwarahu* "Iraq and what is adjacent to it," which is repeated numerous times in the journal. The French word *provinces* is probably not used in the sense of Ottoman *vilayet*s here, because the Ottoman Empire did not have *vilayet*s called Iraq/Mesopotamia or Arabia. It may refer to a lower administrative subdivision.

Syria" or "Syrianism" within the Ottoman Empire from the mid-1850s, about which much more research has been done.[22] The Christian author Buṭrus al-Busṭānī, whom we will meet again below, was an important proponent of this idea.[23] It may be regarded as an example of the phenomenon that Cem Emrence identifies as "concentric homelands (*vatan*s) within the Ottoman universe."[24]

In the first issue of the second year, in 1912, in an article by Ibrāhīm Ḥalamī, the borders of what was understood as Iraq are defined rather sharply. In this discussion the author begins by recognizing that Iraq's borders always have changed over time, continuing with the meaning of Iraq in medieval times, for which he quotes Yāqūt's thirteenth-century *Kitāb muʿẓam buldān*.[25] Further on he writes the following about what was understood as Iraq in his days:

> 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.[26]

In other words, the term "Iraq" in 1912 was equivalent to the two Ottoman provinces of Baghdad and Basra, which is exactly what constituted the country when it was founded in 1920. It is important to note that the province of Mosul is absent here, which was only granted to Iraq by a League of Nations decision in 1925, which indicates that this province was not envisioned as part of Iraq and that its addition to the country was merely the result of the British conquest. Nevertheless, the discussion above shows that the foundations of an Iraqi-Arab identity for the new state were already laid before the First World War and that this idea had partly Christian origins. This may explain why after the war various Christian intellectuals zealously defended the newly founded state of Iraq and its Arab identity, often together with their Muslim counterparts. Although before the war the propagation of this idea was reserved for Christians who worked outside the ecclesiastical channels of the church, after the war this changed: some of the Syriac churches started to embrace

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22 Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 42–43.

23 Buṭrus al-Busṭānī was a Protestant from a Maronite background. Butrus Abu-Manneh, "The Christians Between Ottomanism and Syrian Nationalism: The Ideas of Butrus al-Bustani," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11 (1980): 287–304.

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

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

26 Ibid.

Iraqi-Arab identity, while others stayed away from it. The engagement of the churches after the war will be the topic of the next three sections.

3   The Assyrians around Joseph de Kelaita: Arabic for Practical Purposes

I will start my discussion with the Syriac Christian group that shows the least enthusiasm in using the Arabic language and assimilating to an Arab identity. I will call this group the Assyrians, although this requires some explanation: depending on the user, the word in its modern context may have different meanings, with a changing range of Syriac Christians that are included in the definition. The reason for this is that Assyrian in its modern usage is an ethnic category which many Syriac Christians use to identify themselves, but not all. Proponents of an Assyrian ethnic identity sometimes used the word 'Assyrian' to refer to all Syriac Christians, whether the people they talked about identified as such or not.[27] Other authors use it only for people who did identify as Assyrians. In another sense the term can also refer specifically to somebody who belongs to the Assyrian Church of the East. In less specialist histories of modern Iraq and the modern Middle East in general, authors often do not specify what exactly they mean by 'Assyrian'. In many cases they only use it for people who identify as such, but the absence of clarification occasionally causes confusion.[28] Historians who are aware of the different meanings of the word may often struggle to explain the matter as well. Different usages of the term often overlap, because historically the Assyrian self-identification was the strongest amongst the Syriac Christians who belonged to the Church of the East – hence the official inclusion of the term in the name of this church.[29] It is precisely this point of overlap that adds much to the confusion.

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27   Sargon G. Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History: Iraq and the Assyrians in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 3–5. Donabed does not explicitly discuss what he means by 'Assyrian,' but from his list of what Assyrians should *not* be called it is clear that all Syriac Christians are included in his definition. Nevertheless, the elements of Assyrian Iraqi history that he discusses are almost all about the Assyrians who came to Iraq as refugees, which are also the Assyrians I discuss in this section.

28   Robert Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, third edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 77–78; Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *'Iraq, 1900 to 1950: A Political, Social, and Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 191–200. The only Christians mentioned by Longrigg, even in a discussion on minorities, are the Assyrians, and this only in relation to the Iraq Levies and the road towards independence.

29   For a history of the Assyrian identification in the Church of the East, see Adam H. Becker, *Revival and Awakening: American Evangelical Missionaries in Iran and the Origins of Assyrian Nationalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

The case of Iraq in the early twentieth century is one where this overlap plays an important role. The overwhelming majority of those who in this period in Iraq identified as Assyrian consisted of people who had arrived in Iraq as refugees during the First World War from the Hakkari mountains in the Ottoman Empire, and partly from the Urmia region in Persia. The majority of them belonged to the Assyrian Church of the East, and a minority to the Chaldean Catholic Church or Protestant denominations.[30] They were first accommodated in two different refugee camps in Iraq, and later settled in the north of the country when it became clear that they could not return to Hakkari, and that no other "national home" could be found for them. For a long time, an influential part of the Assyrians remained opposed to eventual integration into Iraq.[31] For this reason, the Assyrians of Iraq acquired a reputation in historiography of having a negative attitude to the state they lived in. However, this view is only partly correct: there were different factions with different ideas about the community's future in the country.[32] The fact that this view is too rigid also transpires in the Assyrians' various attitudes to the Arabic language, as we will see below. A dramatic turning point for the Assyrians came in 1933, one year after the independence of Iraq, when hundreds to thousands of civilians were massacred in the Assyrian town of Simele. A large number of Assyrians decided to leave the country, including the patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East; the remaining part no longer actively opposed integration into Iraq.

