



SYRIAC PEOPLE IN SYRIA

Syriac people, also known as Assyrian, Aramean, Chaldean, are indigenous people of the Middle East. The homeland of Syriac people is Bethnahrin. Bethnahrin means the land between two rivers, namely Euphrates and Tigris. The Fertile Crescent is commonly used to describe this great civilization, too. Syriac people are not a people who settled in the Middle East and Mesopotamia by wave of migration or as invaders.

They are autochthones in the Levant and they conserved their presence during centuries despite all difficulties. They are the most ancient and deeply rooted people among the Middle Eastern nations.

Throughout their six thousand year history, Syriac people have been living in the countries of divided Mesopotamia; Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Lebanon. Meanwhile, Syriac people in every period played crucial role in the construction and developments of above mentioned countries.

The Mesopotamian Civilization has been marked with the significant and vital developments of Syriac people created during the centuries. Syria has witnessed to these changes from the beginning. Even the name of Syria derived from the Syriac. The name of Syria was used as a geographic name by Persians, Rome, Arabs and Ottomans and survived until today. Syria has been the homeland of Syriac people and thus they lived there during the history and they developed civilizations. Consequently, Syriac people are the oldest and indigenous people of Syria.

Syriac people adopted Christianity from its inception and spread it from the Middle East to the Far East - a very large geographical area. The culture of Christianity, once created by the Syriacs, is still present in the Middle East. Meanwhile, upon Christological and theological divergences in the first centuries, divisions occurred among Syriacs. These divisions lasted by several churches, namely; Syriac-Orthodox, Syriac-Catholic, Eastern Apostolic Church, Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean-Catholic, Greek (Rum) Catholic, Greek (Rum) Orthodox, Maronite Church and Protestant Church.

Syriac people suffered from all hegemonic powers which have controlled the Middle East. The Arab conquest and Islam had a negative effect upon Syriac people in every aspect. Syriacs and Christians have been considered and accepted as “second class” citizens and they

were subject to special tax.

Around the year 1900 Christians consisted of 30% of Ottoman population and Asia Minor was nearly all inhabited by Christians. Soon, the Christian populations and Syriac people's presence in Anatolia dwindled until it reached zero.

During the First World War, Syria and Lebanon were under French sovereignty. In 1920 with the international treaty Syria became a mandate of France. Lebanon, which has a significant Syriac population, belonged to Antioch East Maronite Church, and separated from Syria on 01 September 1920. Because of this separation, a new split occurred between Syriac of Syria and those of Lebanon. In Syria, followers of Greek Orthodox Church, Greek Catholic Church and Syriac Orthodox Church are dominant.

At this time Syria was under French mandate thus Syriacs who fled from Turabdin, Diyarbakır and Urfa regions have come to Syria. Under the French mandate, the migrated Syriac people along with the indigenous Syriac people of Syria took their places at the improvement of Syria at economic, educational, cultural, military and in political domains without any privileged status. The Antioch Syriac Orthodox Patriarch which had been exiled from Turkey had been installed at the Homs city by French authorities

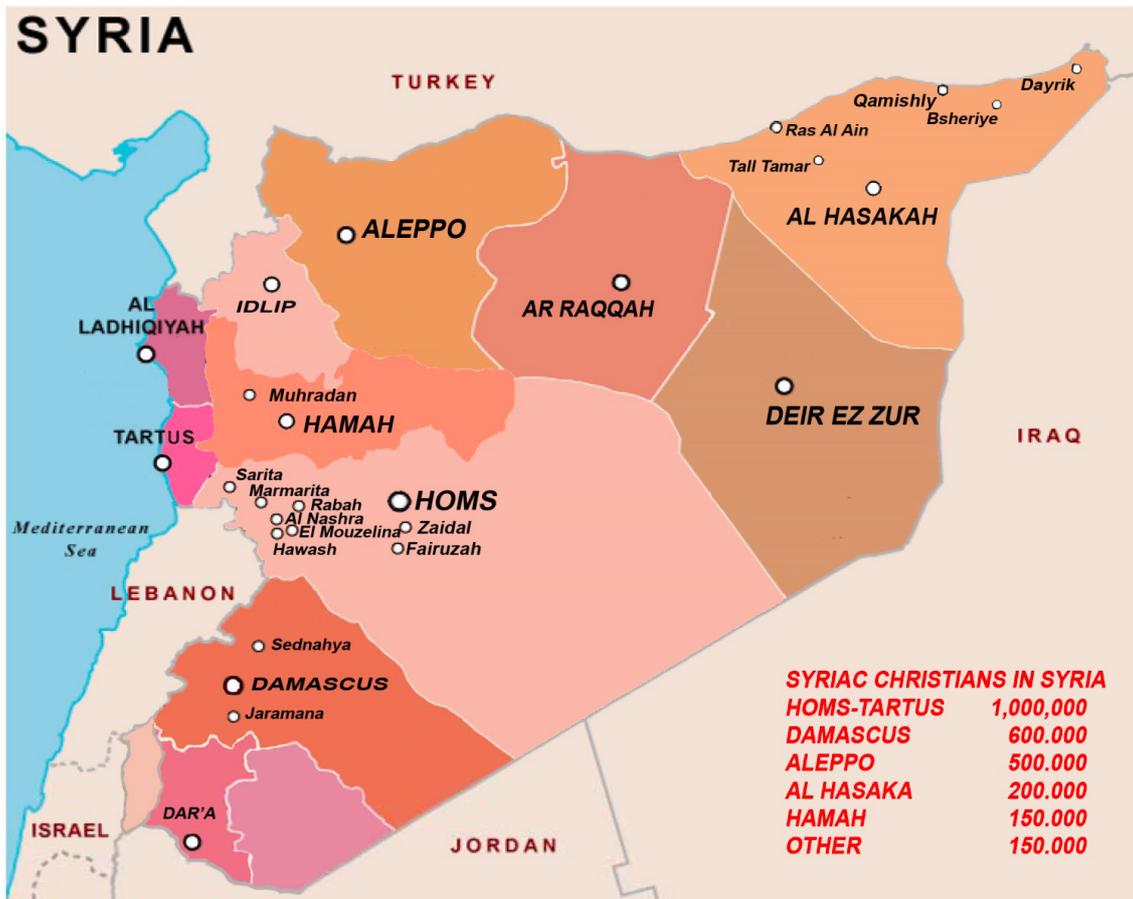
At the aftermath of 1933 Simele Massacres in Iraq, tens of thousands of Syriac people were transferred around Habur region under the French authority. By the objective to create an ally at the region for Syriac people, French authorities set up military units under the name of "Assyrian-Chaldean battalions".

