

= Simele massacre =

The Simele massacre (Syriac : ????? ????? pramta d @-@ Simele , Arabic : ????? ??? ma?ba?at Summayl) was a massacre committed by the armed forces of the Kingdom of Iraq during a campaign systematically targeting the Assyrians of northern Iraq in August 1933 . The term is used to describe not only the massacre in Simele , but also the killing spree that took place among 63 Assyrian villages in the Dohuk and Mosul districts that led to the deaths of between 5 @, @ 000 and 6 @, @ 000 Assyrians .

= = Background = =

= = = The Assyrians of the mountains = = =

The majority of the Assyrians affected by the massacres were adherents of the Church of the East (often dubbed Nestorian) , who originally inhabited the mountainous Hakkari and Barwari regions covering parts of the modern provinces of the Hakkâri , ?rnak and Van in Turkey and Dohuk in Iraq , with a population ranging between 75 @, @ 000 and 150 @, @ 000 . Most of these Assyrians were massacred during the Genocide of 1915 , at the hands of the Ottoman Turks . The rest endured two winter marches to Urmia in 1915 and to Hamadan in 1918 . Many of them were relocated to refugee camps by the British in Baquba and later to Habbaniyah , and in 1921 some were enlisted in the pro @-@ British Assyrian Levies which helped quell Kurdish revolts in the British Mandate of Mesopotamia . Most Hakkari Assyrians were resettled after 1925 in a cluster of villages in northern Iraq . Some of the villages where the Assyrians settled were leased directly by the government , while others belonged to Kurdish landlords who had the right to evict them at any time .

The Assyrians did not share an amicable relation with their neighbours . Their historical feud with the Kurds , which culminated in 1915 , was centuries old . Bitterness between the Assyrians and the Arabs was reported by British historians as far back as 1920 . This was made worse by the British officers of the Levies who encouraged the Assyrians to think that they were first @-@ class troops , which had the effect of increasing the natural pride of the Assyrians . This , coupled with the fact that the British and Assyrian Levies succeeded in suppressing Kurdish revolts when the Iraqi Army failed created an inferiority complex among some Iraqi corps towards the British and the Assyrians .

The conclusion of the British mandate of Iraq caused considerable unease among the Assyrians who felt betrayed by the British . For them , any treaty with the Iraqis had to take into consideration their desire for an autonomous position similar to the Ottoman Millet system . The Iraqis , on the other hand felt that the Assyrian demands were , alongside the Kurdish disturbances in the north , a conspiracy by the British to divide Iraq by agitating its minorities .

= = = Iraqi independence and crisis = = =

With Iraqi independence , the new Assyrian spiritual @-@ temporal leader , Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII the Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East , demanded the Assyrians be given autonomy within Iraq , seeking support from the United Kingdom and pressing his case before the League of Nations in 1932 . His followers planned to resign from the Assyrian Levies (a military force under the command of the British that served British interests) and to re @-@ group as a militia and concentrate in the north , creating a de facto Assyrian enclave .

In spring 1933 , Malik Yaqu , a former Levies ' officer , was engaged in a propaganda campaign on behalf of Mar Shimun trying to persuade the Assyrians not to apply for an Iraqi nationality or accept the settlement offered to them by the central government . Yaqu was accompanied by 200 armed men which was seen as an act of defiance by the Iraqi authorities . His activities caused distress among the Kurds and the Iraqi government started sending its army to the Dohuk region in order to intimidate Yaqu and dissuade the Assyrians from joining his cause .

In June 1933 , the Mar Shimun was invited to Baghdad for negotiations with Hikmat Sulayman 's

government and was detained there after refusing to relinquish temporal authority . He would eventually be exiled to Cyprus .

= = Massacres = =

= = = Clashes at Dirabun = = =

On 21 July 1933 , more than 600 Assyrians , led by Malik Yaqu , crossed the border into Syria in hope of receiving asylum from the French Mandate of Syria . They were however disarmed and refused asylum , and were subsequently given light arms and sent back to Iraq on 4 August . They then decided to surrender themselves to the Iraqi Army . While crossing the Tigris in the Assyrian village of Dirabun , a clash erupted between the Assyrians and an Iraqi army brigade . Despite the advantage of heavy artillery , the Iraqis were driven back to their military base in Dirabun . The Assyrians , convinced that the army had targeted them deliberately , attacked the army 's barracks with little success . They were driven back to Syria upon the arrival of Iraqi aeroplanes . The Iraqi army lost 33 soldiers during the fighting while the Assyrian irregulars took fewer casualties . Historians do not agree on who started the clashes at the border . The British Administrative Inspector for Mosul Lieutenant Colonel R. R. Stafford wrote that the Assyrians had no intention of clashing with the Iraqis , while the Iraqi historian and son of the prominent Arab nationalist Sati ' al @-@ Husri , Khaldun Husry claims that it was Yaqu 's men who provoked the army at Dirabun . Husry supports propaganda rumours which circulated among Iraqi nationalist newspapers of the Assyrians mutilating the bodies of killed Iraqi soldiers , which further enraged the Iraqi public opinion against the Assyrians .

