

Eden Naby

THE ASSYRIANS OF IRAN: REUNIFICATION
OF A "MILLAT," 1906-1914

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Assyrians—Syriac-speaking Middle Easterners¹ belonging throughout the medieval period to either of the two branches of Eastern Christianity (Jacobite and Nestorian)—remained a little-known community scattered throughout Ottoman and Persian territory. The Assyrian community examined here was concentrated in Iranian Azerbaijan, mainly around the town of Urumiyah (Rizaiyah). Together with tribal Assyrians, who remained in their ancestral mountain villages on either side of the Perso-Ottoman border, Urumiyan Assyrians formed the nucleus of the Nestorian community until World War I. They were united by the same language, modern Eastern Syriac (henceforth referred to as Assyrian), and owed ecclesiastical allegiance to the Church of the East under the hereditary Patriarch, the Mar Shamūn.²

Only a few decades after their discovery by Western scholars and archeologists in the mid-nineteenth century—and by Western Christianity—the internal unity and external relations of the Assyrian community as a whole, and the Urumiyan community in particular, underwent drastic change. They suffered several massacres, left their homelands for the West in large numbers, and finally fled as refugees to southern Iran, the Caucasian regions, and Iraq. These developments depleted their numbers and sealed their fate as a geographically and culturally united community.

While the recent history of Assyrian problems has been explored from the vantage of the British, Americans, and Soviets, attention has been focused on external relations rather than on the internal community forces in action just preceding the diaspora. Moreover, researchers appear to have overlooked the Assyrian

I would like to thank Professor Charles Issawi and Mary Ellen Page for reading and commenting on drafts of this paper. My thanks also to my family and to Assyrian friends whose libraries, recollections, and patient answers to questions helped me to understand the atmosphere of the period.

¹ There also exists a community loosely allied to the Assyrians of the Middle East in India, mainly in the state of Kerala; see F. E. Keay, *A History of the Syrian Church of India* (London, 1938).

² For a thorough discussion of the term "Assyrian" applied to either the people or the language, readers should consult John Joseph's study of some years ago, *The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors: A Study of Western Influence on Their Relations* (Princeton, 1961), pp. 3-21.

periodical press of the crucial period prior to World War I.³ Yet beginning in the 1890s, the strongest Assyrian cultural and economic revival of modern times occurred, bringing with it a substantial amount of Assyrian language publishing. In E. G. Browne's compilation of periodicals published in Iran (or elsewhere in Persian) up to 1914, there appear no fewer than four Assyrian language periodicals, all emanating from Urumiyah.⁴ The Assyrians of Iran, with an estimated population of from 30,000⁵ to 35,000⁶ published all four periodicals simultaneously in contrast with the Armenians, for example, who with twice the population (estimated at about 70,000⁷), published only six periodicals at different times, according to Browne.⁸

This study is an attempt to utilize the Assyrian-language periodical press to explore more fully the reasons for the dismemberment of the Assyrian community, the efforts made by Assyrians to ward off the disintegration, and the forces that dictated the final outcome. The main source upon which this research effort has relied is the biweekly newspaper *Kukhva* (Star) which ran for nine years from June, 1906 to autumn, 1914. While use of this periodical is partly predicated on its availability, its importance is enhanced by its position as the first and only non-sectarian Assyrian language newspaper in Iran published during the period under discussion.⁹ Its appearance at this critical period of ethnic community convulsions in the Middle East, and of foreign intrigue in Iran, adds to its significance as a source of material for conditions of the period. Furthermore, the history of the rise and eclipse of *Kukhva*, together with the range of issues it covered, speaks to the problems that beset Assyrians as they climbed to positions of relative success only

³ Dr. L. Yaure analyzed a poem originally published in the pre-World War I Assyrian press. See his "A Poem in the Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Urmia," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 45, 2 (1957), 73-87.

⁴ Edward G. Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia* (Cambridge, 1914), pp. 39, 100, 124, 126. Browne did not see any of these periodicals himself and he gives only vague and unsubstantiated or incorrect information about them.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8. In the 1966 census the Assyrian population of Iran was 20,344 with nearly half of them in Tehran (Ferydoon Firoozi, "Tehran: A Demographic and Economic Analysis," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 10, 1 (1974), 64.

⁶ William Walker Rockwell, *The Pitiful Flight of the Assyrian Christians in Persia and Kurdistan* (New York, 1916), p. 66.

