



# ASSYRIANS IN IRAN III. ASSYRIAN SETTLEMENTS OUTSIDE OF IRAN

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## ASSYRIANS IN IRAN

### iii. Assyrian Settlements Outside of Iran

The Assyrians of Iran are a fraction of the larger Assyrian nation with an estimated population of close to 1,500,000 people. Prior to World War I Assyrians were heavily concentrated in the border regions of present day Turkey, Iraq, and Iran (the area between Lake Urmia, Lake Van, the town of Mosul; and further beyond, in the major cities of Damascus, Aleppo, Mārdīn, Medyāt, and Baghdad). Today they are widely dispersed the world over.

The dispersion of the Assyrians took place during World War I, when the whole nation was uprooted from its homegrounds. The diaspora is still in progress. Presently in the Middle East, besides Iran, Assyrian settlements are located in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey. In other parts of the world Assyrian refugee and immigrant communities are found in the U.S.S.R., in Europe (Sweden, West Germany, England, Holland, Greece, and Italy), in Australia, the U.S.A., Canada, and in South America (Brazil, Argentina).

The Assyrians of Iraq are indigenous to that geographical area. At present they



live in the major cities of Baghdad, Mosul, and Kirkuk or they are dispersed in the villages of northern Iraq. There is a small number of Assyrians of Iranian origin in Baghdad who are the descendents of the families who chose to stay in Iraq in 1921 when the Iranian Assyrian refugees were repatriated. The total population of Assyrians in Iraq is estimated at 600,000 people. (The population estimates are quoted from the Assyrian periodical *Immigrant*, September-October, 1984, p. 2.) The Assyrian settlements in Syria date back to 1930s. They are composed of Assyrian highlanders from Ottoman Turkey who were not repatriated after World War I. Under the auspices of the League of Nations, the refugees were removed to Syria where they were settled along the Kābūr river. The two towns of Qamishle and Haseke in the same area, contain many Assyrian families. Altogether there are close to 50,000 Assyrians living in Syria today. The Assyrians of Turkey are a remnant population of the formerly large Assyrian Jacobite faction. They number about 70,000 souls. With the continuous political turmoil in the Middle East the Assyrian population of that region is rapidly depleting as more and more families seek refuge in other parts of the world.

In the U.S.S.R. the Assyrians are found in Transcaucasia (in Tiflis and in the villages of Armavir district), and in Armenia (the Erevan district). Smaller colonies exist in Krasnodar, Rostov, Kiev, Leningrad, and Moscow (Joseph, *The Nestorians*, pp. 120, 219; Naby, "Les Assyriens," pp. 449-50). These are largely refugee settlements dating back to the 1915-flight of Assyrians into Russia from Iran during World War I (Joseph, op. cit., p. 132). According to the 1970 U.S.S.R. census, there were 24,294 Assyrians in that country (Naby, art. cit., p. 445). But a recent estimate runs as high as 150,000 (*Immigrant*, 1984). The migration of Assyrians to U.S.A. started around the turn of this century. It has been a continuous process with peak periods in the 1920s (as a result of World War I uprootings), the 1970s (due to the Kurdo-Iraqi war in northern Iraq), and in the 1980s (after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, 1979, and the general political turmoil in the Middle East). The total Assyrian American population is close to 200,000 people; Chicago and Illinois rank first, with an Assyrian population of 70-75 thousand; followed by Detroit, Michigan (40-45 thousand), and California (15-20 thousand). (These estimates were obtained by the author from the clergy of the various churches in 1984.)

There are close to 20,000 Assyrians in Sweden. They are found mainly in the city of Södertälje. These are largely Assyrian Jacobites from Turkey who have emigrated within the past twenty years. Substantial numbers of Assyrian



refugees from Turkey, Iraq, and Iran have settled in West Germany and England since the 1970s. In England they are concentrated in London; in West Germany they are dispersed in Augsburg, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Wiesbaden, and Berlin. The total Assyrian population of western Europe does not exceed 50,000 souls. The Assyrian communities in Greece and Italy are a transit refugee population waiting for their visas to be processed by the receiving countries in North America or Australia.

The migration of Assyrians to Canada began in the 1970s. These were originally refugees from Iraq who were stranded in Lebanon and Greece and have been settled in Canada in successive waves within the limits of that country's refugee quotas. Since 1979 Assyrians from Iran have also migrated to Canada as the U.S.A. quotas have become saturated. The total estimate today stands at 5,000 people. Most are found in the province of Ontario, in the cities of Toronto, Hamilton, and London. But there is a remnant Assyrian colony in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, which dates back to 1902, when a small farming colony from Iran found its way to the Northern Prairies (Ishaya, *The Role of Minorities*).

Sydney, the capital of Australia, harbors a substantial Assyrian settlement. The estimate for the whole country runs to 15,000 people. These are primarily refugees from Iraq and Iran which have been settled in that country, since the 1970s, in successive waves. Smaller colonies of Assyrians exist in Brazil and Argentina, about which little is known.

Most of the Iranian Assyrians live in the U.S.A. The largest colonies are found in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois, and in California (Bay Area, Stanislaus County, and Los Angeles). All these settlements have Assyrian churches and civic organizations, radio and television programs, and Assyrian periodicals. The Assyrian emigrants from Iran keep in close touch with the community back home through correspondence, telephone, and by travel. All the Assyrians find an opportunity for annual reunions during the Assyrian-American National Federation Convention.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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