



## ŌDŌ, TŌMĀ

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**ŌDŌ, TŌMĀ** (romanized: Thomas Audo; b. Alqosh, Iraq, 1853; d. Urmia, 27 July 1918; [Figure 1](#), [Figure 2](#)), [Assyrian](#) scholar and archbishop. He was born in Alqosh, north of Mosul, but spent most of his adult life in Urmia, [Azarbaijan](#), where he was killed.

The Ōdō family raised many learned men and high-ranking clergymen to the Chaldean Catholic Assyrians of the Middle East. Tōmā Ōdō was the only one to serve in Persia. He began his studies in Alqosh and continued at the Dominican Fathers' school in Mosul. In 1869 he traveled to Rome with his uncle, Patriarch Yōsep Ōdō (1790-1878), to study theology. He remained in Rome until 1880, when he was ordained priest, and returned to Mosul to spend two years as his uncle's assistant. In 1882, he settled in Aleppo as the Patriarchal representative for four years, and then returned to Mosul to head the Patriarchal Seminary Center. He was ordained bishop in 1892 for the newly created diocese of Urmia.

In the 1880s-90s, Mār (title applied to high clergy) Tōmā produced a number of Chaldean [Neo-Aramaic](#) translations of Catholic works on theology and on ecclesiastical and devotional practice; those that were typeset and printed at the Dominican Press in Mosul were listed by the Chaldean-American priest Raphael Oussani (1901, p. 90) and more recently, in greater detail, by J. F. Coakley and D. Taylor (2009; see [Bibliography](#)). A culminating, linguistic work in this period was his two-volume dictionary of Chaldean, which is notable for its wealth of vocabulary (Coakley and Taylor, p. 31; [Figure 3](#)). In 1901, Oussani extolled the work, and he also praised Mār Tōmā's brother, Qaššīša (priest)



Isrā'ēl Audo, “at present pastor of the Chaldean community at Basrah,” as “the highest native authority living in Syriac grammar and lexicography” (p. 88)—a comment which may imply his involvement in this major publication. (Later, he was metropolitan of Mardin, in northern Iraq; for his account of the violence there in 1915, see in Altuğ, bibliography.)

Mār Tōmā in 1906 published *Qaryānē gōbyē* (Selected readings) in Urmia, in which he asserted a derivation of the self-designation of the Assyrians, Sūryāyē/Sūrāyē, from an ancient form \*Ātūrāyā/\*Āthūrāyā. (For review of the ancient evidence for a connection of “Syria” and “Assyria,” see Rollinger.) He offered this idea based on the fact that the phonetic processes of apocopation of initial “a” and affrication of “t” occur as dialect variations within [Aramaic](#) languages (Macuch, p. 213). Ōdō proposed what he termed a ‘return’ to the name *Ātōrāyē*. (For promotion of this name from the 19th century, see Becker, pp. 301-4.)

Mār Tōmā’s knowledge of a large number of languages allowed him to produce Assyrian translations of Jean de la Fontaine’s *Fables* (*Ktābā d-‘mmā’ matalē*, 1909) and of the [Kalila wa Demna](#) (1895). The latter translation is described as written “in simplified Syriac, designed for young people” (Coakley and Taylor, no. 41) rather than in the actual modern colloquial language. It was nevertheless termed by the scholar Rudolf Macuch (1919-1993) “a genuine pearl of Neo-Syriac” [i.e., Neo-Aramaic], and he regarded Mār Tōmā as worthy of being called the “father of Neo-Syriac literature” (p. 212; for classical Syriac in the 20th century, see Kiraz, 2011).

Aside from the Chaldean religious works, Mār Tōmā’s most important book is the grammar of vernacular Aramaic (1st ed., 1905; 2nd ed., 1911; [Figure 4](#)), which has been frequently reprinted in the Diaspora. *Ktābā d-grāmātīqī d-lišānā swādāyā* has been very influential in preserving knowledge of the language after the community became scattered and its institutions largely destroyed, after World War I. His other works, readers and grammars, offer basic educational language tools.

Toward the close of World War I, in the course of the genocide conducted by the Ottoman troops (which is most thoroughly described for 1915-16; see Gaunt, Yonan), Mār Tōmā’s last act was to provide shelter in for as many as 6,000 Assyrians in the Urmia district, as he tried to save them from the terror of religious war. Together with the apostolic delegate, he offered them shelter at the Catholic Mission, located on the property of the French delegation, in the

hope that the French flag would offer security, but it did not. During the massacres that ensued, most of the nuns and priests who were there, both foreign (the apostolic delegate and the Lazarist clergy) and Assyrian, died. Mār Tōmā was shot in the face. He died on 27 July 1918 (“Audo”). According to the account of the bishop of Salmās, who survived, he was taken to the American hospital, where he succumbed to infection (“blood poisoning,” in Naayam, p. 309; full account, pp. 304-14; see also p. 290).

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