= = = Beginning of the massacres = = =

Even though all military activities ceased by 6 August , stories of atrocities committed by the Assyrians at Dirabun and rumours that Christians were planning to blow bridges up and poison drinking water in major Iraqi cities spread . According to some historians , the agitation against Assyrians was also encouraged by Rashid Ali al @-@ Gaylani 's Arab nationalist government , which saw it as a distraction to the continuous Shiite revolt in the southern part of the country .

The Iraqi army led by Bakr Sidqi , an experienced brigadier general of Kurdish ethnicity , moved north in order to crush the Assyrians once and for all . They started executing every Assyrian male found in the mountainous Bekher region between Zakho and Duhok starting from 8 August . Assyrian civilians were transported in military trucks from Zakho and Dohuk to uninhabited places in batches of eight or ten where they were shot with machine guns and run over by heavy armoured cars to make sure no one survived .

= = = Looting of villages = = =

While these killings were taking place , nearby Kurdish , Arab and Yazidi tribes were encouraged to loot Assyrian villages . Kurdish tribes of Gulli , Sindi and Selivani were encouraged by the mayor of Zakho to loot villages to the northeast of Simele , while Yazidis and Kurds also raided Assyrian villages in Shekhan and Amadiya . Most women and children from those villages took refuge in Simele and Dohuk .

On 9 August , the Arab tribes of Shammar and Jubur started crossing the east bank of the Tigris and raiding Assyrian villages on the plains to the south of Dohuk . They were mostly driven by the loss of a large amount of their own livestock to drought in the previous years .

More than 60 Assyrian villages were looted . Even though women and children were mostly left to take refuge in neighbouring villages , men were sometimes rounded up and handed over to the army , by whom they were duly shot . Some villages were completely burned down and most of them were later inhabited by Kurds .

= = = The massacre of Simele = = =

The town of Simele became the last refuge for Assyrians fleeing from the looted villages . The mayor of Zakho arrived with a military force on 8 and 9 August to disarm the city . During that time thousands of refugees flocked around the police post in the town , where they were told by officials that they would be safe under the Iraqi flag . 10 August saw the arrival of Kurdish and Arab looters who , undeterred by the local police , took away the freshly cut wheat and barley . During the night of 10 ? 11 August , the Arab inhabitants of Simele joined the looting . The Assyrian villagers could only watch as their Arab neighbours drove their flocks before them .

On 11 August the villagers were ordered to leave the police post and return to their homes , which they began to do with some reluctance . As they were heading back Iraqi soldiers in armoured cars arrived , and the Iraqi flag flying over the police post was pulled down . Without warning or obvious provocation , the troops began to fire indiscriminately against the defenseless Assyrians . Ismael Abbawi Tohalla , the commanding officer , then ordered his troops not to target women . Stafford , describes the ensuing massacre as follows :

A cold blooded and methodical massacre of all the men in the village then followed , a massacre which for the black treachery in which it was conceived and the callousness with which it was carried out , was as foul a crime as any in the blood stained annals of the Middle East . The Assyrians had no fight left in them , partly because of the state of mind to which the events of the past week had reduced them , largely because they were disarmed . Had they been armed it seems certain that Ismail Abawi Tohalla and his bravos would have hesitated to take them on in fair fight . Having disarmed them , they proceeded with the massacre according to plan . This took some time . Not that there was any hurry , for the troops had the whole day ahead of them . Their opponents were helpless and there was no chance of any interference from any quarter whatsoever . Machine gunners set up their guns outside the windows of the houses in which the Assyrians had taken refuge , and having trained them on the terror stricken wretches in the crowded rooms , fired among them until not a man was left standing in the shambles . In some other instance the blood lust of the troops took a slightly more active form , and men were dragged out and shot or bludgeoned to death and their bodies thrown on a pile of dead .

In his depiction of the massacre , Mar Shimun , mentions that :

Girls were raped and made to march naked before Iraqi commanders . Children were run over by military cars . Pregnant women were bayoneted . Children were flung in the air and pierced on to the points of bayonets . Holy books were used for the burning of the massacred .

The official Iraqi account that the Assyrian casualties were sustained during a short battle with Kurdish and Arab tribes has been discredited by all historians . Khaldun Husry claims that the mass killing was not premeditated , and that the responsibility lies on the shoulder of , Ismael Abbawi , a junior officer in the army .