⁷ Francis B. Packard, *The Story of Our Mission in Persia* (New York, 1920), p. 22.

⁸ Browne, *Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*, pp. 28, 30, 31, 100, 112, 144. The Armenian periodical press began in Madras (1794-1796) and much came in the nineteenth century from Europe and areas west of Iran. Specific information about the cultural movement among the Armenians of Iran appears to be limited to Armenian language sources unavailable to the writer.

⁹ After the return of the Russians to Urumiyah on May 24, 1915, a new periodical was begun by an organization called "The Society of Assyrian Young Men." The periodical was called *Naqusha* (The Bell-Ringer) and was printed on the Russian Mission press. It continued to appear for a brief period on a monthly basis, under the editorship of Benyamin Arsanus (of Digala) (1882-1957).

to see that success shattered between 1914 and 1918 as a result of circumstances let loose by the chaos accompanying the first World War I.

It is the thesis of this paper that evidence provided by the local-language press supports the following: that the disintegration of the Assyrian community resulted in great measure from the presence of Western religious, quasi-political Missions, which (1) alienated Assyrians from Persian authority, (2) split the Assyrians along sectarian lines, and (3) increased animosity with their Kurdish and Azeri neighbors. A corollary to this thesis is that the Christian Missions in Urumiyah actively opposed attempts to recreate a unified Assyrian community and that some even tried to impede the community's cultural progress.

Before the arrival of the Carmelite (Roman Catholic) Mission in Salamas in the seventeenth century and the American Mission to the Nestorians in 1835, the Assyrians in the Urumiyah region were closely united with the Hakkari Assyrians of Ottoman Turkey. Community tradition recalls that centuries ago, several mountain Assyrians descended to the Urumiyah plain from the Hakkari region. Records suggest that this may have occurred as early as the twelfth century.¹⁰ The ecclesiastical and temporal leader of the community, the Mar Shamūn, resided in the village of Qudshanus in the Hakkari region near the town of Julamerk (Turkish, Çölemerik). In Iran, a hierarchy of bishops and priests headed by the Matran (Metropolitan bishop) residing in Nochea (Persian, Nūkchehr), helped maintain ties with the center of the Church. While retaining a loose clan identity, Urumiyah Assyrians appear to have lost tribal affiliation and structure.¹¹ Unlike mountain Assyrians, whose allegiance rested with the tribe and the tribal leader (*malik*), the Urumiyah Assyrians' main identity lay with the village where several clans might reside. Among the leaders of the village were prelates of the Eastern Church. Like those of their Muslim neighbors, the codes and traditions of the Assyrians were contained in a religious work similar to the *Shari'a* called *Sunhadus*.¹² Thus, although scattered over a wide and rough terrain, through the medium of language, tradition, and religion, a sense of identity and unity existed among Assyrians.

The coming of the Christian Missions in effect put an end to Assyrian unity, as they brought Western education, coupled with Western Christian denominational dissension, to the Nestorian Assyrians. Children attending the many schools—American, British, French, Russian, or German—were taught the languages of their mentors as well as Assyrian, and religion, literature, history, and arithmetic.

¹⁰ See Joseph, *The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors*, p. 23 for more details.

¹¹ Some Urumiyah village clans were the Yadgar, Dooman, Shabas, Khinui, Amrikhas, Davajan. Assyrian tribes include the Baz, Jillu, Tkhuma, Tiari. Descriptions of the tribes appear in many missionary writings as well as in Edward Every's "The Assyrians," *Religion in the Middle East*, ed. A. J. Arberry (Cambridge, 1969), I, 521.

¹² The work is divided into book, chapter, and verse, and regulates marriage, inheritance, usury, construction, and so forth. See A. J. MacLean and W. H. Browne, *The Catholics of the East and His People* (London, 1892), pp. 50, 51, 139, 142 ff. A German translation exists.

In most schools—especially in the two prestigious American schools, Fiske Seminary and Urumiyah College—the classical Syriac so necessary for links with Assyrian tradition, philosophy, and literature was not taught. In other schools, the Western language was begun at such an early grade level as to endanger the propagation of the Assyrian language.¹³ Having no original works of literature or history in their vernacular tongue available to them, these Assyrians relied on textbooks provided by their Western benefactors, whose knowledge of traditional Assyrian culture was predictably limited to what little could be gleaned from Western sources.¹⁴ Much early publishing consisted of translations from Western sources, or concentrated on denominational religious subjects. Therefore, the important traditions of the *Sunhadus* did not reach the generations of students attending Western schools. Lack of contact with their own past culture together with the disruptive influence of denominationalism estranged those who came to hold eminent positions in the Assyrian community from their own cultural background and religion.