As speakers of Neo-Aramaic who came from a place where Arabic was not used, the Assyrians in Iraq had to adopt not only to the new political authority, but also to an entirely new linguistic situation. Although their Neo-Aramaic dialect, which is often called Sureth and belongs to the North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic group of dialects, is close to the Neo-Aramaic spoken by a large portion of the Chaldeans and as well by some Syriac Orthodox and Syriac

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30   To explain the confusion that can be caused by the multiple meanings of the term Assyrian, even if an author is well aware of this, we may take the article by Sami Zubaida on the Assyrians in Iraq in 1933. There, a paragraph is spent on explaining who the Assyrians are, stating that they are "Nestorian Christians." Technically this is not correct, since Zubaida means that among the Assyrians there were also Catholics and some Protestants; however, in general terms this overlap did indeed exist. Sami Zubaida, "Contested nations: Iraq and the Assyrians," *Nations and Nationalism* 6:3 (2000): 366.

31   H. Müller-Sommerfeld, "The League of Nations, A-Mandates and Minority Rights during the Mandate Period in Iraq (1920–1932)," in *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), edited by S.R. Goldstein-Sabbah and Heleen Murre-van den Berg, 258–283.

32   J.F. Coakley, "The Church of the East Since 1914," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78:3 (1996): 179–98.

Catholic Christians, a great difference is that these other Syriac Christians had their roots in Iraq itself where, especially in the intellectual centres such as Mosul and in other cities, Arabic was predominant. The Assyrians, on the other hand, were much less rooted in an Arabic linguistic environment, but instead of Arabic they brought with them an elaborate literary tradition of writing in Neo-Aramaic, which at the end of the nineteenth century had been developed in Urmia in Persia.[33]

The Neo-Aramaic writing tradition was continued right after the Assyrians' arrival in Iraq. To facilitate this, the well-known deacon and later priest Joseph de Kelaita (Yawsep d-bēt Qlaytā, 1880–1952) brought a printing press to Iraq with types he had originally developed for a printing press in India.[34] He had learned this craft in England and the United States. De Kelaita was born in the middle of the Hakkari and Urmia regions, but had not been in the Middle East any more since his departure to England in 1910, so that when he arrived in 1921 in Mosul he had a different background than those who came as refugees from the north.[35] The printing press established by De Kelaita had moving types for East Syriac script and was in operation from 1921 to 1931. At least 15 books were published during those years, but a comprehensive list is not available.[36] Most of those were printed for the Assyrian Church of the East, but in rare cases the press was used by others as well, including the Chaldean Catholic Church. This means that most books are of a religious nature, or are aids for learning the Syriac or Neo-Aramaic language.

The linguistic situation for the Assyrians as outlined above is visible in the choice of languages at Joseph de Kelaita's printing press. The only languages used in the books are Classical Syriac and Neo-Aramaic, in addition to the frequent inclusion of a secondary title page in English. In general, the reprints of older texts are in the Classical Syriac language, whereas the original works are in Neo-Aramaic. Classical Syriac and Neo-Aramaic were clearly distinguished from each other, and the importance of Neo-Aramaic is reflected in a few editions of classical texts where the original Classical Syriac text is accompanied

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33   H.L. Murre-van den Berg, *From a Spoken to a Written Language: The Introduction and Development of Literary Urmia Aramaic in the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1999).

34   Mar Aprem, "Mar Narsai Press," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78 (1996): 171–2.

35   A basic biography can be found in Rudolf Macúch, *Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976), 279.

36   Daniel Benjamin, "Assyrian Printing Presses in Iraq During the 20th Century," *ARAM Periodical* 21 (2009): 154. Benjamin lists 15 books from this period, but at least one book that I came across is not part of the list.

by a translation into Neo-Aramaic.[37] Apparently, the Neo-Aramaic translation made the book accessible to a larger audience. Arabic has no role at all and is not featured in any of the books; the books reflect the Assyrians' special situation as a community with a well-developed literary tradition that was different from the Arabic-dominated literary tradition in the society around them.

In the first decades after the establishment of Iraq as a state, the Assyrians were active in the foundation of schools that specifically served their community. As there was virtually no government-funded education in the early years after the establishment of the state of Iraq, private initiatives to establish primary and secondary schools were numerous and the government did not enforce strict rules for the curricula of these schools.[38] Shamuel mentions five Assyrian schools. Crucially, these schools are clearly identifiable as *Assyrian* schools because they carry this word in their names.[39] The two most important of these were the Assyrian School of Mosul, which was linked to the Church of the East and the Assyrian School in Baghdad, founded by the American United Mission in Mesopotamia in 1921 but later independently governed by Protestant Assyrians. Documents from these schools show that, unlike what is suggested by the books published at Joseph de Kelaita's printing press, Arabic was present at the schools to some extent. Thanks to a diploma dating from 1926 we know about the Assyrian School of Mosul that "English, Elementary Arabic, and Syriac" were part of the curriculum, in a time that government control over private-school curricula was still limited.[40] The diploma itself is also interesting, as it is written in, in that order, English, Arabic and Classical Syriac. The diploma is signed in triplicate, i.e., for each language, by both Joseph de Kelaita as the school's director and two teachers, with their names. What is

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37   For example, De Kelaita's edition of the *Exposition of the mysteries* (*Pūshaq rāzē*) by the fifth-century Syriac author Narsai, which he published using the press in 1928. The book was republished using a self-publishing service – for details see: http://www.lulu.com/shop/mar-narsai/an-exposition-of-the-mysteries/paperback/product-177484.html (accessed 21 August 2019).

38   For education during the mandate period, see Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 193–209. The spectacular growth of the state educational system after independence becomes very clear in: 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), 119–213.