On 13 August , Bakr Sidqi moved his troops to Alqosh , where he planned to inflict a further massacre on the Assyrians who found refuge there .

= = Targeted villages = =

Today , most of these villages are inhabited by Kurds . The main campaign lasted until 16 August , but violent raids on Assyrians were being reported up to the end of the month . The campaign resulted in one third of the Assyrian population of Iraq fleeing to Syria .

= = Aftermath = =

On 18 August , Iraqi troops entered Mosul where they were given an enthusiastic reception by its Muslim inhabitants . Triumphant arches were erected and decorated with melons pierced with daggers , symbolising the heads of murdered Assyrians . The crown prince Ghazi himself came to the city to award ' victorious ' colours to those military and tribal leaders who participated in the

massacres and the looting . Anti @-@ Christian feeling was at its height in Mosul , and the Christians of the city were largely confined to their homes during the whole month in fear of further action by the frenzied mob .

The Iraqi army later paraded in the streets of Baghdad in celebration of its victories . Bakr Sidqi was promoted ; he later led Iraq 's first military coup and became prime minister . Popular support for a compulsory conscription bill rose after the massacres .

Immediately after the massacre and the repression of the alleged Assyrian uprising , the Iraqi government demanded a conscription bill . Non @-@ Assyrian Iraqi tribesmen offered to serve in the Iraqi army in order to counter the Assyrians . In late August , the government of Mosul demanded that the central government ' ruthlessly ' stamp out the rebellion , eliminate all foreign influence in Iraqi affairs , and take immediate steps to enact a law for compulsory military service . The next week , 49 Kurdish tribal chieftains joined in a pro @-@ conscription telegram to the government , expressing thanks for punishing the ' Assyrian insurgents ' , stating that a " nation can be proud of itself only through its power , and since evidence of this power is the army , " they requested compulsory military service . Rashid Ali al @-@ Gaylani presented the bill to the parliament , his government fell , however , before it was legislated and Jamil al @-@ Midfai 's government enacted conscription in February 1934 .

From the nationalists ' point of view , the Assyrian Levies were British proxies to be used by their ' masters ' to destroy the new Iraqi state whose independence the British had consistently opposed . The British allowed their Assyrian auxiliary troops to retain their arms and granted them special duty and privileges : guarding military air installations and receiving higher pay than the Iraqi Arab recruits . Under British protection , the Assyrian Levies did not become Iraqi citizens after until 1924 . The nationalists believed the British were hoping for the Assyrians to destroy Iraq 's internal cohesion by becoming independent and by inciting others such as the Kurds to follow their example .

The massacres and looting had a deep psychological impact on the Assyrians . Stafford reported their low morale upon arrival in Alqosh :

When I visited Alqosh myself on August 21st I found the Assyrians , like the Assyrians elsewhere , utterly panic @-@ stricken . Not only were they disturbed , but their spirit was completely broken . It was difficult to recognize in their cowed demeanour the proud mountaineers whom everyone had known so well and admired so much for the past dozen years .

Because of the massacre , around 6 @,@ 200 Assyrians left Nineveh plains immediately for the neighbouring French Mandate of Syria , and were later joined by 15 @,@ 000 refugees the following years . They concentrated in the Jazira region and built a number of villages on the banks of the Khabur River .

King Faysal , who recently returned to Iraq from a medical vacation , was very stressed during the crisis . His health deteriorated even more during the hot summer days in Baghdad . The British Chargé d 'Affaires met him in his Pajamas squatting in his bed on 15 Augusts where he denied that a massacre was committed in Simele . Faysal left Iraq again on 2 September seeking a cooler climate in London where he died 5 days later .

Mar Shimun who was detained since June 1933 was forced into exile along with his extended family despite initial British reluctance . He was flown to by an RAF plane to Cyprus in 18 Augusts , and later to the United States in 1949 , thus later forcing the head of the Assyrian Church of the East to relocate to Chicago where it remained until 2015 , with the newly consecrated Mar Gewargis 3rd returning the patriarchal seat of the Assyrian Church of the East to North Iraq . In 1948 , Mar Shimun met with the representatives of Iraq , Syria and Iran in Washington subsequently calling upon his followers to " live as loyal citizens wherever they resided in the Middle East " relinquishing his role as a temporal leader and the nationalistic role of the church . This left a power vacuum in Assyrian politics that was filled by the Assyrian Universal Alliance in 1968 .

