

## THE CHURCH OF THE EAST SINCE 1914

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Nineteen fourteen was the last full year in which the Assyrian people lived in their homeland – their homeland at any rate since medieval times – in Persia and Turkey. Their story since then has been one of displacement, then of frustration when their resettlement as a single community repeatedly failed, then of settling down as a minority in Iraq and in very small communities in other countries. This story is itself, perhaps, not well enough known, at least the more recent part of it.<sup>1</sup> Still less has the Church of the East, ‘the Assyrian Church’,<sup>2</sup> had its particular history adequately recorded for the period in question. I hope the present article will repair this omission to some degree, but it must not claim too much. On the one hand I have not been able to document sufficiently a number of points which ought to be matters of record, and on the other, there is much in printed sources covering this eighty-year period which cannot be taken over into an article of limited size. To deal with the former problem I have used what ephemeral publications I have been able to see, and benefited from the help of some patient informants. It will be clear that there are still many gaps in the account which could be filled in with better information than I have got. The latter problem I have tried at least to address by supplying rather full footnotes.

### *Leadership and Church Life, 1914–33*

On the eve of World War I the spiritual condition of the Church of the East was as weak as the temporal condition of its people was

Abbreviations: *The Church of the East* = *The Church of the East and the Church of England* (see n. 3). JEM = archives of the Jerusalem and the East Mission (later Jerusalem and the Middle East Church Association), St Antony's College, Oxford; cited by box and file number. AMP = Assyrian Mission Papers, Lambeth Palace Library; cited by date.

<sup>1</sup> The only monograph in recent times which has tried to cover the whole subject is Gabriele Yonan's *Assyrer heute* (Hamburg and Vienna: Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, 1978). I have drawn on her information at many points.

<sup>2</sup> This name was made current by the Anglican missionary and writer W. A. Wigram (although his readers were already accustomed to the term ‘Assyrian Christians’). Having its background in the Anglican ‘branch theory’ of the church with its emphasis on ‘national’ churches, it nowadays sounds old-fashioned at best (cf. ‘The English Church’). It is also, of course, inexact. On the one hand, there are non-Assyrians in the church, including a significant number in India. On the other hand, one has to distinguish the Church of the East from other churches, in particular the Chaldean (Catholic) Church, which have the same ‘Assyrian’ constituency. (All this is quite apart from the confusion which arises out of the use of the name ‘Assyrian’ by some Syrian Orthodox.)

poor. This has to be said even while recognizing the work done by the Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission, which, although it had sustained the church with education, parish work, printing, and other projects since 1886, had not succeeded in making the church self-supporting as its missionaries had hoped.<sup>3</sup> Neither had this been accomplished by any of the various smaller-scale Lutheran efforts among the Assyrians of Persia.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there is some force to the argument that the missionary endeavour even weakened the church in the longer term by the way it unwittingly fostered dependency and enabled school graduates to emigrate rather than to take up the calling of parish priests.<sup>5</sup>

When the War ended,<sup>6</sup> the Assyrians found themselves concentrated under British civil administration in Iraq, first in the large Baqubah refugee camp near Baghdad and later in other camps in the north of the country. In these circumstances there was some hope that the English mission to the Church of the East would be resumed. However, the disastrous failure of the organized settlement of the Assyrians in 1920<sup>7</sup> led to their dispersal out of the camps, some to Iran, some within Iraq; and it became more and more difficult to think of a practical way for a single small mission to serve them. There was also a change of mood among the Assyrians themselves. Missions, some said, divided their adherents into denominations; and such divisions could only be injurious to the people's national identity. Anglicans like W.A. Wigram replied that the Church of the East was not just a denomination, it was the people's own ancient national church; but whatever may have been the appeal of this view in high Victorian times, it was not in tune with the aspirations of the community now. Wigram, Archbishop Randall Davidson, and other friends of the Assyrians hung onto their vision of the Church of the East renewed with Anglican help, but with increasing awareness that there was nothing they could do to realize it.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> On this mission see my study *The Church of the East and the Church of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> G. Yonan, 'Deutsche Missionsgesellschaften in Persien', in B. Nirumand and G. Yonan, eds, *Iraner in Berlin* (Berlin, 1994), 56–8.

<sup>5</sup> See *The Church of the East*, 320–2. The negative effects of missions ought not to be exaggerated, however. Other factors which made for weakness include the secession of the whole Persian province of the Church of the East to the Orthodox communion in the years after 1898. It is also possible to point to the intensely conservative culture of the Assyrians and especially the xenophobia of the mountain tribes, which went hand in hand with resistance to ecclesiastical changes of any kind.

<sup>6</sup> For the war years, during which one can hardly speak of church history at all, see the list of sources in *The Church of the East*, 402 n. 400. The most detailed of these sources is Yaqob bar Malek Ismael, *Atoraye wa-trey plaše tebilaye* (Tehran, 1964), an abbreviated translation of which is given in R. Macuch, *Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1976), 230–76.

<sup>7</sup> W.A. Wigram, *The cradle of mankind*, second edition (London: A. & C. Black, 1922), 392–415; Yaqob Malek Ismael, *Atoraye*, 156–170 = Macuch, *Literatur*, 263–7.

<sup>8</sup> *The Church of the East*, 285, 340–54.

The church had thus to be more dependent than before the War on such indigenous leadership as it did possess. The two bishops in Persia, Mar Ephrem and Mar Dinkha, must have perished.<sup>9</sup> That left six bishops, whom we may look at in turn.

1. The young Patriarch Benyamin (Mar Shimun XIX) was a gifted leader, even if evidently not much interested in religious matters. He was murdered on 3 March 1918, an event kept to the fore in the common memory of the church today.<sup>10</sup> Benyamin's brother Polos was consecrated as Mar Shimun XX in Urmia a few days later.<sup>11</sup> Polos survived the exodus to Iraq, but he was never in good health and he died in 1920. Before anyone could stop them, the supporters of the patriarchal family then arranged for Polos's eleven-year-old<sup>12</sup> nephew Eshai to be consecrated patriarch<sup>13</sup> as Mar Shimun XXI. (The number was later changed to XXIII.)<sup>14</sup> Although not strictly wrong as to form – it was, at any rate, no more uncanonical than the making of a patriarch had been for centuries – the consecration savoured of a conspiracy, and it caused much ill feeling. However, for the time being the business of the patriarchate fell in great part into the older and more capable hands of Eshai's aunt Lady Surma.<sup>15</sup> Mar Shimun himself was sent to school in

<sup>9</sup> On Mar Dinkha see *The Church of the East*, 336–7. I can find no information on Mar Ephrem.

<sup>10</sup> Yaqob Malek Ismael, *Atoraye*, 93–106 = Macuch, *Literatur*, 250–2; Theodore d'Mar Shimun, *Tas'ita d-yubala d-patryarke Mar Šim'one* (Burlingame, California, c. 1991), 115. In 1987 a special number of the church magazine *Voice from the East* (Chicago; see below, n. 92) announced an annual commemoration of Mar Benyamin on the Sunday before the first Sunday in Lent. On Mar Benyamin Shimun generally see *The Church of the East*, chs VI–VII *passim*; Joel Werda, *The flickering light of Asia* (n.p., 1924), 135–40.