39   Robin Shamuel, "The Private Assyrian Schools in Iraq During the 20th Century," unpublished master's thesis, Leiden University, 2008.

40   Some school curricula were digitized by the Assyrian School of Mosul Project. An archived version of its website is available at: http://web.archive.org/web/20150911032852/http://aina.org/mosulschool/school.htm. This page contains information about the school curriculum in 1921–1924 according to Deacon Yosip Zia, who attended the school at the time.

interesting here is that Joseph de Kelaita signs with his name in Latin, Arabic and Syriac characters successively, whereas the two teachers write their names in one script only: one in Syriac script, the other in Arabic script. This suggests that the teacher who signed in Arabic script did not know Syriac script and was probably a teacher of Arabic at the school from outside the Assyrian community, while the teacher who signed in Syriac script might not have known Arabic. If this is true, it shows a situation that is perfectly imaginable in 1926, with a teacher from outside the community being appointed to teach Arabic to children in order to facilitate a good future in the country they lived in, at the same time keeping the Assyrian community together by establishing an educational institution specifically for them.

The aftermath of the Simele massacre of 1933 was also a turning point for the educational efforts of the Assyrians in Iraq. It meant the annexation of Joseph de Kelaita's Assyrian school in Mosul by the state.[41] The Assyrian School in Baghdad, which was Protestant, was allowed to continue, but was forced to change its name twice so that eventually it no longer contained the word "Assyrian."[42] A request for a subsidy from the director of the school to the American missionaries, who had initially founded the school, shows that in 1937 the prejudice against the Assyrians, i.e., of not being willing to integrate into Iraq, still existed, but also that this particular school did its best to prove it wrong. The following quote from an internal report from the American mission's archive explains why the subsidy request was rejected:

> The Assyrians have never adapted themselves to the life in Iraq but have continued their school and their church in their original language. The Government is desirous of having them absorbed into the Iraqi nation. The Mission feels that its primary purpose is to evangelize the Arabs. Consequently it felt that it could not continue paying out money to a non-Arab community.[43]

The negative decision came at a time when the American mission focused more and more on its initial goal of converting Muslims. In this respect it is not surprising that the missionaries decided to cut the funding for initiatives for the support of Christian groups, even if these were close to the missionaries'

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41   Shamuel, "The Private Assyrian Schools in Iraq," 28–29.

42   Ibid., 33.

43   Presbyterian Historical Society, RG89–1–16, "Memorandum on conversation with Mr. Willoughby regarding the Assyrians in Baghdad and his comments on a letter from Mr. Khendo H. Yonan with regard to the situation there" (1937).

religious views. More telling, however, are the harsh words about the continued use of the Assyrians' language, which the missionaries thought to have a negative effect on their integration into Iraqi society. The defensive response reveals something about the different feelings prevalent amongst the Assyrians:

> Of course we are not an Arabic speaking community, but we are by far more Iraqis in spirit and in every way than the other sects among the Assyrians here in Baghdad, although this attitude has no concern whatever with religious matters, or it does not affect the Mission work in any way, but on the contrary, our church program of work and the evangelization spirit of our congregation are by far more agreeable with the Mission plan of work than even Arabic speaking native church (protestant) in Bagdad.[44]

In other words, these Assyrians acknowledged that their identity was different from that of the mainstream in Iraq, but that they still saw themselves as "Iraqis in spirit." Furthermore, it is made explicit that they regarded all the other Assyrians as less integrated, which shows that this probably was a common complaint or prejudice against the Assyrians in general.[45] Unfortunately these comforting words, showing both the wish to integrate as loyal Iraqi citizens and the spiritual connection with the mission's ideas, did not convince the Protestant mission. Their response even shows a resolute rejection of the wish of these Assyrians to stay loyal to their identity by teaching the school-children Aramaic:

> The Mission has never felt that it was responsible for the school and especially at this time it seems to be a needless expense since there are good Government schools and your children would not lose out educationally if you dropped the idea of conducting a school. You possibly feel that you must teach the Syriac tongue to your children, but is this the wisest course? The language of your country is Arabic and we feel that you should put emphasis on your children learning this language. This would be one way of identifying yourselves with the people of this country if you intend to remain citizens of Iraq.[46]

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44   Presbyterian Historical Society, RG89–1–15, letter from Khendo H. Yonan to Dr Coan, 6 August 1936.

45   By "the other sects among the Assyrians," Khendo H. Yonan means the Assyrians who were not Protestant, most notably those who belonged to the Assyrian Church of the East.

46   Presbyterian Historical Society, RG89–1–17, letter from B.D. Hakken (secretary of the mission) to Khendo H. Yonan, 1 November 1938.

We can conclude that the cultural and educational endeavours of the Assyrians in Iraq correspond to the prevalent view that this community saw itself as separate from the Arab majority: they had their own name and used their own language. However, the sources also show that the Assyrians' historiographical reputation of being opposed to integration into Iraqi society needs some qualification. Both before and after 1933 members of the Assyrian elite were actively promoting knowledge and intellectual pursuits for fellow Assyrians within the frameworks of the state, recognizing the importance of Arabic as a state language. The fact that Arabic was not adopted as the community's own language does not devalue this conclusion in any way.