The Carmelite Mission, the first Western Mission in Azerbaijan, was based in Salamas (today Shāhpūr). It was replaced by the Lazarist Mission in 1862.¹⁵ Its influence was sufficient to establish Salamas as a Catholic, French-oriented base. By the 1890s, the French Roman Catholic Mission was well established in Urumiyah as well.

After sending exploratory parties from Istanbul to evaluate the situation of the Assyrians in Urumiyah and the Hakkari regions, the Americans decided on the Urumiyah Nestorian community as the base of their operations in Iran. In 1835 Reverend Justin Perkins began the first school for boys, to be followed shortly by a school for girls (1838), a press (1840), and a hospital (1880). The original purpose of the American Mission had been to reform the old Nestorian Church and restore its proselytizing strength to that of the early Christian centuries so that it could act as a force in the conversion of Muslims.¹⁶ Both the American and the British Missions began with similar goals in mind. By 1871, however, the American Mission became the exclusive organ of the Presbyterian Church, and rather than help the old church, the Americans encouraged the establishment of a breakaway, native Presbyterian congregation. Backed by a solid educational system, it was clear by the beginning of this century that the Presbyterian church had effectively pushed Urumiyah Nestorian culture into the background.

From their base in Urumiyah, the Americans made several attempts to expand into Roman Catholic-controlled Salamas and into the British Anglican-backed Hakkari Nestorian regions. Competition with Roman Catholic and Russian Ortho-

¹³ *Zāvirā d Bārā*, 49, 1 (1898) 1, and *Kukhva*, 4, 7 (1909), 73-74.

¹⁴ The early American missionaries had studied Old Syriac but the practice was dropped.

¹⁵ The fiftieth anniversary of the Lazarist Mission was celebrated in 1912 (*Kukhva*, 6, 23 [June 24, 1912], 272).

¹⁶ Packard, *The Story of our Mission in Persia*, p. 34.

dox Missions continued, but on the whole British and American Missions concerted their efforts. In 1869 they appear to have reached an understanding with regard to Protestant Missions in Iran, whereby northern Iran would fall within the American sphere and southern Iran within the British (under the Church Missionary Society of England).¹⁷

The Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907 strengthened the position of the Russian Orthodox Church and of Russia in Urumiyah. Assyrians sought Russian political protection and favor through mass conversion to the Russian Orthodox faith. In village after village, the remaining Nestorian Church property was transferred to Russian Orthodox control. The Russians established schools, orphanages, and a press. With larger financial resources at their disposal, they appear to have paid the local clergy at a higher rate, and also provided higher education at less cost to students, than other Missions.

In 1909, hard-pressed by the popularity of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Americans in Urumiyah proposed to unite with the British Anglican Mission, and thereby with the Nestorian Church, which was in communion with the Anglican Church. Such a move would have completely eliminated Anglo-American rivalry in the Hakkari region as well. But the idea was rejected by the American missionary hierarchy for various reasons, among which was a distaste for unification with the "backward" indigenous church.¹⁸

By 1906, the year when *Kukhva* began publication, the three major Western missions had already established their periodical presses. The American periodical, called *Zārīrā d Bārā* (Ray of Light), was the first Assyrian-language newspaper in Urumiyah and very possibly the first periodical, in the modern conception of that term, to be published in Iran.¹⁹ It ran from 1850 to 1914.²⁰ The Roman Catholic periodical, *Qalā d Shārārā* (Voice of Truth), was founded in 1896.²¹ *Āurmīh Ārtudūksyitā* (Orthodox Urumiyah), published by the Russian Mission, appeared

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁸ Unpublished correspondence dealing with this question may be found at the Presbyterian Historical Society (Philadelphia, Pa.), catalogued as "Correspondence from the Urumia Station with Reference to the Proposed Union with the Old Syrian Church," dated 1909.

