

Syriac people, from Mesopotamian civilization to the present times

עמיד א ממדיע האמדיעי

Ancient Mesopotamian civilization is the cradle of the human development, discoveries, innovations and footprint to several other vital and important issues of history of mankind. The place and importance of Mesopotamian civilization is key element to understand many aspect of history. Within this vital and undeniable great civilization Syriac people played very important role to the contribution of this great civilization. Syriac people had been present in every field of Mesopotamian civilization and with their contributions they transformed and flourished Mesopotamian civilization.

Syriac people, also known as Aramean, Chaldean, Assyrian are indigenous people of the Middle East. The homeland of Syriac people is Bethnahrin. Bethnahrin means the land between two rivers namely; Euphrates and Tigris. The Fertile Crescent is commonly used to describe this great civilization, too. Syriac people are not a people who settled in the Middle East and Mesopotamia by wave of migration or as invaders. They are autochthones in the Levant and they conserved their presence during centuries despite all difficulties. They are the most ancient and deeply rooted people among the Middle Eastern nations.

Linguistically, Syriac language belongs to the Semitic family. From the early periods until 7th century Syriac language was the "lingua franca" in all Levant land and it was arrived until Asia. Syriac language was the only medium in economic and trade relations. Later on, Syriac language and Syriac linguists played very important role with the translation of Greek philosophy to the Arabs. The Greek philosophy's well-known works and books had been translated into Syriac language and later on to the Arabic. Syriac people and Syriac language also had crucial role in the establishment of different academies in the history. Academy of Antioch (380 AD), Academy of Edessa (155 AD) is well-known to the historians and also Syriac linguists and philosophers played very important role at the Baghdad Academy. Parallel to the rise of Arabic language and Arabs influence Syriac language lost its influence constantly. Despite this reality Syriacs have managed to preserve and develop their special linguistic and cultural characteristics in their own geographic areas even until today.

Throughout their six thousand year of long history, Syriac people have been living in the countries of the divided Mesopotamia, Syria, Iraq, Iran, South and South-eastern Turkey and Lebanon. Meanwhile, Syriac people in every period played crucial role in the construction and developments of above mentioned countries.

Syriac people converted into the Christianity since the first century AD and spread the Christianity from the Middle East to the Far East in a very large geographical area. The culture of Christianity, once created by the Syriacs, is still present in the Middle East. Meanwhile, upon Christological and theological divergences in the first centuries, divisions occurred among Syriacs. These divisions lasted by several churches, namely; Syriac-Orthodox and Syriac-Catholic, Assyrian-Catholic, Chaldean-Catholic, Greek (Rum) Catholic, Melkite-Greek-Catholic, Melkite-Greek- Orthodox, Maronite-Church and Protestant church.

During the centuries Syriac people had been present in different parts of Mesopotamia and in the Middle East. Syriac people suffered from all hegemonic powers which have controlled the Middle East. The Arab conquest and Islam had negative effect upon Syriac people in every aspect. Syriacs and Christians have been considered and accepted as "second class" citizens and they were subject to special tax. Following the Turk invasions Syriac people had been target. They had been massacred, killed and their lands and properties had been plundered. The effects and consequences on Mongols invasions are still present at the different areas of Syriac people. The Ottoman Empire was last great power which dominated Syriac people among others. Syriac people as Christian entity with other Christian components were subject of special taxes, mode of conduct and rules. Christian entities were "second class" within Ottomans hierarchy. Syriac people with other Christian groups had been subject of the genocide under Ottoman rule. Around 1900's years Christians consisted of 30% of Ottoman population and Asia Minor was nearly

all inhabited by Christians. The genocide of 1915, also known among Syriac people as "Sayfo", annihilated Christian components. Seyfo literally means the "sword".

Aftermath, Christian populations and Syriac people presence in the Anatolia dwindled and come to zero point. The long tradition, civilization and culture were the subject of horrible genocide and the consequences and trauma were colossal.

During the First World War, world powers did not take into consideration of the rights of Syriac people during different accords and treaties despite of some promises from Western powers. The new states that emerged in the Middle East region and in Turkey, Syriac people had been deprived from all constitutional, legal and political rights. Moreover, Syriac people had been constantly subject of harassments, conflicts and discriminative policies. Syriac people are still without any constitutional guarantees in the Middle East countries and in Turkey.

Today, Syriac people are present in different countries of Levant. There are important Syriacs present in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey and little quantity in Iran. In all mentioned countries, Syriac people are deprived from democratic, modern and constitutional rights. In Iraq, Syriac people faced great extinction treats and they gave thousands victims from 2003 to now. Syriac people have the autonomy demand in Iraq at the Nineveh Plain. In Turkey, Syriac people also face constantly legal, juridical problems and they are without any political guarantees. The ongoing court case against Syriac Monastery of Mor Gabriel is at the top of concerns among Syriac in all over the world. Syria which is engulfed into the civil conflict, Christians and Syriac people face great dilemma.

Overall, Syriac people have to acquire modern, democratic rights in the Middle Eastern countries in order to continue to flourish their culture and civilization at the homeland of their forefathers and to help to the construction of better future as they did in the history.

European Syriac Union, ESU, is Syriac NGO based in Brussels working, promoting and demanding of Syriac people rights' in the diaspora countries, at the European level and at the countries of Middle East. ESU is internationally legalized, democratic and modern organization which consider as the methods of works. ESU is working for all Syriac people without any differences regarding any denomination, cultural background and belief. ESU as a NGO is nearly present at all European countries in order to help, advocate the problems of Syriac people and being their voices to create public opinion about Syriac people.

Unofficial Syriac population in the Middle Eastern countries:

Iraq:	350 000 - 500 000
Syria:	1 1/2
Turkey:	35 000 - 50 000
Iran:	20 000
Lebanon:	2 million

The rest of the world (Diaspora)

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llion (Syriacs emigrated in the 14 th and 15 th century to India)

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