4   The Chaldean Patriarchate and Sulaymān Ṣāʾigh's *al-Najm*: Strong Commitment to the State and its Arab Identity

The Simele massacre of 1933 was a turning point for the Assyrians in Iraq, but must have had an impact on all Christians in the country, even if it was only the Assyrians who were directly targeted.[47] However, in the September issue of the official Chaldean journal *al-Najm*, which came out right after its yearly summer break during which the Simele massacre took place, not a single word is devoted to what happened. Instead, about half of the issue is filled by an obituary of King Faisal, who had died during the same summer, and an appraisal of his son and successor, King Ghazi.[48] The warm words for the new king are especially striking considering his supposed role during the massacre.[49] The lack of any mention of the Simele massacre could be explained by a complete absence of communication between the Assyrians and the Chaldeans, but this is not probable. Another explanation makes more sense. Sadly, the Simele massacre was an issue of national Iraqi pride and resonated in the whole country. Therefore, not only were the Chaldeans necessarily aware of what had happened, but they may also have been supposed to agree with the nationalist

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47   The contemporary account by Ronald Sempill Stafford reads: "Apart from this, a violent campaign of anti-foreign and anti-Christian propaganda had lashed the mob into a state of frenzy. The Christians in Mosul were panic stricken, and with an excited and entirely undisciplined mob any small incident might lead to a tragedy." R.S. Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935), 167. On page 170–171, we furthermore read that the leading Christians were supposed to attend official meetings, and "whatever their feelings, they had no option but attend."

48   *Al-Najm* 5:7 (1933).

49   Ibid., 169–70. See also Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, 170, for an account of the cheering that Prince Ghazi received from crowds after the massacre.

pride that came with it. Therefore, the only sensible way the Chaldeans could react was by ignoring the event, but at the same time praising the government and the new King.[50]

Al-Najm (The Star) was an Arabic-language journal edited by Sulaymān al-Ṣāʾigh (1886–1961), a priest and author from Mosul who is also known for his three-volume work on the history of his birthplace. The journal appeared between 1928 and 1938 and was an official publication of the Chaldean Catholic Patriarchate, which was located in Mosul at the time.[51] The journal focused on literature and history related to the church, but also included articles about society, health and morals, as well as news rubrics with stories concerning the church and its religious community, Iraq and the world. Thus, it gives a good impression of the official position of the Chaldean Patriarchate regarding the position of their community in the country and what the Arabic language meant to them. The journal was completely in Arabic, which was also explicitly endorsed as the language of choice for the Chaldeans. In the following paragraphs I will discuss the position of the Chaldeans in Iraq as it was envisioned by the Patriarchate, their views on Iraqi-Arab nationalism, and what they wrote about the Arabic language, on the basis of an analysis of contributions to this journal during the years 1928–1938.

The terminology used in *al-Najm* to refer to the Chaldean community and the country in which they lived sheds light on how the Chaldeans saw themselves as part of Iraq. Three key terms are used in talking about the group they belonged to: *umma* (nation), *waṭan* (homeland) and *ṭāʾifa* (religious group, sect). These three words are common Arabic words, but the exact usage is crucial, for there is an important difference here with the Syriac Orthodox usage, which I will discuss below. For the Chaldeans, *umma* refers to the Arab nation, which alternates between the transnational Arab nation as a whole and the nation of Iraq. In a number of cases the editor uses the phrase "the Iraqi nation in particular and the Arab nation in general (*al-umma al-ʿIrāqiyya khāṣṣatan wa-al-umma al-ʿarabiyya ʿāmmatan*)."[52] The word *waṭan* (homeland) was used to

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50 A similar argument is found in A. Schlaepfer, "*The King is Dead, Long Live the King!* Jewish Funerary Performances in the Iraqi Public Space," in *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East*, edited by S.R. Goldstein-Sabbah and H.L. Murre-van den Berg (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 198–202. Here we find an explanation why Jewish participation in funerals after the death of King Ghazi (1941) was greater than after King Faisal's death, even though times were much harder for Jews in Iraq in 1941 than in 1933.

51 A second series covered the years 1950–1955; the reason given for the interruption is financial. Buṭṭī, *Mawsūʿat al-ṣaḥāfa al-suryāniyya fī al-ʿIrāq*, 50.

52 "*Akhbār ṭāʾifiyya,*" *al-Najm* 5:5 (1933): 334, in a piece about the uncovering of a statue of Faisal in Baghdad.

refer to the country of Iraq – it was not used for the Arab countries as a whole. The word *ṭāʾifa* (religious group, sect) is used to refer to the Chaldean Catholic community only. Like *umma*, *ṭāʾifa* is a very common Arabic word and is used in particular for all different Christian denominations found in the Middle East. While this may seem obvious, it is in sharp contrast to the Assyrian terminology. The *ṭāʾifa* of the Chaldeans is called *al-ṭāʾifa al-kaldāniyya* (the Chaldean religious group) and is set apart from the other Christian *ṭāʾifa*-s found in Iraq. There is not a single sign of an understanding of unity or *umthonoyutho* between the different Syriac Christian groups, although at least in one case the journal expresses in particular its Christmas and New Year wishes to the "Christian *ṭāʾifa*-s."[53] By using the word *ṭāʾifa*, the Chaldeans identified themselves as nothing more than a religious group or denomination in Iraqi society. Crucially, they regarded this *ṭāʾifa* as part of the wider Iraqi-Arab *umma*, and they presented themselves as an integral part of it, not as a minority.

