

The Assyrian Experience: Sources for the Study of the 19th and 20th Centuries

Harvard College Library, March-April 1999.

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- [1] The Widener Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, was the site of an exhibit entitled "The Assyrian Experience: Sources for the Study of the 19th and 20th Centuries" from March to April 1999. This was the second exhibit at Harvard University devoted to an aspect of the history and culture of modern Assyrians, the first having been Eden Naby's photo exhibit, "Assyrian Christian Architecture of Iran," mounted at the Center for the Study of World Religions in the fall of 1998.
- [2] Organized by Eden Naby and Michael Hopper, Head, Middle Eastern Division, Harvard College Library, the exhibit included some 200 items chosen to illustrate the great variety of materials that are available at the Harvard Library for research on the Assyrians. The Harvard Library's collection of material on the Assyrians is probably the largest in the United States. The collection includes material in the Syriac language (both classical and modern) and in numerous other languages as well as material in a variety of formats, including books, periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, photographs, posters, sound recordings, videotapes, and cd-roms. Materials selected for the exhibition exemplified the range and depth of the collection and provided an overview of the major aspects of Assyrian life during the 19th and 20th centuries.
- [3] The collecting of Assyrian materials, their preservation, and the publications emanating from Harvard University are all made possible largely through income from the David B. Perley Memorial Assyrian Fund established in 1979 by Dr. and Mrs. Richard Redvanly and the Assyrian community.
- [4] To accompany the exhibition Ms. Naby and Mr. Hopper prepared an exhibition catalog published under the same title as the exhibit. The 176-page exhibition catalog includes an introduction to the exhibit, a case-by-case description of the exhibit cases each accompanied by a brief introduction and a selected reading relating to the case, and a selected bibliography on the Assyrians and the Syriac language in the Harvard Library. (For information on obtaining copies of the catalog please contact Michael Hopper at [mhopper@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:mhopper@fas.harvard.edu)).

- [5] In conjunction with the opening of the exhibit on March 7, 1999, Professor James F. Coakley, Houghton Library and the Department of Near East Languages and Civilizations, presented the inaugural lecture of The Mishael and Lillie Naby Assyrian Lecture Fund. The Mishael and Lillie Naby Assyrian Lecture Fund was established in 1997 by the daughter and son of Reverend Mishael Naby (1898–1980) and Rabi Lillie Yohannan Naby (1906–91), two Assyrians from the Urmia region of Iran whose lives were disrupted but not destroyed by the massacre of the Assyrians during World War I. The fund provides for the hosting of one or more lectures, on an annual basis, at Harvard University, on a topic related to Assyrian culture and history during the medieval and modern periods.
- [6] Professor Coakley's lecture entitled, "Syriac from Script to Print, 1539–1954," illustrated with numerous color slides, traced the evolution of Syriac script from manuscript to printed page while comparing and contrasting various hands and typefaces. Professor Coakley plans to publish his lecture complete with illustrations at a future date.
- [7] Despite a New England snowstorm and the resulting icy highways the same day, the inaugural lecture and the opening of the exhibit were well attended by more than 60 Assyrians and other interested individuals traveling from as far away as New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Jersey. A special highlight of the evening was a Chai-Kada reception hosted by the local Bet Nahrain Assyrian Association.