



Homepage: www.eurokurd.net

E-mail: zarathustra_news@comhem.se

Topic: Assyrians / Syrians the situation in upper Mesopotamia

Interview: President of the Institute Mesopotamia, Jan Beth-Jawoce

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Gabar Çiyan / Zarathustra News

Can you introduce yourself?

My name is Jan Beth-Şawoce. I was born in 1955 in Turabdin in northern Mesopotamia. I came to Sweden as a political refugee in 1975. Since I came to Sweden I have been active in various Mesopotamia compounds.

When was founded The Institute of Mesopotamia? What are the objectives?

The Institute of Mesopotamia was founded in 1998. Currently, the Institute has a collection of books in different languages for those interested on the different ethnic, religious and cultural communities in Mesopotamia. The collection is available at Södertörns University College (Södertörns Högskola) in Flemingsberg. Flemingsberg is in outside (south) of Stockholm.

Of course one of the objectives is to collect both new and old books on Mesopotamia. The Institute has published different books in Swedish, Neo-Syriac, English and Turkish about Mesopotamian modern history and languages.

Assyrian / Syriac language is one of the Middle East and even one of the old languages. What position has the language now? How can we preserve the language? Can you develop it?

In history we have had different classical and modern languages with the old spelling [characters]. Among the classical language which we have the Edessa [we call it for Urhoy].

The Edessaen´ s language Syriac is well known among linguistics and scientists. Since the establishment of Christianity in the city of Edessa, which in located in northern Mesopotamia, at year 37 AD, Christianity came to different parts of the

world. Edessean's own language called for Syriac. Edessa had university and attracted many students from different parts of the world. The graduate students came to their home areas with knowledge of different subjects and among the Syriac language.

From Edessa was Assyrian missions for Christianity. Missionaries came from Mesopotamia to different parts of the world. These missionaries came to the established church congregations.

Many ethnic groups before Christianity their language was not written. Only after Christianity their languages written down with Syriac characters. Thanks to the Assyrian missionaries' knowledge and understanding that many people's language was recorded and later found literature in their language. It used the Syriac orthography as like own alphabets. Here the first texts were written down in Kurdish, Arabic, Persian, Mongol, Turkish, etc..

Today we have modern language is known as the Neo-West Syriac, Neo-East Syriac, Neo-Chaldean or Neo-Aramaic. These languages were banned by the Church, therefore, was not closed. First, they were discovered by American missionaries in the 1800's. One of the modern languages were Neo-East Syriac spoken in Urmi. With the help of American missionaries were written down and later produced Modern literature in this language. Other modern languages were also down with the help of American missionaries example Neo-West Syriac in Turabdin and Mardin. We do not know yet why this experiment was unable to continue.

Since emigration language problem showed up in exile countries. The church, together with the reactionary nationalist organizations opposed to the idea of writing down modern Neo-West Syriac with or without the Latin alphabet. In order to write down the language created by linguistic experts a LATINIZE alphabet. Then came the publications and products in this modern language. It came after TV channels and the Internet. Young people began to use more modern language in the electronic communication.

How much is the Assyrians / Syrians number now in Turkey? What are the major problems? How Turkey's relationship to you?

Assyrians / Syrians / Chaldeans number today in Turkey is about 20 thousand. More Party of them live in Istanbul and a small group in Turabdin and Botan area.

Naturally, the community just like any other ethnic groups are officially non-recognized. Since the Republic of Turkey was formed and later banned all languages other than Turkish. All ethnic groups were called Turks. Assyrians / Syrians as "Christian Turks". Kurds as "mountain Turks" and so on.

Repression by Ankara's Kemalist governments against various ethnic groups has been enormous. And without any interruption to the continuing through today at the same pace.

Kemalist regime has organized various legal and illegal military militias to oppress, harass, pursue, deportation, confiscation of land areas of the country, murdering, .. people with non-Turkish and non-Muslim background.

Iran?

Assyrians / Syrians / Chaldeans live today scattered in different parts of Iran. The total number is about 30 thousand. The majority now live in Tehran. Since Khomeini's fascist-Islamist regime over the number of Assyrians, day after day, they suffered. Everywhere in Iran there is only Islamic law. Non-Muslims have no chance to survive long in Iran. Non-Muslims are forced to take the Muslim custom.

Then yezidis and Jews, before it was many in Urmi and its region. But today almost left. Yezidis in Iran since 1979 became the target of the regime's repression apparatus because their religion is a non-recognized religion of the state religion of Islam.