This view of the Chaldeans as an integral part of the Iraqi-Arab nation agrees with the official ideas of the new state and its head of state, Faisal. The principles of the state of Iraq and the authority of the king were explicitly endorsed several times, even though the government was not always supported.[54] In 1931, *al-Najm* printed a speech of bishop Istifān Jibrī that had been held in Kirkuk in the presence of King Faisal. The topic of his speech was *ḥubb al-waṭan*, which literally means "love for the homeland," but which can also be translated as "patriotism." The phrase *ḥubb al-waṭan* is known in Islam as part of a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad which has been used to justify several forms of nationalism.[55] Even the Christian proponent of Syrianism, Buṭrus al-Bustānī, used this saying to stress the importance of allegiance to the *waṭan*.[56] This Christian usage of the phrase is echoed here by the Chaldean bishop:

> God did not create man to be all alone, but to live with others in a societal body, and the country (*al-bilād*) in which he is born or lives, together with the people of his people (*qawm*) in a lasting way, is called the homeland

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53   Editorial, *al-Najm* 4:1 (1931): 1.
54   In 1933, a piece was included in support of the Mosul branch of the anti-British and multi-sectarian opposition party *Ḥizb al-Ikhāʾ al-waṭanī*, which was not included in the government until in 1935. See Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History*, 61.
55   U. Haarmann, "Waṭan," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, volume XI, edited by P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 174–75.
56   Issa, "The Arabic Language and Syro-Lebanese National Identity": 478–79. As Rana Issa mentions, Buṭrus al-Bustānī argues against usage of the word *umma*, which is an idea that the Chaldeans clearly do not copy.

(*al-waṭan*). This definition of the homeland implies the kingdom, because it is the same thing in this meaning; when we say that a man loves his homeland, it means that he loves the kingdom under which patronage (*ẓall*) he lives.[57]

Al-Bustānī continues by claiming that according to a number of biblical passages the idea of loving one's homeland is natural, and, crucially, that this also means that people should obey their government. Religious differences in one country, as in Iraq, do not pose a problem here, as the bishop explains:

> We should observe that unity of homeland (*waḥdat al-waṭan*) does not require unity of religion (*waḥdat al-dīn*), just as unity of religion does not require unity of homeland. There might be one single religion for a number of homelands or kingdoms (*awṭān wa-mamālik*), but there can also be one homeland or kingdom that contains peoples (*aqwām*) with different religions (*adyān mukhtalifa*).[58]

As in other countries, the Iraqi understanding of Arab nationalism of this time contained an element of Islam, without directly challenging its inclusive nature towards Christians and Jews. The Chaldeans seem perfectly comfortable with this, as occasionally it seems that a certain pride seems to be hidden in placing Christianity alongside Islam, as on an equal footing. For instance, the following passage from Faisal's obituary stresses that the Chaldean Church participated in a mourning ritual together with an Islamic organization:

> On that day the Luminous Islamic Guidance Association (*jam'iyyat al-hidāya al-islāmiyya al-zāhira*) published an announcement to the people, announcing accepting condolences, and reading of *al-Fātiḥa* in the Sheikh Abdallah mosque for three full days. In the same way, the residence of the Chaldean Patriarchate accepted condolences in the evening of that day, and likewise the rest of the dioceses in their residences, and moving obituary speeches were held.[59]

Nowhere in *al-Najm* is it explicitly written that the Chaldeans were Arabs, even though the authors' support for the "Arab nation" comes very close. What also points in that direction is their positive assessment of the Arabic language.

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57   *Al-Najm* 3:7 (1931), 327ff.
58   Ibid.
59   *Al-najm* 5:7 (1933): 322.

Not only was it the exclusive language of the journal, at certain points it was also mentioned as the language of choice, suggesting these Chaldeans saw it as their own. This is significant because a large part of the Chaldean population did not have this language as their mother tongue. Respect for the language is shown already on the first page of the first volume in 1928, when the opening editorial devotes the journal to "'those who pronounce the *ḍāḍ* (*al-nāṭiqīn bi-l-ḍāḍ*)," referring to the common idea and symbol of pride that Arabic is the only language containing the *ḍāḍ* sound, and that the Arabs are the only people capable of uttering it.[60] The clearest example of this is the inclusion of an article by a (probably French) Dominican priest identified as Hyacinthe, entitled "Let us master our language as well as possible!." In this article, readers are urged to do their very best to perfect their knowledge of the Arabic language: "Oh youth of Iraq, your language is Arabic, which is old, widely known and one of the most important, far-reaching in terms of speakers and abundant in terms of vocabulary...."[61]

Neo-Aramaic and Classical Syriac were however not completely absent from *al-Najm*. On the front page, both the journal's name and motto ("We saw a star in the East") were printed in Syriac together with Arabic. Furthermore, some articles in the journal contained some quotations from liturgical or historical Syriac texts, printed in Syriac script. The use of Syriac on the front page imbues the Syriac language with a symbolic relevance. Syriac and Neo-Aramaic were furthermore referred to a couple of times in announcements and news reports relating to the Chaldean *ṭāʾifa*: in an announcement of a New Year's wish issued by the Chaldean Patriarchate, it is mentioned that a wish of reportedly 59 pages was issued in both "the Arabic and Chaldean languages,"[62] and in a report on a meeting of the Chaldean Charity Association in Mosul the singing of songs in both Chaldean and Arabic is mentioned.[63] The word "Chaldean" (*kaldānī*) may here refer both to the Classical Syriac and the Neo-Aramaic vernacular language spoken by the Iraqi Chaldeans, which were not usually differentiated. What is important is that *suryānī* (Syriac) is never used for the language: this word was only used to refer to the Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic churches. This difference is also visible in the archives of the Dominican Syro-Chaldean seminary, who used the French equivalents "syrien" and "chaldéen" respectively as names for both types of Syriac, even if

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60   Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 59–60.

61   Al-ab Hiyāsint al-Dūmīnīkī, "*Nutqin lughatunā bi-juhd al-istiṭāʿa*," *al-Najm* 7:4 (1935), 141.

62   "*Akhbār al-ṭāʾifa*," *Al-Najm* 5:1 (1933): 40.

