

# THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY IN IRAQ IN THE 20TH CENTURY, YEREVAN, 2016

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## SUMMARY

Although the roots of the Armenian reorganized community in Iraq may be traced back to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century which was as a result of the forced relocation by Shah Abbas of the Armenians to Iran, some of whom later on moved to Mesopotamia, however, the number of the Armenians here increased by the arrival of approximately 20-25000 survivors of the Armenian Genocide together with many Assyrians (Aysories) who had fled from the Western Armenian provinces and some parts of Iranian Aderbajan (Atropatene-Atrpatakan<sup>1</sup>). These people who were mercilessly driven out of their homeland, were sheltered and housed at a camp in Baquba by the British military forces, where they stayed until 1920. After the uprising of the Arab liberals (The Great Revolution of 1920), the British military forces were compelled to move the Armenians to another camp situated in Nato Omar where they were to stay until the end of the 1920s.

After the successful repatriation of about 9000 Armenians late 1921 and beginning of 1922, the remaining few thousands had no alternative but to settle down in Iraq, and like the legendary phoenix, found enough strength and courage to recover from their wounds, increase in number, prosper under the auspices of their Apostolic Mother Church, national schools and public organizations.

The present research is devoted to various aspects of the lives of these unfortunate people. It consists of an introduction, three chapters which, in their turn have relative subtitles, conclusion, an appendix, index and bibliography.

In the introduction, the topics and scope of the study are defined, the scientific novelty and the existing literature about this community's history and also the main unstudied sources, which we came across during our research work, also a brief sketch about the Armenian existence in Mesopotamia, from ancient times until the ill-fated WW1 and the Armenian Genocide.

The first chapter named "The Iraqi Armenians in Iraq in the 20<sup>th</sup> century", consists of three subtitles. The first subtitle is about the refugees' arrival and their placement in the 3000 tent-city camp, which was prepared for the Armenian and Assyrian refugees just before their arrival in August 1918. More than 10000 Armenians perished on their way to Iraq. Here, we have presented various aspects of the refugees' lives in the light of archival documents, which had not been accessible to researchers of this community. Because of the continuous unstable and unpredictable political situation throughout Iraq's modern history, i.e. from the time of the independence in 1921 and the formation

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<sup>1</sup> In ancient and medieval times Iranian Atropatene-Atrpatakan was situated to the south-east of Great Armenia.

of Iraqi government, the archival documents in question, were safely kept intact. We had the chance and opportunity to study these documents in Baghdad and make necessary resolutions to the number and activities of Armenian refugees. Subtitle 2 and 3 of this chapter, are devoted to the invaluable role of the Armenian Apostolic and Armenian Catholic churches and philanthropic organizations in assisting the deportees to overcome their sufferings and start a new life. The second chapter consists of two subtitles, the first being the economy and its impact on the lives of the newly formed society, the role of Armenian traders in the development of the country's economy etc. In the second subtitle we have presented the activities of the public organizations, founded after settlement of the refugees in this totally strange country.

Much attention is given to describing the role of educational-cultural life of the community, schools (Armenian Apostolic and Armenian Catholic), theater and music, literary-artistic, fine arts, printing and press which represent the spiritual and mental support for the survival of a nation, who were forced out of their fatherland, cut off from their roots and anchored in a strange land.

After the revolution of 1958 and afterwards, the first Ba'athi takeover in 1963, there was a continuous political unrest in the country which resulted in substantial emigration of Christians including the Armenians. However, the second bloodless Ba'athi coup d'état in 1968 brought some kind of stability to the country from which the Armenians also benefited and started rebuilding their cultural institutions, renovated their churches and once more proved that they were honest, dutiful and lawful citizens.

The conclusion sums up the one hundred-year story of the deported Armenians, mostly from the historical Vaspurakan district and other parts of Western Armenia and Cilicia. Because of the present political, economical and insecure situation in Iraq, Armenians as well as other Christians are compelled to emigrate again, but now from a country, which at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century hosted and sheltered them, giving the opportunity of a new and productive life, which they fully accomplished to the benefit of the Armenian people as well as to the Iraqi hospitable state and people.

The appendix consists of various letters and documents exchanged between the Armenian Diocese in Iraq, the Refugee Committee, correspondence about the repatriation of the Armenians, communication between the king of Iraq and the Holy See of Edjmiatsin, also statistical data of the refugees, pictures of churches and archival documents and the map of Iraq.