<sup>11</sup> Werda, *Flickering light*, 140–4 (including the text of his enthronement sermon), 274; Yaqob Malek Ismael, *Atoraye*, 108 = Macuch, *Literatur*, 254.

<sup>12</sup> According to an article in the *Assyrian Star* (May–June 1975, 17) his birthday was 28 February 1909. However, some sources contemporary with the consecration give his age as twelve (e.g. Wigram to Archbishop Davidson, 19 May 1920, in the AMP). Since Assyrians did not customarily keep track of their age, there may be some genuine uncertainty.

<sup>13</sup> On the consecration of Mar Eshai Shimun: Yaqob Malek Ismael, *Atoraye*, 161–3 = Macuch, *Literatur*, 264–5; *The Church of the East*, 345.

<sup>14</sup> Mar Shimun assumed the number XXIII sometime before 1940. One of the two extra Shimuns is the apostle Simon Peter (adopted as the first patriarch of the East on the basis of 1 Peter 5:13). The other one arises from a combination of several revisions to the previously received list of patriarchs in the 14th–17th centuries. For the list of patriarchs which now circulates in the church see *Nineveh*, 5: 3 (1982), 17–18 (although a more recent unpublished list in my possession has some further revisions). For the received list see most recently J.-M. Fiey, *Pour un Oriens Christianus novus* (Beirut: Franz Steiner, 1993), 37–9.

<sup>15</sup> The business of the patriarchate being more political than specifically ecclesiastical, it is as a nationalist figure that she is mentioned by sources of the period (e.g., R.S. Stafford, *The tragedy of the Assyrians* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), 106, 114, 200; G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Davidson* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), ii. 1181–4; J.G. Browne, *The Iraq levies 1915–1932* (London: Royal United Service Institution, 1932), 41; cf. *The Church of the East*, ch. VIII). Today, Lady Surma is known to Assyrians as one who was consecrated to the service of the church. That, indeed, she was (*The Church of the East*, 198), but a comment is called for on the often-heard story that this consecration was from her very birth. It is said that a mother belonging to an episcopal family would abstain from certain foods during her pregnancy, so that her child if a boy could be a nazirite (*natar kursi*); but if it

England in 1924. He remained there for three years (first at St Augustine's College, Canterbury, then at Westcott House in Cambridge) before returning to Iraq.<sup>16</sup>

2. The second-ranking bishop in the church was 'the Matran' (metropolitan of Shamsdin) Mar Yosip Khananisho. As the nephew and *natar kursi* of his uncle Mar Isaac Khananisho, he had some education in the traditions of the church as a boy. He was consecrated bishop in August 1914 by Mar Benyamin Shimun. The old Matran died on the exodus from Urmia and was buried in Kermanshah. Mar Yosip was consecrated metropolitan by Mar Polos Shimun in Baghdad in December 1918. He was then twenty-five years old. Mar Khananisho's sister Esther was married to Mar Polos Shimun's brother David, and it was their son Eshai whom Mar Khananisho consecrated as patriarch in May 1920. The tie by marriage partly explains the loyalty of the matran to the patriarch and his family in subsequent years. Mar Khananisho was a gentle man who wrote hymns and copied liturgical manuscripts in a practised hand. Later in life he was credited with a holy man's power to heal by his touch.<sup>17</sup> Sources for the period 1920 to 1939 have little to say about him. Perhaps we may infer he was occupied, quietly, with church rather than national affairs.

3. The other considerable bishop in the church was Mar Abimalek Timotheus of Malabar. Mar Timotheus, a graduate of the Anglican clergy training school in 1901 and a zealous churchman, had lived in Trichur, the cathedral town of his diocese in the Indian state of Cochin (now part of Kerala), since 1908. He made several trips to Iraq in the years after the War: first in 1919, then in 1920–21 just after the consecration of the boy patriarch. Mar Timotheus protested against the consecration, and to keep peace between himself and the patriarchal family he was made regent of the patriarch. He stayed in Iraq only a year, however, before having to return to the business of his church in India. After a spell in the United States in 1924–25 he reappeared in Iraq in 1927; but on this occasion the Matran and Lady Surma would not accept his claim to

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was a girl who then did have a bishop among her brothers, she would be dedicated to serve him and the church at least until his coming of age. It was explained to P. Rondot in the 1950s that such was Lady Surma's case (Rondot, *Les chrétiens d'orient*, Paris: Peyronnet, 1955, 160) and Assyrians who knew her have told me the same thing. Yet I am puzzled not to find any mention of this custom for girls in earlier sources (e.g., Maclean, *The Catholicos of the East and his people* (London: S.P.C.K., 1892); Werda, *Flickering light*, 144–5; or Lady Surma's own book *Assyrian church customs and the murder of Mar Shimun* (London: Faith Press, 1920)). It is also hard to escape the conclusion from other contemporary sources that in her youth she was regarded as marriageable (see *The Church of the East*, 197–8, 389 n. 255).

<sup>16</sup> On Mar Shimun in England see Lambeth Palace Library, Douglas Papers, vol. 62; and *The Church of the East*, 347–9.

<sup>17</sup> S. Michael, 'Mar Yousif Khananisho, metropolitan of Rustaq', *Assyrian Star*, 28:1 (Jan.–Feb. 1979), 6–7, 13; and anon., 'A brief biography of the late Metropolitan Mar Yosip Khnanishu 1893–1977', trans. Shimshoon Rasho, *Voice from the East*, July–Sept. 1988, 10–13.

be still in charge of Mar Shimun. The British authorities in Iraq came to the conclusion that he was a troublemaker, and he was removed to India finally in 1928. Thereafter he played little part in the affairs of the wider church.<sup>18</sup>

4. Mar Elia of Alqosh, a former Chaldean priest and a man of some learning and diplomacy, was consecrated bishop by Mar Benjamin Shimun in 1909. He had, however, been restrained by the authorities in Mosul from ever taking up his diocese, and being in Kochanes in 1914 he shared in the wartime ordeal of the Assyrians from Kurdistan and Persia. Some time after the advent of Mar Eshai Shimun – whether because of the succession of the boy patriarch or for some other reason – Mar Elia left the Church of the East to return to the Chaldean Church. (He died in Alqosh in 1955 at the age of ninety-three.)<sup>19</sup>

5. Mar Zaya Sargis, the bishop of Jilu and Baz, was consecrated as a boy by Mar Reuil Shimun upon the death of his uncle, c. 1900. He had perhaps no formal schooling, and certainly no theological training beyond what was entailed in the upbringing of a *natar kursi*. Of his activities what little is reported suggests that he was on uneasy terms with the patriarch and matran.<sup>20</sup>

6. Mar Yelda Yawallaha of Dure in Barwar was consecrated as an uneducated young man of eighteen by Mar Benyamin Shimun in 1907. (His consecration had been a source of particular disgust to the English missionaries who saw the old hereditary system persisting in spite of all their efforts over twenty years to reform the episcopate.) Mar Yawallaha earned credit as a military leader in some fighting against the Turks in 1924; but ‘his private life and character were ... far from blameless’ (Stafford). He was evidently under indefinite suspension by the patriarch, and is hardly mentioned in church sources in his lifetime.<sup>21</sup>

It is hard to imagine a worse state of affairs for the leadership of the church at the beginning of the 1920s: the patriarch a boy with a very small contingent of supporters, and three of the other four bishops more or less disaffected. When we consider also how anxious and unsettled were the conditions of life for the Assyrians in Iraq over the next decade, it is not surprising that properly ecclesiastical matters are practically unmentioned in the sources. The exceptions to this statement are two enterprises in Mosul. One was the ‘Assyrian Press’ of Yosip d-Bet Qelaita, which was in operation from 1921 to 1929.