63   "*Al-jamʿiyya al-khayriyya al-kaldāniyya bi-al-Mawṣil, bi-munāsabat ijtimāʿihā al-ʿāmm 26 ayyār sanat 1929*," *Al-Najm* 1:8 (1929).

the differences between them are limited to different script variants and pronunciation traditions.[64]

In conclusion, as a mouthpiece of the Chaldean Catholic Church *al-Najm* shows that the Patriarchate actively supported the integration of the Chaldean community as one of the Christian *ṭāʾifa*-s, being an integral part of the Iraqi-Arab nation. The state institutions and the King were supported, but not necessarily the government. The use of Arabic was encouraged and people regarded the language as their own.

5   The Syriac Orthodox and Paul Bihnām's *al-Mashriq*: Holders of a Middle Position

Like authors from the other churches in Iraq, Syriac Orthodox authors show a continuous literary activity that goes back to antiquity if we take into account their manuscript production, which continued as before after the First World War. However, unlike the Assyrians and the Chaldeans, who produced printed books already before the independence of Iraq, the Syriac Orthodox Church inside Iraq shows no involvement in printed literary activity before the year 1946, and most of what we have from them is in the form of manuscripts. Because of that, the Syriac Orthodox position regarding the use of Arabic is more difficult to reconstruct than that of the Chaldeans and the Assyrians. Also the missionary archives do not provide any further information here. Luckily, from 1946 to 1951 two journals were published that were closely connected to the Syriac Orthodox Church. These journals are *al-Mashriq* and *Lisān al-Mashriq*, published subsequently during the years 1946–1947 and 1948–1951.[65] The two related journals were the responsibility of the priest Paul Bihnām, who was the director of the Syriac Orthodox "clerical school" of Saint Ephrem in Mosul, a transnational seminary for the education of Syriac Orthodox priests in Iraq and abroad.[66] The journals were published in close connection with this

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64   Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, IV Mossoul, Z-9, F, "Le séminaire Syro-Chaldéen," 39. The French sources seem to refer only to the classical language.

65   *Al-Mashriq* should not be confused with its namesake, the far better known Catholic journal *al-Mashriq*, which has been published in Beirut since 1898. I accessed *al-Mashriq* and *Lisān al-Mashriq* in the Widener Library at Harvard University in 2015.

66   This school was a transnational seminary and was known in Arabic as *al-madrasa al-iklīrīkiyya al-afrāmiyya* "Clerical Ephrem school." Not much seems to have been written about it, although a short history can be found on the website of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate. "Mor Aphrem Theological Seminary," accessed 21 August 2019, http://syriac patriarchate.org/st-aphrem-theological-seminary/.

school, as visible from the frequent inclusion of articles about events that took place at the school. Compared to the Chaldean *al-Najm*, *Al-Mashriq* and *Lisān al-Mashriq* contain fewer explicit clues to ideas about language and nationalism. However, a few key articles that deal with identity, as well as some news stories that deal with events in the Syriac Orthodox world, help us to understand some of the underlying assumptions.

Where the Chaldeans of *al-Najm* consistently used the word *ṭāʾifa* to refer to their community, in Syriac Orthodox sources we frequently find the word *umma*, meaning "nation." Although *umma* was also frequently used by the Chaldeans, the essential difference is that they used it for the Iraqi and Arab nations, whereas in *al-Mashriq* and *Lisān al-Mashriq* it is used for the Syriac community itself. This means that the nation they considered themselves part of was not Iraq, or the Arabs as a whole, but their own Syriac community. A couple of times we find the word *ṭāʾifa* as well, in at least one case alongside the word *umma*.[67] A few times we also find the word *milla*, which is the underlying form of the Ottoman Turkish word *millet*. In both cases the word seems synonymous with *umma* and could have been replaced by it. However, in all cases where *ṭāʾifa* and *milla* are used, these words refer to the Syriac Orthodox community on a local level inside Iraq or in other countries, which suggests that these words have more of a political or legal connotation.[68]

The *umma* that the Syriac Orthodox authors had in mind was a transnational nation of Syriac Christians worldwide, both in the Middle East and in the diaspora in the Americas, and possibly also in India. The full name was *al-umma al-suryāniyya*, which may be translated as "the Syriac nation," although it should be kept in mind that the word *suryāniyya* could have been translated in various ways into English (should this have happened in the time it was written), including "Syrian" and "Assyrian." Nowhere is there any explicit definition of what was understood by this "Syriac nation": did it only refer to the Syriac Orthodox, or to all Syriac Christians, including the East Syriac Chaldeans and Assyrians who in contemporary sources in Iraq were never referred to as

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67   *"Khiṭāb al-rāhib Jurjis al-qass Būlus: al-mawhiba al-ṣāliḥa,"* *al-Mashriq* 1:22,23,24 (1947): 1034 and 1036. In this speech, the words *ṭāʾifa* and *umma* are both used to refer to the Syriac Orthodox in Iraq.

68   For the word *milla*: *Lisān al-Mashriq* 2:1 (1949): 39, about the consecration of a church; *Lisān al-Mashriq* 2:3,4 (1949/1950): 141, about the election of the Syriac Orthodox *majlis al-millī* in Mosul. For the word *ṭāʾifa*: *al-Mashriq* 1:22,23,24 (1947): 1034, speech by George al-Qass Joseph about the director of the clerical Ephrem school praising his service to the *ṭāʾifa* – in the same speech, the word *milla* is also used; *Lisān al-Mashriq* 1:8,9 (1949): 385, in a report about a play about the story of Saladin at the same school put on in order to raise money for the poor.