¹⁹ See Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*, p. 10, for a discussion of the early press in Iran. Although the existence of an earlier Persian periodical has been ascertained, because that periodical appears to have been an internal court information sheet, Jan Rypka agrees with Browne that 1851 marks the beginning of the Persian periodical press (Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* [Dordrecht-Holland, 1968], pp. 337-38). The commencement of *Zārīrā d Bārā* in 1850 is mentioned by G. V. Arsanus in "Rol' assiriiskikh prosvetitelei i pisatelei v stanovlenii sovremennogo assiriiskogo iazyka," *Semitskie iazyki*, Vyp. 2, c. 2 (Moscow, 1965), p. 700, and confirmed by copies for the year 1895 which bear the volume number 46.

²⁰ The authors of *Assiriiskii vopros vo vremia i posle pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow, 1968), K. P. Matveev and I. I. Mar Iukhanna, mistakenly identify the first year as 1851 (p. 19) as does Iraj Afshār in "Nasturiyān-i Irān: Āsūri-hā va kaldāni-hā," *Iffild'āt-i māhānah*, 4, 40 (1330/1951), 27.

²¹ Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*, p. 124.

irregularly in the first part of the century but on a more regular basis in 1911, perhaps as a consequence of the Russian occupation of Urumiyah in that year.²²

The main objective of the three sectarian periodicals was the dissemination of information about their particular brand of Christianity.²³ In this effort they were uncompromising. Reluctance to coordinate their activities led them to persist in using three different systems of transliterating the vernacular Assyrian language, a factor that discouraged literacy and the exchange of ideas among members of the small community. The three sectarian newspapers also served to air the personal grievances of local clergy. Abuse and invective, garbed in religious terms, appeared in the Mission newspapers. It is no wonder that in this period one finds Assyrians, either because of political or economic opportunism, or through sheer confusion, shifting frequently from one to yet another Western denomination. Physical fights among native clergy were not unusual as pastors came to be identified at one time or another with as many as three or four different denominations.

Into this atmosphere poisoned by denominational rivalry stepped a group of national-minded Assyrians, products of the educational systems sponsored by the Missions, who proposed to organize united Assyrian cultural action. Murmurings against sectarian division are recorded as early as 1895. While expressing their gratitude to "those who have come from afar to help us," the Assyrians decried the divisive effect of Mission activity among them. They urged the community to join in a search for ways to reunite themselves and pleaded for a separation of religion and *millat*.²⁴ One obstacle to implementation of the separation principle came from the Old Church where the Mar Shamūn claimed both temporal and ecclesiastical leadership.²⁵ With the decline in the prestige of the Nestorian Church, however, the adherents of the separation principle appear to have gained ground.

Impetus for the unification movement also came from several external factors. The movement coincided with the first phase of the Constitutional movement in Iran (1906–1909), the generally liberal atmosphere in the country, the weakening of central authority, and the greater pressure exerted by Britain and Russia on Iran. Despite the weakness of Persian authority, the improved economic and social posi-

²² *Kukhzu*, 5, 16 (1911), 188.

²³ A survey of two years of *Zābirā d Bārā*, 1895 and 1898, revealed a concentration on translation of sermons from English to Assyrian, on biographies of Western political and religious leaders, and on moral admonitions against alcohol. Little local news and virtually no national (Iranian) news received coverage. Direct and indirect attacks on Roman Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy appeared also (*Zābirā d Bārā*, 46, 2 [1895], 12; 46, 1 [1898], 3; 46, 9 [1898], 65).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 46, 3 (1895), 19.

²⁵ This dual claim of the Mar Shumun contributed to the conflict between the Assyrians and the Iraqi government in 1932–1933. See Khaldun S. Husry, "The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 5, 2 (1974) 172. In 1973 the Mar Shamūn, who was elevated to the post in 1920, resigned, in an unprecedented move. It is highly doubtful that the office will be filled on a hereditary basis from now on, if it is filled at all by a single individual. In 1976 a new patriarch was elected under new rules.

tion of Assyrians, and the strong backing they received from Western powers, nowhere in the press does there occur even a hint that the Assyrians aspired to political autonomy. When the area was under nominal Persian control (up to 1911), the unity movement called only for the unification of the *millat* under Persian rule. Even after the military occupation of Urumiyah by Russia in 1911, Assyrian aspirations did not extend beyond that of a cultural community.