<sup>18</sup> Mar Aprem, *Mar Abimalek Timotheus: a biography* (Trichur: Mar Narsai, 1975); Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 1185–8; AMP, specif. for 1927–8; Douglas papers, 67. 251–381.

<sup>19</sup> *The Church of the East*, 302–14; and information from Mr Sargon Aboona.

<sup>20</sup> Earl Percy, *Highlands of eastern Turkey* (London: Arnold, 1901), 199–200; *The Church of the East*, 252; H. Luke, *Mosul and its minorities* (London: Hopkinson, 1925), 100–1; Stafford, *Tragedy*, 122.

<sup>21</sup> Stafford, *Tragedy*, 122. He died in 1951 (*Light from the East*, 4:1 (Dec. 1950–Jan. 1951), 1–2).



**Patriarchs and Bishops of the Church of the East**

Top row left to right, Mar Benyamin Shimun, Mar Reuil Shimun, Mar Polos Shimun; middle row, Mar Yosip Khananisho of Shamsdin, Mar Eshai Shimun, Mar Timotheus of Malabar; bottom row, Mar Zaya Sargis of Jilu, Mar Isaac Khananisho of Shamsdin, Mar Elia of 'Nineveh' (Alqosh). The photographs were assembled not long after 1920.

The press published a number of church books, using the imprint 'Assyrian Press of the Church of the East' on the title-pages. These included the *Taksa* (missal), published in 1928 and still used in a reprint by the Church today. The closing of the press was related to the ordination of Yosip as priest by Mar Timotheus against the will of the patriarch. Yosip also ran a school in which many Assyrian *literati*

were educated.<sup>22</sup> The other work was a school and feeding-station maintained by the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A., nominally a continuation of the Archbishop of Canterbury's mission, under the Revd J. Panfil, from 1925 to 1933.<sup>23</sup>

*Mar Shimun and Temporal Power*

The British mandate in Iraq ended in 1932 without any settlement for the Assyrians. They thoroughly distrusted the new Iraqi government, and a series of massacres of unarmed Assyrians in August 1933 by the army made the tragedy – or to use another current expression, the British betrayal of the Assyrians – complete.<sup>24</sup> In the aftermath of the massacres Mar Shimun, who had for the past two years been a visible and pugnacious spokesman for the Assyrian cause,<sup>25</sup> was stripped of his Iraqi nationality and deported with his family to Cyprus.<sup>26</sup> In 1940 he went on alone to America, having been invited to come and live in Chicago by the Assyrian community there. The rest of the family, including Lady Surma, subsisted for some years more on Cyprus on money paid from England out of the residue of the Assyrian Mission funds.<sup>27</sup> They were able eventually to settle in Ealing in west London in c. 1951, and thence to remove to America when they could get visas, c. 1961.

His distance from the Middle East did not diminish the patriarch's self-understanding as leader of the whole people. This had been his legal position in pre-war Turkey, and some of Mar Shimun's Anglican friends (in particular, Wigram) probably encouraged him too far in the idea that the old state of affairs could be re-created.<sup>28</sup> Others, however, including other Anglicans, saw this idea as an anachronism, symptomatic of 'a fundamental inability to distinguish between Church and nation', as the Anglican bishop in Jerusalem put it after visiting Mar Shimun in Baghdad in 1933.<sup>29</sup> If it was anachronistic in 1933, it was still more so in 1945 when the 'Assyrian National Petition' submitted by the patriarch to the San Francisco conference of 1945 took up the old cause of a national settlement, and had no results.<sup>30</sup> Canon J.A. Douglas wrote,

<sup>22</sup> Macuch, *Literatur*, 261, 279.

<sup>23</sup> *Church of the East*, 349–50 and n. 416.

<sup>24</sup> Note the titles of Stafford's *The tragedy of the Assyrians* (n. 15 above); anon., *The Assyrian tragedy* (Annemasse, 1934); and J. Malek's *The British betrayal of the Assyrians* (Chicago: Assyrian National Federation and Assyrian National League of America, 1935).

<sup>25</sup> See the documents published in the League of Nations *Official Journal*, Dec. 1933, 1786–1841.

<sup>26</sup> *The Assyrian tragedy*, 62–4.

<sup>27</sup> JEM 81. 2–5, *passim*.

<sup>28</sup> The patriarch's claim to 'temporal power' is clearly explained in Stafford's chapter 'The Mar Shimun', *Tragedy*, 99–111 (although Stafford refrains from mentioning Wigram). For the pre-war state of affairs see further *The Church of the East*, 17, 130.

<sup>29</sup> JEM 81. 1, 19 July 1933.

<sup>30</sup> Sargon O. Dadesho, *The Assyrian national question at the United Nations (a historical injustice redressed)* (Modesto, California, 1987), 160–8, prints the text. Cf. Yonan, *Assyrien*, 76–7; Douglas Papers, 67, 7 May 1945.

'I have a great affection for [Mar Shimun], and it has been an intense sadness to me to see him develop into a somewhat embittered and as I judge, impracticable *roi en exil* with an almost hopeless demand and a grievance against some of his best friends.'<sup>31</sup> Preoccupation with this almost hopeless demand, for the resettlement of the whole people, can only have paralysed the patriarch as far as the ordinary administration of church affairs was concerned. It was his view, no doubt, that as long as the settlement was uncertain, there was a reason not to create a new structure of dioceses and bishops.

When the death of Mar Timotheus of Malabar in 1945 reduced the episcopate to the historically low number of four, plans were at last made to convene a 'synod' somewhere in the Middle East between Mar Shimun and Mar Khananisho at which some bishops would be consecrated. But the matran was unwilling to leave Iraq, for fear he would not be readmitted, and Mar Shimun could not get a visa to enter the country. The planned meeting thus fell through. The patriarch blamed the British government, but others thought that his own intransigence was at fault. Wigram, who remained a close friend of the patriarch, wrote to Douglas, 'Nothing that we can do seems to make Mar Shimun do anything about the provision of Bishops, though he admits that unless Bishops are consecrated, the end of the Church must be very near'.<sup>32</sup>

The year 1948, however, marked a change in the patriarch's official policy and accordingly a turning-point in the history of the Church of the East. In December 1946 - February 1947 there were reports of attacks on Assyrian villages and civilians by troops in Iranian Azerbaijan. An appeal to the United States State Department for a protest to be made to Iran was signed by about seventy Episcopalian bishops, evidently at the instigation of Mar Shimun and a helpful friend Irwin St John Tucker, the pastor of St Stephen's Episcopal Church in Chicago. The State Department gave no satisfaction to the bishops, but Mar Shimun must have thought the Episcopal response to the plight of the Assyrians was encouraging. In April 1948 he drafted a grand appeal addressed to the Christian people of America, citing this time the famine conditions among the Assyrians in Syria. The patriarch asked for \$250,000 for immediate needs. He wrote: 'They look to me, their patriarch and civil head, and I am helpless save for your good will'. According to the item in the Episcopal magazine *The Living Church*, 'To help meet their needs, he has organized a Patriarchial [*sic*] Council composed of Assyrians and Americans with headquarters at ... Chicago, Ill.'. <sup>33</sup>

The appeal failed embarrassingly: only a few hundred dollars came in, at any rate through Episcopal Church channels. However,

<sup>31</sup> Douglas to Archbishop Fisher, 'autumn 1945': Douglas Papers, 66. 23.