Suryānī? A lengthy article entitled *Al-thaqāfa al-Suryāniyya* "Syriac civiliza-tion," which appeared in the journal's first year of publication, sheds light upon this question. In the fifteen parts of the article, the author (who can probably be identified as the editor of the journal) goes through the two millenniums of history of the Syriac Christians with a focus on its literature and languages. In the beginning of the article he writes about "the noble Syriac nation," which "has been around since the oldest times in the beloved East."[69] This nation is traced back not only to the early centuries of Christianity, but also even further back to the earlier Arameans, praising them as the foundation of all civiliza-tion: "And thus [the Syriac people] knew that the Aramaic nation (*al-umma al-Arāmiyya*) was to them a lofty civilization before Christ for many genera-tions, who have laid the foundation of all knowledge, starting in those remote times in the past …"[70] The Aramaic heritage of the Syriac Christians is proudly given as the foundation of the culture of today's Syriac Christians, an idea that was to become the basis of the Aramaic nationalist ideas that developed from the 1950s onwards, although the idea itself was much older than that. However, for the period since the establishment of the Edessene Syriac language the au-thor consistently uses the designation *Suryānī* "Syriac."

For the author, *al-umma al-suryāniyya* also includes the East-Syriac Church of the East as it developed as a dyophysite church after the condemnation of Nestorius in 451, although he describes its theology from a Syriac Orthodox point of view. In another part of this article, discussing the famous School of Edessa (the fourth- and fifth-century institution that was decisive in the development of Syriac literature and theology), a considerable amount of space is devoted to dyophysite authors who attended the school, including the famous East-Syriac author Narsai. In addition to that, Nestorius himself is mentioned as "patriarch of Constantinople, who was Syriac by nationality (*al-suryānī al-jins*)."[71] The article uses no harsh words to describe Nestorius' dyophysitic ideas, although his teachings are contrasted with the mainstream ideas, represented in the school by "a section that remained with the old doc-trine of the church."[72] Thus, East Syriac authors from both before and after the Christological schisms are treated as belonging to the Syriac *umma*, even though their theological ideas were considered unorthodox.

The use of the word *umma* shows that these Christians saw themselves as a nation and therefore probably as an ethnically distinct group, even if there

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69   "*Al-thaqāfa al-suryāniyya*," *al-Mashriq* 1:4 (1946): 178.
70   Ibid., 179.
71   "*Al-thaqāfa al-suryāniyya*," *al-Mashriq* 1:5 (1946): 229.
72   Ibid.

are no overt displays of nationalism. In Arabic, the word can refer both to a nation in its modern sense and to the Islamic concept of *umma*, meaning the worldwide Muslim community. Although the use of *umma* in *al-Mashriq* and *Lisān al-mashriq* for the worldwide community of Syriac Christians parallels the meaning of the Islamic *umma*, it probably should not be understood in only this sense. The word *umma*, as well as its Syriac cognate *umtho*, appears more often in Syriac Orthodox sources, both in manuscripts inside Iraq and in printed works in other countries.[73] In some of these sources the idea of a nation or even nationalism is more pronounced.[74]

As interesting as the idea of belonging to a nation, however, is the fact that the journal shows a perception of a special relationship with the Syriac Christians of other denominations. As I indicated in the beginning of this article, in the first decades after the establishment of the state of Iraq there is little evidence of a sense of *umthonoyutho*, or the idea that all Syriac Christians are part of one nation. *Al-Mashriq* gives the first evidence of the development of this idea inside Iraq. As it is more often the case, the idea of *umthonoyutho* does not translate into anything concrete: apart from the fact that the other Syriac denominations are mentioned every now and then, there is no evidence in *al-Mashriq* and *Lisān al-Mashriq* of any concrete attempts to unite the communities such as communal meetings or other forms of collaboration. In fact, the only case of the Syriac Orthodox evidently working together with another denomination is their contacts with Christians who clearly did *not* belong to their nation. This is the case in the description of a religious party in 1947, in which the clerical school of the Syriac Orthodox thanks the Armenian association for permission to use the hall of the Armenian Orthodox school as a location to celebrate its anniversary, as well as for the services of the Armenian musical band.[75]

Even if the most common point of reference expressed in the journal was the Syriac Orthodox nation, the fact that this nation belonged to Iraq is not ignored, and at times referred to in patriotic terms. There is a striking difference between the first volume and year of publication of *al-Mashriq*, when Iraq is

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73   An article from the 1930s that appeared in the Arabic-language journal of the Syriac Orthodox patriarchate that was published in Jerusalem shows the earlier usage of this term in the Arabic language: "*Lamḥ fī tārīkh al-umma al-suryāniyya fī al-ʿIrāq*," *al-Majalla al-baṭrīrkiyya* 7,8 (1936).

74   This is the case in the contemporary poems by the Syriac Orthodox poet Ghattas Maqdisi Elyas, and in the discourse surrounding the founding of the Assyrian Democratic Organization in Syria in the 1950s. For the Assyrian Democratic Organization, see Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland*, 290–99.

75   "*Akhbār al-shahr*," *al-Mashriq* 1:16,17 (1947): 797.

mentioned very rarely, and the subsequent volumes of *al-Mashriq* and *Lisān al-Mashriq*, when patriotic references to Iraq appear every now and then. The usual word to refer to Iraq is *waṭan* "homeland," which is the same as what we saw in the Chaldean *al-Najm*.[76] The following citation is an example:

> Since a couple of years, the honourable and virtuous Doctor ʿAbd al-Aḥad ʿAbd al-Nūr and Mr Mattā Sarsam have been representatives of Mosul in service of their nation (*ummatihi*) and of their homeland (*waṭanihi*) … May God protect them (*ḥafiẓahum Allāh*) for the service of the beloved Iraq under the shadow of His Majesty, our beloved king Faisal the second, and under the auspices of the attendant of the throne of Faisal, the exalted crown prince His Highness Abdel-Ilah.[77]

Here, the words *umma* and *waṭan* are used next to each other with two different meanings: the representatives are supposed to serve both their nation, the Syriac Orthodox, and their homeland, Iraq. It is similar to the juxtaposition by the Chaldeans of *ṭāʾifa* and *umma* for respectively the Chaldean community and the Iraqi-Arab nation, but the terms used are not compatible except for the word *waṭan*, which has the same meaning for the Syriac Orthodox and the Chaldeans. The complimentary words in which the country, its king and the regent are described are also similar to what we see in *al-Najm* – even if we see them there far more frequently.