Kukhva served as the organ of the newly emerging local Assyrian leadership. Edited from 1907 by Yukhana Mushi, a well-educated school inspector with a knowledge of Persian, Turkish, Assyrian, and English, *Kukhva* aimed at creating a means of communication among Assyrians living in various Iranian cities such as Tehran, Salamas, Sennah (today Sanandaj), in Ottoman Turkey, Tsarist Russia, and North America. Subscription from outside Urumiyah was encouraged, and special sections were devoted to news of Assyrians living outside the home region. Subscribers even included members of the local Jewish community. In an attempt to confirm its intage as a nonsectarian publication with no political allegiance to a foreign power, *Kukhva* carried press reports from *Novoe Vremia* (St. Petersburg) and other Russian newspapers,²⁶ as well as from the *London Mail*, and other British and French publications.²⁷ A special effort was made to win the good will of Persian administrators, the local Muslim press, and the Kurdish chieftains. *Kukhva* urged Assyrians to consider the laudatory actions of their Muslim neighbors²⁸ and praised the constructive action taken by Muslim leaders.²⁹ Particularly interesting in view of its attitude toward the government is its coverage of the Russian bombardment of the Holy Shrine in Mashhad on March 29, 1912. Although the editor does not state his source for the report, the view expressed is that of the British, particularly with regard to the loss of a part of the shrine treasure and the violation of the inner chamber.³⁰ Perhaps to avoid confrontation with the Russian force occupying Urumiyah, *Kukhva* abstained from its usual practice of expressing editorial opinion.

True to its motto *Khda kukhva sura bnushi bi rqi'a* (A small star alone in the sky), *Kukhva* attempted to keep alive the nonsectarian Assyrian language, literature, and cultural heritage, despite pressure from the Mission presses. One method it adopted was the publishing of patriotic poetry dedicated to Assyrian unity³¹ and to leaders like Mar Tuma Addo and Dr. Lutar Malik.³² Another way was

²⁶ *Kukhva*, 4, 11 (1909), 129; and others.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6, 2 (1911), 36; and others.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4, 15 (1910), 172-173.

²⁹ One of the leaders much admired by Assyrians was Hazrat-i Ashraf Ijlal-i Mulk, the governor of Urumiyah until 1912 (*ibid.*, 6, 17 [1912], 200; and 5, 21 [1911], 246-247).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6, 22 (1912), 248-250. Compare with Sir Percy Sykes's account in *A History of Persia*, Vol. II (New York, 1915) pp. 426-427.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6, 3 (1911), 29, 30.

³² *Ibid.*, 6, 7 (1911), 76-78.

publicizing cultural events such as the publication of Assyrian language works on literature and linguistics,³³ as well as performances of plays.³⁴

During its nine years of existence, *Kukhva* helped to encourage and shape community opinion independent of the Western Missions. It frequently attacked division caused by the Missions—for example, in an article called “The Snake of Sects has Eaten into Nationalism.”³⁵ Aside from its constant war against sectarian division, the periodical grasped at any signs of unity among Assyrians. It helped organize the *Mutva d 'Üdrana* (Aid Society), to raise money for Assyrian projects;³⁶ the Assyrian Literary Society, to develop writing in the national language;³⁷ and an organization to coordinate spelling. *Kukhva* also voiced support for unification efforts outside Urumiyah: the formation of cultural societies in Salamas³⁸ and Tehran,³⁹ a drive to build an interdenominational church for Assyrians in Tiflis,⁴⁰ and a Society for Friendship and Culture formed in 1910 in Tikhuni (Tuğub, a village in Hakkari, Turkey), which included among its members Assyrians and Kurds.⁴¹

The organization to coordinate the spelling of modern Syriac deserves special attention because it constituted a major effort to draw together Assyrians divided as a result of Western Christian rivalry. By the first decade of this century, many Assyrian-language publications were emerging from the Mission presses. The orthographic systems employed by each Mission differed, however, and this proved an impediment to the development of a single literature. Because the sole motivation for printing throughout the nineteenth century had been to teach the indigenous Assyrians the religion and literature of Western Christianity, no particular benefit was envisaged from the use of a united orthographic system for the community. Indeed separate orthographic systems—American, French, and Russian—assured to some extent that the members of one congregation would not fall under the influence of another Mission. With the emergence of a nonsectarian periodical press and literature (histories and linguistic material), the need for employing a uniform orthographic system became evident to community leaders.

In the summer of 1910, a committee headed by Mar Tuma Addo (1852–1918), a Roman Catholic priest and learned Assyrian scholar, and composed of representa-

³³ *Ibid.*, 4, 11 (1909), 124–125.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5, 2 (1910), 23.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5, 3 (1910), 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 4, 7 (1909), 78.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6, 21 (1912), 241–242.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5, 13 (1911), 146–147. Because the by-laws of this society limited membership to “Chaldeans” it was accused of being sectarian. The Society disclaimed such accusations, claiming that all Assyrians in Salamas were in fact known as “Chaldeans.”