<sup>32</sup> Douglas Papers, 67, 9 December 1946.

<sup>33</sup> *The Living Church* 5, 19 October 1947; 2 May 1948. The Petition is shown in Yonan, *Assyrier*, 121.



reflection on this failure, and on the chronic failure of appeals to the west over the patriarch's lifetime, produced a new policy. In November 1948 the Patriarchal Council began to publish a monthly (later, bi-monthly) church magazine entitled *Light from the East*.<sup>34</sup> It was well edited in English (by Fr Tucker) and Assyrian, carrying news of parishes in the United States and the Middle East, and recording the activities of the patriarch. The first issue reported his visits to the Iranian and Syrian embassies in Washington, and the prospects for better relations with both governments. In an article under his own name, entitled 'New Policy Seeks Peace, Justice, Freedom', Mar Shimun wrote:

It is our earnest prayer to Almighty God that a brighter future may dawn for the Assyrians in the Middle East, where they can live as loyal subjects and citizens of the various countries, contributing their best as peace-loving Christian citizens, and receiving in return justice, freedom and equality of opportunities, from their respective governments.

There was, from this point on, no further mention of a national settlement. Subsequent issues of the magazine made repeated reference to the patriarch's 'new policy'; items of news concentrated on church- and school-building rather than stories of persecution by hostile governments; and there was sharp criticism of a plan to resettle some of the Assyrian population of Syria in South America.

With this magazine went a somewhat new style for the patriarch, who no longer made appeals as a secular leader on behalf of his oppressed and unlucky people. English observers were not *au courant* with this change, and there was some surprise when the patriarch visited Europe in 1952 and gave a lecture to the Royal Central Asian Society. He adopted a friendly tone, did not mention the British 'betrayal' of the Assyrians, and dwelt instead on the progress made by Assyrians in their various countries.<sup>35</sup>

The years from 1948 until the arrival of new troubles in 1968 were accordingly a time of consolidation for the Church of the East. It may serve as a suitable period in which to survey the church geographically, as far as the sources permit.

1. *India*. In 1952 in California Mar Shimun consecrated Mansur Darmo as Mar Thoma Metropolitan of Malabar, to succeed Mar Timotheus.<sup>36</sup> Mar Thoma was the first bishop consecrated by Mar Shimun since assuming office in 1921. The bishop faced his share of difficulties in governing the 'Chaldean Syrian Church' (as it was

<sup>34</sup> G. Yonan, *Journalismus bei den Assyriern* (Berlin: Zentralverband der Assyrischen Vereinigungen in Deutschland und Mitteleuropa, 1985), no. 79. The last issue is vol. 7 no. 6 for Oct.–Nov. 1954.

<sup>35</sup> Mar Shimun, 'Assyrians in the Middle East', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 40 (1953), 151–60.

<sup>36</sup> Mar Aprem, *Mar Thoma Darmo* (Trichur: Mar Narsai, 1974), 11–18; Mar Shimun, 'Assyrians', 154.

styled) in Trichur, but these were of a local nature and need not be recorded here.<sup>37</sup> The Mar Narsai Press, started by Mar Timotheus but diligently worked by Mar Thoma, became the church's main publishing-house. Mar Shimun paid a triumphant visit to the community in 1961 when he came to the World Council of Churches assembly in Delhi.<sup>38</sup> By this time Mar Thoma had already shown signs of discontent, the results of which would be seen later.

2. *Iraq*. Assyrians were settled in many villages in the north of the country (including the region of Barwar, the only one of the pre-war Assyrian lands that was within Iraq), and otherwise chiefly in Baghdad, Habbaniyah (a British air-force base 50 miles west of Baghdad), Mosul, Basra, and Kirkuk.<sup>39</sup> Mar Zaya Church in Baghdad was consecrated in 1959.<sup>40</sup> In Mosul, Yosip d-Bet Qelaita had a new printing press, the Diqlath Press, which printed some liturgical books and materials for church schools. Yosip died in 1952.<sup>41</sup> Mar Khananisho maintained the succession of two episcopal families, consecrating Mar Isho Sargis of Jilu (1951) and Mar Andreos Yawallaha of Barwar (1957) after the deaths of their uncles.<sup>42</sup> Mar Isho Sargis lived in Baghdad; Mar Khananisho, in the north of the country until c. 1963 when the Kurdish troubles caused him to move to Baghdad also. Mar Yawallaha, on the other hand, became associated with the Kurdish cause, and was head of a relief organization, so becoming isolated from his brother bishops. (He died in 1973.<sup>43</sup>) When Mar Sargis died in 1966 Mar Khananisho consecrated a teen-aged cousin again, Mar Yosip Sargis, calling at the time for other families to devote their sons to the episcopate by rearing them as nazirites.<sup>44</sup> Other bishops in Iraq mentioned in the sources are Mar Daniel of Kirkuk and Mar Aprem Khamis of Basra.

<sup>37</sup> Mar Aprem, *Mar Thoma Darmo*, 30–54.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 57–9. The Church of the East accepted the invitation to the first W. C. C. assembly in Amsterdam in 1948 but did not attend. The church was not recorded as a member at the Evanston assembly of 1954, but was at New Delhi in 1961.

<sup>39</sup> I know no census of Church of the East parishes. *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 18 (1968), has a list of 9 of the larger churches. The information in Yonan, *Assyrier heute*, 107, is very summary at this point.

<sup>40</sup> *Assyrian Star*, 8:5–6 (May–June 1959), 16–17.

<sup>41</sup> *Šarba d-haye d-Malpana Qašiša Yosep d-Bet Qelayta* (Baghdad, 1977), 31; newsletter of the Ashurbanipal Library (Chicago), 2:2 (Apr.–June 1989). The Nineveh Press in Kirkuk is said to be a continuation of the work of Yosip (Macuch, *Literatur*, 282); but some church publications of this press which I have seen are Catholic.

<sup>42</sup> *Light from the East*, 4:4 (June–July 1951), 1. In the case of Mar Yawallaha, two nephews Andreos and Shallita aspired to the office, but neither was old enough in 1951 to be consecrated. The see remained vacant for six years; then Mar Khananisho consecrated Andreos (at age 19). Shallita joined the Syrian Orthodox! The whole affair was understandably used by Mar Thoma Darmo in his case against the hereditary succession of bishops (*Hereditary succession* (n. 70 below), 19–20).

<sup>43</sup> Yonan, *Assyrier heute*, 99–100 (picture p. 100); Macuch, *Literatur*, 394 (retailing a report that he was poisoned). A life of this bishop was published in Iran, but I have not seen it.

<sup>44</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 17 (1967), 102–4; *Voice from the East*, July–Sept. 1993, 12. For the persistence in some quarters of the idea that bishops had to be nazirites from birth, see H. Anschütz, 'Die Gegenwartsfrage der "Apostolischen Kirche des Ostens" und ihre Beziehungen zur "assyrischen" Nationalbewegung', *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 18 (1969), 122–45, specif. 133.