Arabic was the only language used in *al-Mashriq* and *Lisān al-Mashriq*, and we could almost be led to forget that Syriac was still a very important language for the Syriac Orthodox. This is borne out by the great proportion of Syriac we find in their manuscripts, which also indicates the use of the language in church. The only Syriac we find in the journals is the Syriac translation of the journal's title on its front pages, and some Syriac terminology (printed in Arabic script) such as *malfono* "teacher" and *mfashqono* "interpreter." Unlike what we see in *al-Najm*, however, *al-Mashriq* and *Lisān al-Mashriq* devote more attention to the Syriac language, which was clearly regarded as the language that belonged to the Syriac *umma*. This is especially visible in the article series cited

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76　It is significant that *waṭan* refers to Iraq and not to a homeland for the Syriac Christians. In contemporary Syriac poetry and other sources, the word *motho*, which also means homeland, is found to refer to the area where the Syriac Christians live, sometimes with nationalist connotations. This is the case in poems by Ghattas Maqdisi Elyas, and the word was reportedly used in this sense by members of the *Committee for the Love of Church and Language*, which was founded in 1955 in Syria by opponents of Arabization of the Syriac Christians in the country. For the latter see Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland*, 293.

77　"Al-nāʾibān al-fāḍilān," *al-Mashriq* 2:1,2 (1947): 77.

previously called "Syriac civilization," where a lengthy part is devoted to the Syriac language.[78] That is not to say that the Arabic language was not treated with respect: not only is the Arabic of a high level, but in some places the language is also praised for its beauty or importance. This happens for example when the priest ʿAbd al-Aḥad Tūmā of Bartallah, an Aramaic-speaking town, speaks in Arabic in Baghdad after "not having delivered a speech in the language of the ḍād (*lughat al-ḍād*) for thirteen years," and asks to be excused if he makes some mistakes in "this noble language."[79]

In conclusion, the Syriac Orthodox journals *al-Mashriq* and *Lisān al-Mashriq* show the existence of a curious middle position in their ideas about the Arab identity of the state. Like the Assyrians, they saw themselves as a nation distinct from the Arabs of Iraq and beyond with a language of its own, even though they called this nation *Suryānī*, "Syriac." Equally, they showed little or no interest in the members of this nation that belonged to other Syriac churches. However, like the Chaldeans and unlike the Assyrians, they deliberately used the Arabic language, and in an eloquent way. The fact that they belong to the country of Iraq is asserted, but although the country's Arab identity is not contested, no attempt is made to present the Syriac Orthodox as part of that identity.

6   Conclusion

The establishment of the state of Iraq as an Arab country meant the beginning of an enormous change in which the Arabic language came to be used by Syriac Christians. While Arabic had already been used by Syriac Christians for more than a millennium, its adoption in its modern form had to wait until after the First World War. 'Modern' use of Arabic here means that there is no longer any difference between "Christian Arabic" and "Muslim Arabic," that it appears as a language clearly separated from Syriac, using Arabic script and modern media such as journals and printed books – in other words, the Arabic that we associate with the Arab *nahḍa*. Already before the establishment of the state, in the period after 1908, various Syriac Christian authors in Mosul and Baghdad had published in Arabic, but none of them had done so through ecclesial networks. As Arabic became the official language of the whole country after the establishment of the state, Christian churches also began to publish in Arabic, starting with the Chaldean Catholic Church, and later also the Syriac Orthodox Church. At the same time, we see that the newly arriving Assyrians

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78   This part is published in *al-Mashriq* 1:10 (1946) until 1:24 (1947).

79   "*Al-khiṭāb al-tārīkhī*," *al-Mashriq* 1:10 (1946): 468.

enriched the literary landscape by their systematic publishing in and teaching of written Neo-Aramaic. In more traditional settings, such as manuscript production, the changes were slower and the old practices of language mixing and Garshunography continued. Thus, the first decades after the First World War set a precedent for the rest of the twentieth century. Arabic became the official language of the state and it formed the basis of the state's Arab identity. This choice also implied that a number of minority languages, including Aramaic, were excluded. The Syriac Christians of Iraq, split between different churches but also between native speakers of Arabic and of Aramaic, show various views on the new reality, reflected in various positions expressed by church leaders in publications and educational endeavours.

The Chaldeans in *al-Najm*, with their consistent usage of *ṭā'ifa* for themselves and for the other Christian groups and *umma* to refer to Iraq and the Arab world, positioned themselves deliberately as a religious group within the Arab Iraqi nation. The Arab identity of the state was not only acceptable to them, but was even staunchly endorsed. The Arab nationalism they supported did not discriminate according to religion and was therefore also acceptable to them, even if it recognized the special relationship between the Arabic language and Islam. This is in sharp contrast to what we see happening with the Syriac Orthodox, who used the phrase *al-umma al-suryāniyya* to refer to the Syriac Christians worldwide. Although they positively assessed their presence in Iraq as their *waṭan*, they did not share the idea that they were part of the same Iraqi-Arab nation with the Chaldeans. For the Assyrians, most of whom part of and represented by the Assyrian Church of the East, it is also clear that those who reached out to their community by publishing or educational efforts saw themselves as part of a nation that was different from the majority in the country. The difference between them and the Syriac Orthodox is that the former generally expressed themselves less favourably – or sometimes outright unfavourably – about the country in which they lived.

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