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5, 17 (1911), 200–202.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5, 3 (1910), 28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6, 2 (1911), 17–18.

tions from the four printing-press establishments, met to decide on a uniform spelling system and to draft rules for cooperation among the three sectarian presses.⁴² But the effort ended without agreement. The Roman Catholic group withdrew its support, and although the American, the Orthodox, and the *Kukhva* members continued to meet,⁴³ a unified system of spelling came about only long after the Assyrian community had gone into diaspora.⁴⁴ Thus, sectarian dissent proved an insurmountable obstacle to the effort to develop this basic foundation for literacy and culture.

One of the chief issues involving Assyrian unity and community relations with Persian authority was the election of a representative to the legislature (Dār al-shaurā). The Persian Constitution of 1906, through its supplement of October 7, 1907, had given the Assyrians ("Chaldeans/Nestorians"), together with the Armenians, Zoroastrians, and Jews, the right to send one delegate each to the legislature.⁴⁵ The center of the Iranian Assyrian community being Urumiyah and its environs, the choice of a delegate rested with the leaders of that community. In the fall of 1910, at a meeting of Urumiyan Assyrians representing the four major denominations (Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, and Nestorian), it was agreed that a committee of forty men be appointed (ten from each denomination) to decide on the candidates to be placed before the community for election. Archbishop Sergis of the Orthodox Mission vetoed this decision, however, by insisting that the "nation (*millat*) is ours. Most people have converted to Orthodoxy. Therefore, the representative must come from the Russian Orthodox congregation and the selection committee must consist of a Russian Orthodox majority." He also insisted that the choice of whether a representative would be sent to the Iranian capital at all rested with his congregation.⁴⁶ The Russian position created an impasse, provoking a strongly worded plea from the nonsectarian press to all Missions to either cease interfering in Assyrian community affairs or leave. Echoing the thoughts expressed by another Assyrian fifteen years earlier, a *Kukhva* editorial declared that although Assyrians had derived much benefit from the presence of the Missions, they were prepared now to build their own schools and churches and conduct their affairs by themselves. Struggle and hardship are better than being victimized and exploited by "people . . . who sell their nation for a salary or a position." The editorial ended by requesting that the Missions depart and take their "little disciples" with them.⁴⁷

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5, 2 (1910), 16; and 6, 14 (1912), 161-162.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6, 15 (1912), 175.

⁴⁴ By 1930, most Assyrian publications had adopted the American system, including the Soviet periodical *Kukhva d Madinkha* published in Tiflis, although this system had been described as "naked and bare" (*Kukhva* 6, 14 [1912], 162; and *Kukhva d Madinkha*, 1, 10 [1929], 3.).

⁴⁵ "The Place of Islam in the Persian Constitution," *The Moslem World* (1911), 341-342.

⁴⁶ *Kukhva*, 5, 14 (1911), 163-164.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5, 15 (1911), 167-170.

Even those Assyrians residing in the West who saw no merit in Assyrian participation in Iranian political life agreed that a nonsectarian community organization and meeting place were preferable to reliance on foreign Missions.⁴⁸

After some negotiation with Tehran, the Urumiyan Assyrian community—minus the Russian Orthodox group—named three candidates and planned a tentative voting schedule.⁴⁹ Yet by late spring (1911) they had not arrived at a decision.⁵⁰ The second Majlis was dissolved in December 1911. Russian interference in the relationship between the Assyrian community and the Iranian government, through the institution of the Russian Orthodox Mission, had lost the Iranian Assyrians their first opportunity for legitimate participation in government.