3. *Syria and Lebanon.* There were more than thirty Assyrian villages of Old-Church people in the Khabur region of Syria, plus small populations in Hassake and Qamishli, and in Lebanon.<sup>45</sup> The largest of the Khabur villages, Tel Tamar, had been the site for the last western mission to the Church of the East, a school operated by the Jerusalem and the East Mission under Canon C.T. Bridgeman, c. 1942–45.<sup>46</sup> An indigenous theological school opened in 1948 under a Q. Yohanan Ishoo, supported by contributions from Assyrians in the U. S. A.<sup>47</sup> Mar Shimun never succeeded in visiting his community in the Khabur, although in 1968 in Lebanon he at last consecrated a bishop for Syria, Mar Yohanan Auraham. At the same time he consecrated Mar Narsai de Baz as bishop of Lebanon.<sup>48</sup>

4. *Iran.* There were congregations in Urmia (Rezaieh) and several of the surrounding villages including Wazirawa, Gugtapeh, and Ardishai, as well as in the cities of Tehran, Abadan and Hamadan.<sup>49</sup> Little is heard from any of these places during the 1940s and 1950s. For a time there was a kind of theological school in Tehran under Q. Ruwil Arsanis. In 1951, there being no bishop to ordain its graduates, an Orthodox bishop (! – an ethnic Assyrian called Mar Yokhanan) was called on to ordain three priests and three deacons. A bishop Mar Yokhanan Philipos was consecrated for Iran by Mar Khananisho in April 1953, but it is not clear what oversight he ever exercised, and he later moved to Arbil in Iraq.<sup>50</sup> In 1958 the priest at Abadan, Q. Khanania, became pastor of the congregation in Teheran which according to one report ‘had been deprived of spiritual guidance for many years’.<sup>51</sup> He was consecrated bishop as Mar Dinkha by Mar Shimun in 1962. (Mar Dinkha is a relative of the bishop of that name who died in the First World War.) The flowering of ‘Assyrian’ culture and literature in Iran during Mar Dinkha’s years was a secular rather than a church phenomenon, but Mar Dinkha is said to have enjoyed good relations with the ‘Assyrian’ leadership.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Yonan, *Assyrer heute*, 120–44, specif. 135–7 giving detailed statistics for Syria.

<sup>46</sup> *The Church of the East*, 361; *Bible Lands* no. 174 (Oct. 1942), 1311–14; 177 (July 1943), 1350–2; July 1944, 14; Jan. 1945, 31–2; July 1945, 49–51.

<sup>47</sup> *Light from the East*, 1:2 (Dec. 1948), 7.

<sup>48</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 18 (1968), 296, 341–52. On the part played by Mar Yohanan in the controversies of the 1970s see *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 26 (1976), 168–70. Mar Yohanan died in 1985.

<sup>49</sup> Yonan, *Assyrer heute*, specif. 89–92, 95–6. H. de Mauroy, ‘Chrétiens en Iran’, *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 14 (1974), 139–62, 298–313, is full of information, but ecclesiastically it mostly refers to the Chaldeans.

<sup>50</sup> *Light from the East*, 4:5 (Aug.–Sept. 1951), 1–2; 6:3 (Apr.–May 1953), 1–2; Mar Darmo, *Hereditary Succession* (n. 70 below), 13.

<sup>51</sup> According to Anschütz, Mar Dinkha was a nazirite from birth (‘Gegenwartslage’, 133); but the biography in *Voice from the East*, Oct.–Dec. 1986, 9–10 does not mention the fact.

<sup>52</sup> Anschütz, ‘Gegenwartslage’, 138–41; Yonan, *Assyrer heute*, 91; Macuch, *Literatur*, 316.

5. *United States*. In 1952 Mar Shimun counted his adherents in 'about twelve parishes';<sup>53</sup> but of these probably only eight were well organized at that time: Chicago, New Britain (Connecticut), Philadelphia, Yonkers (New York), Flint (Michigan),<sup>54</sup> Gary (Indiana), San Francisco and Turlock (California). The patriarch administered these parishes as his own diocese, and imposed on them a demanding regime: there was a quota of thirty per cent of their income for central purposes, plus a voluntary offering known as the Patriarchal Pence for the support of theological schools in the Middle East.<sup>55</sup> The church in America advertised the publication of a *Taksa* in 1949 and a catechism in 1950.

6. *Soviet Union*. A census of 1959 numbered Assyrians in the U.S.S.R. at 21,000. According to K. Tsereteli's report of 1970, 'A great part are Nestorian; the number of Catholics is relatively small, and a minority belong to the Orthodox'.<sup>56</sup> However, no mention of church organization is made in this or any other source of the period,<sup>57</sup> and it must be supposed that religious life subsisted for the most part clandestinely and without clergy.<sup>58</sup>

7. *Japan*. This may be mentioned on account of the 'Association for the Reinstatement of the Church of the East' in Japan, whose activities were reported enthusiastically in *Light from the East*. It was the personal project of a Kyoto academic named Sakae Ikeda who claimed to have discovered relics of the Church of the East in Japan from the seventh and eighth centuries. There were, however, no firm reports of any baptisms or any congregations being organized.<sup>59</sup>

In passing, we may remark on the self-consciousness of the Church of the East in this quiet period, as indicated by the incidence of the terms 'Assyrian', 'Nestorian' and 'Aramaic'. Naturally the first of these words was in common use, and the official title of the church, according to *Light from the East*, was the 'Church of the East of the Assyrians'. The identification with ancient Assyria was not in Mar Shimun's time (nor is it now) particularly emphasized in church circles, but neither was it rejected. In 1951 the patriarch accepted the gift of a gold quasi-

<sup>53</sup> Mar Shimun, 'Assyrians', 156.

<sup>54</sup> The church of Mar Shimun bar Sabba'e in Flint was previously in the charge of an Anglican Assyrian Y.M. Neesan. See J.F. Coakley, 'Yaroo M. Neesan, "a missionary to his own people"', *Aram*, 5 (1993), 87-100.

<sup>55</sup> *Light from the East*, 2:2 (Feb.-Mar. 1950), 10; 2:3 (Apr.-May 1950), 8.

<sup>56</sup> 'Die Assyrer in der USSR', in R. Stiehl and H.E. Stier, eds, *Beiträge zur alten Geschichte und deren Nachleben* (Festschr. Franz Altheim; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970), ii. 375-81; quotation p. 375.

<sup>57</sup> For the recent revival of the church in the former Soviet Union see *Voice from the East*, Oct.-Nov. 1992, 12-17.

<sup>58</sup> See e.g. the pathetic account in Nadya Davidova, *A Soviet Assyrian in India* (Trichur: Mar Narsai, 1992), 13-18.

<sup>59</sup> *Light from the East*, 2:2 (Feb.-Mar. 1950), 11-13 and other reports down to 4:4 (June-July 1951), 9.

Assyrian tiara, designed by Fr Tucker and given by a family in India.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, *Light from the East* was quite free in its use of 'Nestorian', a title now officially rejected by the church.<sup>61</sup> Also in evidence in the magazine was the enthusiasm for 'Aramaic', the language (as the discussion had it) of Jesus and the earliest Christians now preserved only in the 'Aramaic' (i.e., Syriac) New Testament. Such ideas can be traced to Lamsa Gendo (he anglicized his name to George M. Lamsa), whose string of books on this theme continued until 1968.<sup>62</sup> Lamsa was a member of the Patriarchal Council, and as late as 1964 represented the Church of the East as an observer at the third session of the Vatican Council.<sup>63</sup> His ideas, however, whether because of their lack of scholarly basis<sup>64</sup> or (more probably) because they sat uneasily together with the 'Assyrian' ideology, never took official hold in the church.

