



SOPURĠĀN

SOPURĠĀN, [Neo-Aramaic](#) Sipūrġān, [Assyrian](#) village in the Urmia plain, situated on the Nazlu river, 26 km northeast of the city of Urmia (Razmārā, p. 262; Dehḵodā, s.v.) and 2 km from the edge of Lake Urmia (Mālik, p. 1; see map, *sopur*, designation of a functionary responsible for road cleaning; Moʿin, II, p. 1826; Dehḵodā, s.v.) but, rather, Assyrian in origin and means “the exposed edge of the lake” (Mālik, p. 1). The earliest mention of Sipūrġān is found in a letter of Mār ʿAbdīšōʿ IV to Pope Pius IV in 1562 (Wilmshurst, p. 349). The village is mentioned again in a manuscript donated to the church of Mārt Maryam in Jerusalem in 1612 (Wilmshurst, p. 332). Mīrzāʿ Dāwīd records evidence from tombstones in the village cemetery that point to an Assyrian presence in the village as early as 668 A.D. (Mālik, p. 2). The Assyrian inhabitants were divided into four main clans: Bēt Mālikēʿ; Bēt Mārūġulēʿ; Bēt Qāšālōwēʿ; and Bēt Qāšāʿ Laʿzarēʿ (Mālik, p. 5).

Sipūrġān served as the seat of the diocese of the Church of the East that comprised the Assyrian villages along the Nazlu river (Heazell, pp. 77-80; Maclean, p. 196). In 1840, American Protestant missionaries established a primary school in the village (*Missionary Herald* 36, 1841, p. 391). A Russian Orthodox survey of Assyrian villages made in 1862 reported 172 families and 2 priests living in Sipūrġān and the neighboring village of Ḳānīšān (Sado, p. 58). An Anglican survey of 1876 listed 150 families, one priest, and one church, dedicated to Mār Gīwargīs (St. George), for Sipūrġān alone (Cutts, p. 357). In 1883, the missionary Šamāšāʿ (deacon) Gīwargīs Dāwīd Mālik (1836-1909), a native of the village, established a girls’s school there (Malech, p. 390; In 1887,



the Anglican mission established a middle school for boys below the age of 17 in Sipūrġān under the name of St. George's School (Coakley, p. 116; Maclean, p. 338; Heazell, p. 23). The sectarian divisions that developed among the Assyrians of the Urmia plain in the 19th century also affected Sipūrġān. A Presbyterian congregation was established in the village following the formal separation of the Protestant sympathizers from the Church of the East in 1870 (*Missionary Herald* 66, 1870, pp. 189-91, 254-57, 402-3). Roman Catholic missionaries, who arrived soon after the Americans, claimed 350 adherents in Sipūrġān by 1913 (Wilmshurst, p. 321). The Russian Orthodox mission of 1897 succeeded in winning over the bishop of Sipūrġān as well as the majority of Assyrians of all denominations in the Urmia plain (Heazell, pp. 140-142).

The Assyrian population of Sipūrġān in 1890 was about 1,800 persons divided among approximately 200 homes. There was also a small Armenian presence in the village amounting to 15 homes (Mālik, p. 4). Mīrzā' Dāwīd estimated that half of the inhabitants of Sipūrġān were killed or died from hunger and exhaustion during the flight from Urmia in 1918 and that half of the survivors immigrated to Russia and the United States with the remainder ending up in refugee camps in Iran and Iraq (Mālik, p. 5). Those immigrating to Russia joined earlier Assyrian immigrants who had settled in Armenia and Georgia following the Russo-Persian War of 1826-28 according to the terms of the Treaty of Torkamānčāy, article XIV, which stipulated a one-year period during which legal immigration out of Iran to Russian-controlled territory was allowed (Hurewitz, ed., I, p. 235; Naby, pp. 446-47).

In 1934, 203 of the 2,327 Assyrians in Chicago identified Sipūrġān as their ancestral village (*Assyrian Chronicle*, p. 11). The Young Sepurghans Association of Chicago ([Figure 3](#)) was formed as a social and philanthropic society to help Assyrians from Sipūrġān in the Diaspora and those that gradually returned to their village in Iran. In 1950 the village had 338 inhabitants (Razmārā, p. 262) which declined to 250 persons in 1966 (de Mauroy, p. 305).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Assyrian Chronicle (Chicago) 3/30, 1934, p. 11.

- J. F. Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England*, Oxford, 1992.
- E. L. Cutts, *Christians under the Crescent in Asia*, London, 1877.
- ‘Ali-Akbar Dehḳodā, *Loḡat-nāma*, Tehran, 1946-75.
- F. N. Heazell and Mrs. Margoliouth, *Kurds & Christians*, London, 1913.
- J. C. Hurewitz, ed., *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics. A Documentary Record*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., New Haven and London, 1975-79.
- A. J. Maclean and W. H. Browne, *The Catholicos of the East and his People: being the Impressions of Five Years’ Work in the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Assyrian Mission*, London, 1892.
- G. D. Malech, *History of the Syrian Nation and the Old Evangelical-Apostolic Church of the East*, Minneapolis, 1910.
- D. G. Mālik, *Bēt ma‘mrā’ w-šarbtā’ d-mālikē’ d- Sipūrḡān* (The house and genealogy of the Maliks of Sopurḡan), unpublished manuscript, 1922.
- H. de Mauroy, “Chrétien en Iran,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 24/3-4, 1974, p. 305.
- Missionary Herald* 36, 1841, p. 391; 66, 1870, pp. 189-91, 254-57, 402-3.
- M. Mo‘in, *A Persian Dictionary II*, Tehran, 1964.
- Eden Naby, “Les Assyriens d’Union soviétique,” *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 16/3-4, 1974, pp. 445-57.
- Ḥ.-‘A. Razmārā, ed., *Farhang-e joḡrāfiā’i-e Irān: Āādiḥā IV. Ostān-e 3 va 4 Ādarbāyjān*, Tehran, 1951.
- S. Sado, “Nestorians of Urmia in the Early 1860’s,” *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Society* 6/2, 1992, pp. 49-59.
- D. Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913*, Louvain, 2000.