The corrosive influence of the foreign Missions manifested itself in another aspect of Assyrian relations with Persian authority. It was the practice of the small *millats* in Urumiyah, as elsewhere in Iran, to deal with the Persian government through the offices of a community leader called *millatbāshī* (community head). Unlike the Armenian and Jewish communities of Urumiyah, by the turn of the century the Assyrians had not one but four *millatbāshīs* serving Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Russian Orthodox, and Nestorians separately.⁵¹ An effort to reduce this number to one man who would represent the whole community appears to have met with no success, because *Kukhva* reports that elections held in the fall of 1909 resulted in a certain Muqduṣi Baba Varda of Ada assuming the post of Presbyterian *millatbāshī*.⁵² After December 1911, when the Russian military presence in Urumiyah gave effective control to the Russian consul, Assyrians tended to carry their grievances to him directly.⁵³ Frequently these grievances involved Muslims, both Kurds and local residents. Apparently, upon complaint from Assyrians, the Russian consul would dispatch Cossacks to settle the dispute. While it had been the practice of Missions to redress wrongs against their parishioners through their embassies and consulates, the occupation of Urumiyah by the Russians increased the leverage of Assyrians against Muslims and heightened tensions. By turning to the Missions rather than to local Persian authority through the *millatbāshī*, the Assyrians aggravated already hostile feelings toward themselves by gaining a favored status in comparison with other non-Christian and linguistic minorities.

⁴⁸ By 1911 many Assyrians had already settled permanently in American, Canadian, and European cities (*ibid.*, 5, 15 [1911], 170-171).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5, 15 (1911), 174.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6, 3 (1911), 29-30.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4, 6 (1909), 66-67. It is not clear what channels were available to other denominations, for example, the Lutherans.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 4, 10 (1909), 115. Muqduṣi was a title conferred on a man who performed the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Its use conforms with the Muslim practice of using titles like Hāji, Mashhadi, or Maqḍisi (or Muqaddisi) for men making pilgrimages to Mecca, Mashhad, or Jerusalem.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 6, 20 (1912), 235-236. Whenever the Iranian government proved too weak to take effective action, Assyrians turned to the Russians. See *Kukhva*, 4, 16 (1910), 187-190.

There is some indication that the Russian consul appreciated the advantage of conciliating the several denominational branches into which the Assyrians were divided. At least some of the disputes brought before him, particularly those involving customary law, such as inheritance, were turned over to the Nestorian church to be settled according to the instructions of the *Sunhadus*.⁵⁴ This is in contrast to the events of 1910, when the Russian Mission refused to cooperate with the rest of the community in the selection of a delegate to the Majlis, and also prevented the formation of an interdenominational committee, armed by the Persian government, whose purpose would have been to defend Urumiyah and nearby villages against Kurdish marauders.⁵⁵ After gaining military control of Urumiyah, the Russians perhaps understood the advantages of being able to rely on a united Assyrian force against Persian resistance to future Russian annexation of northwest Iran.

One of the main controversies in the Assyrian community before World War I involved immigration to the West. When Russian control of the Transcaucasus brought present-day Armenia and Georgia under the rule of a Christian power, Assyrians began migrating north in search of seasonal or permanent employment. Generally only men made the journey, traveling by foot or cart to Julfa, where they boarded trains for Tiflis and points north. One basic reason for the migration was that, as Christians, Assyrians could not engage in many trades among Muslims, a situation owing not to government restrictions but to the fact that local Muslims would not trade with Christian butchers, bakers, or food merchants.⁵⁶ Most Assyrians who went to Russia returned after a few years with their savings.⁵⁷ After about 1850, when, through contact with Americans, Assyrians discovered employment opportunities in North America, they frequently did not stop in Russia but boarded ship at Libava (Latvia) for Canada and the United States. Many returned to Urumiyah, but a number died en route. Gradually, however, return to Iran decreased as men sent for wives and families thus forming colonies in North American industrial centers.

Many in Assyrian circles advocated remaining in Urumiyah. Others felt that the only political salvation for the community lay in relocation to "Christian" soil.⁵⁸ Western Missions sometimes sent their brighter pupils to study abroad. Yet

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6, 10 (1911), 115-116.

⁵⁵ The *Kukhva* article implies that the Russian Orthodox action aimed at preventing Assyrian cooperation with the Persian government (*Kukhva*, 5, 3 [1910], 29-32).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4, 15 (1910), 170-171.