= = = Responsibility for the massacres = = =

Official British sources estimate the total number of all Assyrians killed during August 1933 at

around 600 , while Assyrian sources put the figure at 3 @,@ 000 . Historians disagree as to who holds responsibility for ordering the mass killings . Stafford blames Arab nationalists , most prominently Rashid Ali al @-@ Gaylani and Bakr Sidqi . According to him , Iraqi Army officers despised the Assyrians , and Sidqi in particular was vocal of his hate for them . This view was also shared by British officials who recommended to King Faysal not to send him to the north during the crisis . Husry , on the other hand , blamed the Assyrians for starting the crisis and absolved Sidqi from ordering the mass killing in Simele . He hinted that King Faysal I was the authority who might have issued orders to exterminate Assyrian males . Kanan Makiya , a leftist Iraqi historian , presents the actions taken by the military as a manifestation of the nationalist anti @-@ imperialist paranoia which was to culminate with the Ba 'athists ascent to power in the 1960s . Fadhil al @-@ Barrak , an Iraqi Ba 'athist historian , puts Sidqi as the author of the whole campaign and the ensuing massacres . For him the events were part of a history of Iraq prior to the true nationalist revolution .

= = = British role = = =

Iraqi ? British relations faced a short cooling down period during and after the crisis . The Iraqis were previously encouraged by the British to detain Mar Shimun in order to defuse tensions . The British were as well wary of Iraqi military leaders and recommended to transfer Bakr Sidqi , a senior ethnic Kurdish general who was stationed in Mosul , to another region due to his open animosity towards the Assyrians . Later , they had to intervene to dissuade King Faysal from personally leading a tribal force to punish the Assyrians . The general Iraqi public opinion promoted by newspapers , was that the Assyrians were proxies used by the British to undermine the newly established kingdom , was also shared by some leading officials including the prime minister himself . The British and European protests following the massacre only confirmed to them that the " Assyrian rebellion " was the work of European imperialism .

Both King George V of England and Cosmo Gordon Lang the Bishop of Canterbury took a personal interest in the Assyrian affair . British representatives at home demanded from Faysal that Sidqi and other culprits be tried and punished . The massacres were seen in Europe as a Jihad against a small Christian minority .

In the long term , however , the British backed Iraq and rejected an international inquiry into the killings , fearing that this may provoke further massacres against Christians . They also didn 't insist on punishing the culprits , who were now seen as heroes by Iraqis . The official British stance was to defend the Iraqi government for its perseverance and patience in dealing with the crisis and to attribute the massacres to rogue army units . A report on the battle of Dirabun blames the Assyrians , defends the actions of the Iraqi Army , and commends Bakr Sidqi as a good officer .

The change in British attitude towards the Assyrians gave rise to the notion of the British betrayal among some Assyrian circles . An idea which first gained popularity after 1918 when the Assyrians who were concentrated in Urmia did not receive the British relief which led to their massacre by the Turks and Kurds and their deportation to Hamadan .

= = Cultural impact and legacy = =

7 August officially became known as Martyrs Day or National Day of Mourning by the Assyrian community in memory for the Simele massacre , as it was declared so by the Assyrian Universal Alliance in 1970 .

In 2004 , the Syrian government banned an Assyrian political organization from commemorating the event and threatened arrests if any were to break the ban .

Assyrian music artist Shlimon Bet Shmuel has written a song about the event . A number of poems and stories have been written about the incident , including one by the American William Saroyan , titled " Seventy Thousand Assyrians " , written in 1934 ;

... We 're washed up as a race , we 're through , it 's all over , why should I learn to read the (Assyrian) language ? We have no writers , we have no news ? well , there is a little news : once in a while the English encourage the Arabs to massacre us , that is all . It 's an old story , we know all

about it .

The Simele massacre inspired Raphael Lemkin to create the concept of genocide . In 1933 , Lemkin made a presentation to the Legal Council of the League of Nations conference on international criminal law in Madrid , for which he prepared an essay on the Crime of Barbarity as a crime against international law . The concept of the " crime of barbarity " evolved into the idea of genocide , and was based on the Simele massacre and the Armenian Genocide , later to include the Jewish Holocaust .

The massacres also had a deep impact on the newly established Kingdom of Iraq . Kanan Makiya argues that the killing of Assyrians transcended tribal , religious , ideological and ethnic barriers as Sunni Arabs , Shia Arabs , Sunni Kurds , Sunni Turkmen , Shia Turkmen , and Yazidis ; Monarchists , Islamists , nationalists , royalists , conservatives , Leftists , federalists , and tribalists , were all united in their anti @-@ Assyrian and anti @-@ Christian sentiments . According to him , the pogrom was " the first genuine expression of national independence in a former Arab province of the Ottoman Empire " and that the killing of Assyrian Christians was seen as a national duty .

The British were standing firmly behind the leaders of their former colony during the crisis , despite the popular animosity towards them . General Headlam of the British military mission in Baghdad was quoted saying " the government and people have good reasons to be thankful to Colonel Bakr Sidqi " .