In 1964 Mar Khananisho was in the United States for medical treatment, and the opportunity thus arose to convene a 'synod'. The two prelates issued a synodical letter from the patriarch's residence in San Francisco (where he had moved in 1954) dated 28 March 1964. This imposed several reforms: (1) adoption of the Gregorian calendar (and apparently the Latin date of Easter); (2) regulation of the days on which marriages cannot be performed, viz. Lent and seven dominical feasts; (3) limitation of prescribed fast-days in Lent to the first, middle and last weeks; and (4) permission to abbreviate certain parts of the liturgy.<sup>65</sup>

### *Schism*

In 1968 Mar Shimun suffered a revolt against his authority, and the Church of the East a schism which persists even today. The schism had its origins partly in forces which had divided the Assyrians for years, and partly in the personalities and politics of the years 1966-68 when it became actual. Tribal allegiances were the deepest cause. Opposition to the patriarch by the people of Lower Tiari went back to Ottoman times when, whether by way of cause or effect, there had never been a bishop among the tribe. The chief, Malek Khoshaba, became a Catholic, and his son Yusif, a Presbyterian and an ex-colonel in the Assyrian Levies, was equally anti-British and anti-patriarchal. A pretext for open opposition to Mar Shimun was then furnished by the 'synodical' canons of 1964, in particular the

<sup>60</sup> *Light from the East*, 4:5 (Aug.-Sept. 1951), 4; 4:6 (Nov.-Dec. 1951), 4.

<sup>61</sup> See below, and elsewhere in this volume the article of S.P. Brock.

<sup>62</sup> Lamsa died in Turlock, California in 1975.

<sup>63</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 17 (1967), 291-300.

<sup>64</sup> If a reference be needed, see *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 18 (1956), 151-7. This article was devoted to the 'Yonan codex', a Syriac manuscript then on the market and being publicized on Lamsa's authority as the oldest copy of the New Testament in the original Aramaic.

<sup>65</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 14 (1964), 234-8. The change to Western Easter is not explicitly mentioned, but was evidently intended.

new calendar, which gave credibility to the view of some Assyrians in the Middle East that Mar Shimun had sold the church out to Western influences. In 1966, in Daura, a suburb of Baghdad, Yusif persuaded the local priest Q. Isaac Nwiya, who was another Tiari man, to head a party of Old Calendarists. A petition to the Iraqi government awarded the church to this party. Similar parties were formed in other towns in the north of the country. In Kirkuk the government had to intervene to make the two parties share the church.<sup>66</sup>

At this point, Mar Darmo of Malabar appeared ready to be drafted into the ecclesiastical leadership of the dissidents. Mar Thoma Darmo, who was not a mountaineer (he came from Iyel near Mar Bhishu), had a feud with the patriarch which seems to have originated in a different issue, the hereditary succession of the patriarchate. Mar Shimun did not, at any rate, express himself very openly on this subject. It is recorded that in 1970 or 1971 he presided over a synod which abolished the hereditary succession of bishops;<sup>67</sup> but that was after it was certain that Mar Shimun would himself have no nephews. In earlier years the patriarch evidently expected that the succession would continue in his family.<sup>68</sup> In 1955 he was in London for the christening of a niece; and Canon Douglas wrote to the *Church Times* that had the child been a boy he would have been dedicated to succeed to the patriarch's office.<sup>69</sup> When this statement (which Douglas can hardly have invented) was brought to the attention of Mar Darmo he was drawn to make a protest. A pamphlet from his press brought the issue to the notice of Assyrian readers in 1960. The outwardly amicable visit of Mar Shimun to India in 1961–62 did not repair the strained relations between the two men. An English version of the pamphlet entitled *The Church of the East and hereditary succession* followed in 1963.<sup>70</sup> Mar Darmo was canonically suspended by Mar Shimun in 1964.<sup>71</sup>

The conditions under which the dissidents could get together with this leader to make an open declaration against Mar Shimun were furnished by the Iraqi government. Mar Thoma Darmo was given a visa to come to Baghdad in September 1968, where he was met by Yusif and a party of his followers. A week after his arrival he began to consecrate bishops, and two were raised to the rank of metropolitan, namely Mar Aprem for India and Mar Addai for Baghdad. Mar Aprem (George Mookken) came from Kerala in India

<sup>66</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 18 (1968), 388–9; JEM 82. 3, memorandum dated 29 March 1966; Mar Aprem, *The Assyrians in Iraq* (Trichur: Mar Narsai, 1990), 41–2.

<sup>67</sup> A memorandum on recent synods prepared by Mar Bawai Soro.

<sup>68</sup> *Light from the East*, 2:3 (Apr.–May 1950), 11.

<sup>69</sup> *Church Times*, 26 Aug. 1955, 10.

<sup>70</sup> A rare book; see OCLC no. 14871389.

<sup>71</sup> *Mar Thoma Darmo*, 55–88. Litigation by the majority party in India to overturn this suspension was eventually successful on appeal in 1974 (*Mar Thoma Darmo*, 89–106). The case dragged on until dismissed in 1989! (See *Voice of the East* (Trichur), Nov.–Dec. 1989, 1.)

and was not an Assyrian at all; Mar Addai's family came from Ashitha in Tiari. The three metropolitans proceeded to meet in synod and depose Mar Shimun and on 11 October 1968 the other two consecrated Mar Thoma as patriarch. The government had in the mean time published a decree denouncing Mar Shimun, Mar Yosip and their adherents and 'restoring' nine churches to the Old Calendar party. One of these was Mar Zaya church in Baghdad, and there Mar Darmo's consecration took place in the presence of some high government officials.<sup>72</sup>

So two rival patriarchates came into being. Mar Thoma Darmo died only a year later, but Mar Addai, the metropolitan of Baghdad, was elected to succeed him (and is still in office today). However, the Old Calendarists' position in official favour was quickly lost. The government may have realized that the dissident party did not after all have majority support among the Assyrians, and that there was more to be gained by conciliating Mar Shimun's party.<sup>73</sup> In any case, in December 1969 Mar Shimun received a message from the president of Iraq inviting him to write a letter to the community calling for loyalty to the government. He did so; the letter was published in February 1970, and at the same time the government annulled the order which had given the churches to the Old Calendarists. Mar Shimun got a visa, and after thirty-seven years' absence he was at last able to return to Iraq for a visit in April and May. This took place in high state; Mar Shimun preached a televised sermon strongly denouncing the Darmoists; and he was officially recognized as supreme head of the Assyrian community in Iraq.<sup>74</sup> The patriarch made another visit to Iraq in 1971, during which he consecrated a bishop for his party in India (Mar Timotheus) and preached a sermon which spoke in a most unsubtle way of the happiness which Assyrian Christians had historically enjoyed under Islamic governments.<sup>75</sup>

The loss of their exclusive recognition in Iraq can be seen as the beginning of a long slow decline in the fortunes of the Old Calendarists. In recent years this decline has seemed to accelerate. In 1989, in the one case in which the two parties have confronted each other in court, involving the temporalities of a parish in Sydney, the Old Calendarists were the losers.<sup>76</sup> Since then, the

<sup>72</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 19 (1969), 220–33, 278–9; JEM 82.3, memorandum dated December 1968; *Mar Thoma Darmo*, 112.