It is legally prohibited for non-Muslims to get to high positions in the military and political life. Assyrians as a Christian, or rather, as a non-Muslim group has a representative in Parliament. The Representative has no authority or power to influence in Parliament. Many Assyrians on legal and illegal basis, leaving Iran.

Iraq?

Until 1990, lived more than 1 million Assyrians / Syrians / Chaldeans in Iraq. Since the Gulf War the number began to gradually shrink. As the Assyrians / Syrians / Chaldeans had long peer religious and regionalist problem. These problems have always been obstacles in the way of not being united round of national political demands. Reactionary clergy and other church leaders have consistently opposed to the group must be united and politicized.

After Saddam's case, Assyrians / Syrians / Chaldeans continued to live with their own internal problems. Their internal divisions beds for various rulers of Iraqi society to control the Assyrian / Syrian / Chaldean group easier. This has contributed to today's chaos.

Syria?

Since the Arab racist-fascist Baath Party to power after a military coup in 1973, Assyrians / Syrians / Chaldeans number began to gradually shrink in Syria. Assyrian community as other non-Arab ethnic groups have no national rights in the country. In Gozarto [in the Arabic Al-Jazira] area, north-east of the country, since 20 years the central government excite ethnic Assyrians and Kurds against one another. Therefore arrived some tragic events in Gozarto between Assyrians and Kurds, Arabs and Kurds, etc..

Today live over one million Assyrians / Syrians / Chaldeans in Syria. Officially they are Christian Arabs. Except in Gozarto area, their language is not spoken.

How many Assyrians / Syrians are there in the world? Where is it? Their number and the problems that face them?

Assyrians / Syrians / Chaldeans are dispersed throughout the world. Their number goes up to perhaps more than 7 million. The majority of Assyrians today live in exile. They live in the North and - South America, Australia, Europe, Russia. Assyrians in their home countries lived in undeveloped feudal societies. Where many was driven by the central government indoctrination policies, feudal and religious ideas. Illiteracy, backwardness, ignorance and unaware of government was strong and deep. Their history, language, culture and religion was prohibited by law. Therefore they could not develop themselves, and lived very isolated from the outside world. To form associations on an idea was forbidden. And traditionally in their home countries they have never had the opportunity to be able to learn to solve their own problems.

With such a mentality came to the Assyrian exile. They came from different directions with different backgrounds. It was quite natural and expected that various types of conflicts would come to the surface. And that was what happened to the Assyrians in exile in the last 30-40 years. The tears still of these internal conflicts wearing religious, linguistic and regionalist character.

Thousands of Assyrians from all over world reacted immediately after the accusations against the monastery became public. During the last months, activist groups were formed and notes of protests have been addressed to a wider public as well as political representatives in countries that are residence to Assyrians such as the United States, Canada, Germany, Holland, Sweden and Switzerland. Also major media such as Reuters, TT, as well as renowned newspapers, journalist and TV-channels in Western countries, reported extensively on trial, connecting it to an eventual Turkish EU-membership.

The monastery of Saint Gabriel is one of oldest existing institutions of Assyrian Orthodox Christendom and a unique testimony of Assyrian presence and history in the region. It has been subjected to several accusations and shutdowns by the Turkish state since the 1970s. Its existence is of primary importance to the Assyrian people, in particular to younger generations to which it is one of very few symbols left in the original homeland.

Thus, we feel obliged to express our deepest concern over the more and more difficult situation the monastery and local Assyrians are subjected to after years of relative improvement. Therefore, we ask all individuals and organisations concerned to do their utmost on order to guarantee the survival of the Monastery of Saint Gabriel. Stockholm, 4 February 2009

Zarathustra News

EuroKurd Human Rights - EHR

EuroKurd Human Rights is a non-profit organization working for human rights in Kurdistan. The organization is free from all political ideologies and economic interests. The work is based on journalistic research work on the violation of these rights and international conventions governing rights.

EuroKurd collect and translate important texts for Kurdish to spread awareness among the public on its website.

EuroKurd establish contacts with organisations who cooperate with human rights.

Zarathustra News is Eurokurds news service. Zarathustra News is known for his research journalism, and good contacts with the Kurdish media, organisations and personalities.

www.eurokurd.net is a Web site and was used for EuroKurds purposes. Site content consists of news and analyses on human rights, and security issues in Kurdistan.

We look forward to continued good cooperation with you.

Sincerely

EuroKurd Human Rights

Stockholm