⁵⁷ Many Assyrians traveled to Russia and the United States under various religious pretexts—collecting money for nonexistent orphanages, schools, and churches. Others would travel as "holy men," selling bits of wood or soil which they claimed to have brought from Jerusalem, or even from Jesus' grave site. They were labeled with the Armenian term *k'acho gogh* (cross thieves). See pamphlet by Galen B. Royer, *Urumsia, Persia: The Nestorians, Great Deceivers "Cross Stealers"* (1910?), a copy of which may be found at the Presbyterian Historical Society. *Kukhva* also discusses this problem but calls them *ponchi* (thief), *Kukhva*, 4, 18 (1910), 210.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4, 6 (1909), 63; and 5, 2 (1910), 13.

encouragement to emigrate from Iran came only indirectly from the presence of Missions. Of direct influence was the appeal of better employment opportunities outside the Muslim milieu. The choice of the educated class of men and women to emigrate and become menial laborers abroad rather than remain in Urumiyah impoverished the local Assyrian culture still further.⁵⁹

A loss to the total Urumiyan community was also felt since it had been the Assyrians who, trained by the Missions, had taken the lead in fields like medicine, education, and even foreign trade and banking.⁶⁰

Although it enjoyed a high rate of readership on three continents and usually was able to meet all its expenses through subscription, by the summer of 1913 *Kukhva* had entered a period of decline.⁶¹ It was simply unable to compete with the Western-subsidized sectarian press. It is also likely that the Russian military command in Urumiyah acted to control all the press, particularly the independent *Kukhva*. Throughout its history it had frequently failed to reach its subscribers in Russia owing to the censor's interference in Julfa.⁶² In this later period there is evidence in *Kukhva* reflecting a marked, though cautious and unenthusiastic, Assyrian acceptance of the Russian presence, particularly as it began to appear that Tsarist annexation of Azerbaijan was inevitable. Yet the embrace of Russia was by no means accepted wholeheartedly by the Assyrians, particularly the intellectuals and members of the Protestant congregations.⁶³

The final blow that closed all four Assyrian language periodicals came in late 1914 and early 1915, as Azerbaijan—and Urumiyah with it—experienced the protracted struggle between Turks and Russians in this easternmost arena of World War I. Although some Assyrians returned to Urumiyah during the early 1920s, after three flights (1914, 1915, 1918), the surviving Assyrian community had become too widely scattered to attempt a unification on the scale of that preceding World War I. Their geographical unity had been destroyed.

In sum, the struggle to maintain Assyrian unity faced formidable opposition in Iran during a period when Assyrians were making great cultural and economic strides. It may be argued that the Assyrian *millat* in Iran would have inevitably disintegrated as a consequence of changes in the pattern of traditional Near Eastern society which had heretofore supported the *millat* system. Rising ethnic demands

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4, 8 (1909), 90; and 6, 8 (1912), 85-86.

⁶⁰ Assyrian educators had opened secular schools for Muslims in Urumiyah along new lines, *tarbiyat khuda* (Per. *usûl-i jadid*, new style), where they taught English and Persian as well as the modern sciences. These schools were independent from the mission schools for Muslims (*Kukhva*, 5, 2 [1910], 20). Persian newspapers quoted in *Zâhirâ d Bard*, 61, 1 (1910), 3, complain about Assyrian immigration from Iran.

⁶¹ *Kukhva*, 6, 23 (1913), 269-270.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4, 6 (1909), 72 ff.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 6, 13 (1913), 145-146. The editor warns of the danger to Assyrians when the Russian troops depart. See Joseph, *The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors*, pp. 128-129, for the treatment of Protestants during the Russian occupation.

for equality and the awareness of governments regarding their sovereign power, together with other political and economic changes, certainly affected in differing ways minority communities like the Armenians, Assyrians, Jews, and Kurds. Within the Assyrian community of Iran, however, the Western Missions not only were largely responsible for transmitting concepts and ideas that helped to alter the pattern of Assyrian society, but also mounted opposition to reunification efforts launched by the Assyrians.

The dedication of the Western Missions to the proselytism of the native Christian church led to sectarian dissent in a *millat* which had persevered as a unit for centuries under Islamic governments. Western Missions openly or indirectly served the purposes of foreign governments which were less interested in Assyrian unity or even progress than in using Assyrians as nuclei for local support. Manipulation of the Assyrian community took various forms: for example, the American Mission expected to use the Assyrians as a religious spearhead for their thrust into the Muslim sphere. The Russians, on the other hand, clearly worked to make the Assyrians political allies, by either wooing them toward dependence on Russian power or hindering their participation and cooperation with the Iranian government.

Progressive Assyrians attempted to neutralize the discord wrought by the Missions through fostering better relations with the Persian authorities, advocating development of Assyrian economic and cultural areas, opening channels of communication among Assyrians divided by sect and separated by geography, and improving conditions in Urumiyah so that migration to the West would not be the sole alternative available to ambitious youth. World and local events conspired to doom the attempt.