<sup>73</sup> The approach to Mar Shimun was doubtless related to the politics of the Kurdish question. It is one theory that Malek Khoshaba had promised, and then failed, to deliver volunteers to fight against the Kurds; and that Mar Shimun was subsequently asked to make the same promise. See Dadesho, *Assyrian national question*, 198; and R. De Kelaita, 'On the road to Nineveh: a brief history of Assyrian nationalism', *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Society*, 8:1 (1994), 6–30, specif. 26. Cf. also *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 19 (1969), 279.

<sup>74</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 20 (1970), 206–9.

<sup>75</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 22 (1972), 218–20; *Assyrian Star*, Jan.–Feb. 1972, 7–8.

<sup>76</sup> That is, the Mar Dinkha party kept control of the church property: *Voice of the East*, Apr.–May 1989, 16; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 April 1989, 9; *Bet Nahrain* 16:2 (Aug. 1989), 11.

newly-begun ecumenical process (to be mentioned in a moment) has ignored them. The Indian province, the only part of the Old Calendarist communion which was ever much visible to the outsider, thanks to the energetic and genial figure of the metropolitan Mar Aprem, has very recently (November 1995) joined Mar Dinkha.

Still, the Old Calendarists are by no means extinct, and earnest negotiations in 1993-94 to reunite the two parties failed. In the diaspora the Old Calendarists are present in some numbers in most of the places where the Church of the East is represented. In the last several years the Old Calendarist communion has adopted the distinctive name '*Ancient Church of the East*' for itself, suggestive of a permanent and separate denomination. Incidentally, the absence of the word 'Assyrian' must be deliberate, whether because of the relative importance at that time of the non-Assyrian province in India or because of the wish to avoid a name with nationalist overtones in Iraqi hearing.<sup>77</sup>

#### *An Elected Patriarch*

To take the account of the major party of the Church of the East down to the present it is necessary to go back to 1971. Following his visits to Iraq, Mar Shimun was evidently under pressure from some Assyrians, in particular, 'nationalists', to return there permanently. Probably this pressure, coupled with ideas of a quiet retirement at the age of sixty-four, led to his decision to resign from office. He announced his resignation on 1 January 1973. He was asked by a synod of other bishops, and agreed, to remain in office for six months more. In August, after that period had expired, nothing having happened about the succession, Mar Shimun announced that he had married. His wife, Emama Yokhanan, a much younger woman, was a distant relative whom he had met in Iran in 1968. The marriage took even his own family by surprise,<sup>78</sup> and was met with more or less of dismay throughout the church – the more so because Mar Shimun's letter (18 August 1973) defended the marriage of bishops and so appeared to raise the possibility that other bishops might marry also. Another synod of bishops meeting in Beirut in September under Mar Khananisho reacted sternly and decreed that Mar Shimun was deposed, even reducing him to the status of a layman.<sup>79</sup>

However, Mar Shimun was not now minded to accept his deposition, and a period of months ensued during which the affair

<sup>77</sup> The Old Calendarists cultivate a more clearly pro-Iraqi attitude than do the New Calendar party. Mar Addai spoke out somewhat before Mar Dinkha against the U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq (*Voice of the East*, Jan.-Feb. 1993, 25). Mar Aprem's 1990 book *The Assyrians in Iraq* is notably not critical of the regime.

<sup>78</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 25 (1975), 386.

<sup>79</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 23 (1973), 380-3; Macuch, *Literatur*, 391-2, 395-6 (summarizing reports in the newspaper *Ator*).



became confused and heated. The patriarch excommunicated Mar Aprem Khamis of Basra who was named by the synod to take over the diocese of the United States. Early in 1975 the patriarch consecrated two new titular bishops, both Italians who had previously been priests in the Russian Orthodox Church, Mar Claudio and Mar Giovanni – a bizarre action presumably intended to co-opt some supporters into the episcopate. At last in April 1975 the other bishops, led by Mar Dinkha, met again in Beirut. At this synod they agreed to accept Mar Shimun back as patriarch for the time being on condition of an amnesty for those he had excommunicated. This synod allowed the church at large to understand that Mar Shimun had returned to office. The patriarch, while not admitting that he had ever left, himself announced a synod to be convened in Seattle (a city where there was a parish especially loyal to him) in November to settle finally the question of the patriarchate and the marriage of bishops.<sup>80</sup>

This synod never took place, however. On 6 November 1975 the patriarch was assassinated at his house in San Jose, California by a young Assyrian David Malek Ismail. David was brought to trial in March 1976, convicted of first-degree murder, and sentenced to imprisonment.<sup>81</sup> At first it may have seemed that the assassin acted out of rage at the patriarch's behaviour towards the church; and so it was argued by the defence who represented the crime as having been done in hot blood. The prosecution, however, strongly suggested that the background to the assassination was militant Assyrian nationalism. According to this hypothesis, although Mar Shimun had been officially disengaged from the nationalist movement for almost thirty years, hopes still clung to him. His reception in Baghdad in 1970 was sufficient to demonstrate this fact.<sup>82</sup> Some militants associated with the Assyrian Universal Alliance<sup>83</sup> wanted the patriarch to become active in pressing Iraq for an autonomous Assyrian land; and when he was unwilling to treat with these militants, there was a conspiracy to have him put out of the way. The other evidence of premeditation on the part of the assassin being sufficient, the state did not attempt to prove this hypothesis, and no other prosecutions were ever brought.<sup>84</sup>

Mar Shimun's tragic death did at least clear the way for the canonical election of a new patriarch. Mar Dinkha had made

<sup>80</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 25 (1975), 98–99, 383–5; 26 (1976), 167–74.

<sup>81</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 26 (1976), 165–7; and see n. 84 below. The assassin was released after twelve years (*Voice of the East*, Dec. 1988, 10).

<sup>82</sup> De Kelaïta, 'Road to Nineveh', 27: 'The message read between the lines [of Mar Shimun's pro-Iraqi speeches] was one which rejuvenated Assyrian nationalists.'

<sup>83</sup> For this (legitimate) organization see De Kelaïta, 'Road to Nineveh', 28; and Yonan, *Assyrien heute*, 216–19.

<sup>84</sup> I have had the benefit of a transcript of part of the court proceedings, very kindly given to me by Mr Fred Kelaïta.

contacts in Britain on a visit in 1967 (when he was described by a Lambeth official as 'the most hopeful ray of light which has appeared in the Assyrian church for many years').<sup>85</sup> He now convened a synod of bishops in October 1976 at Alton Abbey in Hampshire, and the synod duly elected him as Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV.<sup>86</sup> The new patriarch survived some initial questions about the acceptability of his election, since the dubious Italian bishops had taken part.<sup>87</sup> More seriously, he had the great misfortune to assume office just as the Gulf War between Iran and Iraq was beginning. As a result, he settled reluctantly in Chicago, and the separation of the patriarch from his people in Iraq, which Mar Dinkha intended to repair, has persisted.

In his enthronement sermon the new patriarch made a point of repudiating the name 'Nestorian', and under him the church has adopted the formal style of the 'Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East'. Also in his sermon he indicated that his politics would continue the policy of accommodation with Middle Eastern governments:

The authorities of these countries have a good relationship with us. The Sons of the Church live in liberty, peace and equality in all these countries with all their citizens. Those living in the East have kept their faith and the Assyrian language. When our Church has been in need of economical assistance, the authorities have been very generous ...<sup>88</sup>

In the years since 1976, because the attitude of many of the faithful in the West is hostile to Iraq, this policy has required a delicate touch. Only in July 1994 did the bishops decide to write an open letter to world leaders urging the lifting of United Nations sanctions on Iraq.<sup>89</sup>

The life of the Church of the East in the last twenty years can give the outsider the impression of sleepiness. A glance through the quarterly church magazine *Voice from the East*, published in Chicago since 1982, reveals mainly the bare reporting (partly in English and partly in Assyrian) of official engagements of the patriarch and other bishops, along with sermons and reprinted articles on ancient church history. (The more outward-looking magazine of Mar Aprém of Trichur, *Voice of the East*, has, of course, been a publication of the Old Calendarist party.) A process of *aggiornamento* has gradually been taking place, however. Synods of bishops have been regularly held, in 1978 (in Baghdad), 1984 (Chicago), 1990 (Baghdad) and 1994 (Sydney). Various liturgical and other reforms have been decided, e.g. in 1978 the lifting of the old rules according to which

<sup>85</sup> JEM 82. 3, 23 Feb. 1967.

<sup>86</sup> *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 26 (1976), 377–9.

<sup>87</sup> Neither bishop now figures in the episcopal lists. I note that Mar Claudio in 1985 was reported to be in charge of the St George Monastery in Galzignano, Italy (*Assyrian Star*, Jan.–Feb. 1985, 19).

<sup>88</sup> Duplicated typescript in my possession.

<sup>89</sup> *Voice from the East*, Apr.–Aug. 1994, 7.

bishops could not eat meat or drink alcohol. The return of the patriarch to his official see in Baghdad has been repeatedly considered (and postponed). Reconciliation with the Old Calendarists and the possibilities for a new seminary have also been continuing subjects of discussion.<sup>90</sup>

The 1994 synod paid special attention to ecumenical affairs, and mention of these affairs will fittingly close the present article. The patriarch made a visit to the pope in 1984 and speeches of good will were exchanged,<sup>91</sup> and in 1990 there was a cordial and well-publicized conference in Chicago between Mar Dinkha and Mar Rophael Bidawid the Chaldean patriarch.<sup>92</sup> Even so, the church still seemed to be left out of the process of more practical ecumenical conversations. When the Middle East Council of Churches was constituted in 1974, it was organized in three divisions: Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Anglican/Protestant. The Church of the East was thus neatly excluded.<sup>93</sup> Or again, the consultations sponsored by the Pro Oriente Foundation between the Roman Church and the 'non-Chalcedonian churches' from 1971 to 1988 entirely ignored the Church of the East.<sup>94</sup> However, all this has now changed. Pro Oriente went on to initiate a dialogue with the 'pre-Ephesine Church' (i.e., the Church of the East) in 1994;<sup>95</sup> and on its side the synod appointed Bishop Mar Bawai Soro to head a Commission on Inter-church Relations and Education Development. A declaration of common christological agreement was signed by Mar Dinkha and Pope John Paul II in December 1994. Among many journals which reported the event may be mentioned Mar Bawai's magazine the *Messenger*.<sup>96</sup> It is to be hoped that discussions with the Coptic and Syrian Orthodox churches now taking place will bear similar fruit in the future.

<sup>90</sup> See n. 67. That decrees of the 1990 synod are published in *Voice from the East*, Jan.–Mar. 1990, 4–6 (in Assyrian); and of the 1994 synod in the same journal, Apr.–Aug. 1994 (in Assyrian and English).

<sup>91</sup> *Assyrian Star*, Jan.–Feb. 1985, 18–19.

<sup>92</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 16 Mar. 1990, reprinted in *Voice from the East*, 9:1 (Jan.–Mar. 1990), 17.

<sup>93</sup> *Eastern Churches Review*, 7 (1975), 89.

<sup>94</sup> So, for example, in the widely-distributed book of Archbishop M.G. Fouyas, *The person of Jesus Christ in the decisions of the ecumenical councils* (Addis Ababa, 1976), we find a careless equation among the terms 'non-Chalcedonian', 'Oriental' and 'Oriental Orthodox'. From this publication no one would guess the existence of the Church of the East. The common declaration of 1988 between the Roman and Oriental Orthodox churches simply referred to Nestorianism as a 'condemned error' alongside Arianism and Eutychianism (see the next note).

<sup>95</sup> See *Syriac dialogue: first non-official consultation on dialogue within the Syriac tradition* (Vienna: Pro Oriente, 1994), the record of a conference in June 1994. On the previous neglect of the Church of the East see pp. 27–33.

<sup>96</sup> Beginning with issue no. 11 (March 1995) this will be an annual publication of the Commission (165 NW 65th St., Seattle, Washington 98117). The text of the declaration is in this issue, pp. 7–10 in English and 43–5 in Assyrian. The English text can also be found in *L'Osservatore Romano* (weekly edition in English), 16 Nov. 1994, 1, 4; *Voice from the East*, Sept.–Dec. 1994, 10–14; *Nineveh*, 17:4 (Oct.–Dec. 1994), 3–4; *Sobornost*, 17:1 (1995), 52–4.

*Statistics*

The following tables show the membership of the Church of the East and its organization, with the names of its bishops, at the end of 1995.<sup>97</sup>

## Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East

<i>bishop</i>	<i>diocese</i>	<i>parishes + missions</i>	<i>membership</i>
Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV	Chicago (U.S.A.)	3	60,000
Mar Timotheus	} India	25	30,000
Dr Mar Aprem			
Poulose Mar Poulose			
Mar Narsai De Baz	Lebanon	3	5,000
Mar Gewargis Slewa	} { Iraq	20	115,000
Mar Sargis Neesan		4 + 5	40,000
Mar Aprim Khamis		4	15,000
<i>vacant</i>	Eastern U.S.A.	7	24,000
Mar Bawai Soro	Western U.S.A.	2	1,000
Mar Meelis Zaia	Seattle, Sacramento (U.S.A.)	3 + 2	15,000
Mar Emmanuel Joseph	Australia	4 + 2	10,000
Mar Odisho Orah	Canada	4 + 6	15,000
<i>vacant</i>	Europe	13 + 17	20,000
<i>vacant</i>	Syria	5	15,000
Total	Iran		<u>365,000</u>

## Ancient Church of the East

Patriarch Mar Addai II	Baghdad	3	30,000
Mar Narsai Thoma	Kirkuk	1	3,000
Mar Thoma Giwargis	Nineveh	7	10,000
Mar Daniel Yacob	U.S.A., Canada	3	3,000
Mar Yacob Daniel	Syria, Lebanon	3	2,000
<i>vacant</i>	Australia, New Zealand	3	4,000
<i>vacant</i>	Europe	—	<u>2,000</u>
Total			54,000

<sup>97</sup> I have to thank Mar Bawai Soro and Mar Aprem of Trichur for providing this information at my request. I have reproduced the figures just as I received them.

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