Moreover, Syriac people had been constantly subject to harassments, conflicts and discriminative policies. Syriac people are still without any constitutional guarantees in the Middle East countries.

Today, Syriac people are present in different countries of Levant. There are important Syriacs present in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey and little quantity in Iran. In all mentioned countries, Syriac people are deprived from democratic, modern and constitutional rights. In Iraq, Syriac people faced great extinction threats and have had thousands of victims from 2003 to now.

Historically, Syriac people had been divided to different denominations and groups in Syria. This reality is the centre of difficulties and different problems. Additionally, the executed policies destroyed all dynamics and cultural values of the people. Separatist policies affected all groups and ethnicities and broke down the unity of the Syriac people.

Now Syria is engulfed in civil conflict, and the Syriac people face a great dilemma. In Syria, Catholics and Orthodox (Syriacs) are densely living at the region of Jazeera. Greek Catholics and Greek Orthodox (Syriacs) are in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama and at Latakia regions. The population of the Syriac people is about 2.6 million in Syria.



There are not official and objective studies and researches about the exact number of Syriac Christians in Syria, but normally they make about 12% of the population in Syria and consequently they have about 2,600,000 people deployed in the entire territory. The Syriac Christians are mainly in the provinces of Homs, Tartous, Hasaka, Damascus and Aleppo.

The Wadi Al-Nasara area makes up the largest gathering of Syriac Christians in Syria and they are about 98% of the population.

Al-Hasakah province is one of the largest gatherings of Syriac Christians in terms of ratio - about 30% of the population.

In Damascus there are large gathering of Syriac Christians - around 20% of the population

Finally, in Aleppo too there are large gathering of Syriac Christians - around 20% of the population.

Highlighted areas of Christians in Syria

Homs and Tartous Christian Valley (Wadi Al-Nasara): It is the only region in Syria where the Syriac Christians are the majority with 65% ~ 70% of the population in the area. The most important towns and villages in the Christians valley are: Qalet Al-Hesen, Marmarita, Hawash, Zueitina, Mzaineh, Al-Nasra, Mashta Azar and Mashta Al-Helw, Almshtaih, Safita, Drekish. In other towns and cities like Qraiten, Rabah, in the old neighborhoods of Homs like Bab Sbaa', Bab Dreb, Hamidieh, and new neighborhoods: Nezha and Waa'r and in the suburbs like Al-Rableh, Fairouzeh and Zaidal. The number of Syriac Christians in these areas is about 1,000,000.

City of Damascus and its countryside: The presence of Syriac Christians is concentrated in several Damascus neighborhoods including: Kassaa', Bab Touma, Bab Sharq, Al-Midan and Al-Tabbale and in its suburbs: Doumar, Harasta, Barzeh, Jaramana, Kashkool, Dwylah and others, with Syriac presence in Qalamoun Mountains in Maa'loula, Saydnaia, Maa'ret Saydnaia, Yabroud and Nabek. The number of Syriac Christians in these areas is about 600,000.

Hasaka province: Syriac Christians are densely populated in the cities of Al-Hasaka, Al-Qamishli, Al-Malikiyah (Derik) and in some towns and villages like Raas Al-A'in, Amouda, Qahtanie, Tal-Tamer, Tal-Tal, Tal-Nasri, Tal-Kharita, among many other villages. The number of Syriac Christians in these areas is about 200,000 and they comprise about 25-30 % of the population.

Aleppo Province: Syriac Christians are densely populated in many neighborhoods including Azizia, Telal, Syrian Qadime, Syrian Jdaideh, Midan and Slemanie. The number of Syriac Christians in these areas is about 500,000 and they make up about 20% of the population of the city of Aleppo.

Hama Province: Syriac Christians live in some central neighborhoods of the city, and in the northern and western rural areas like Mhardeh, Al-Sqelbieh, Beida and Kfarbou. The number of Christians in these areas is about 150,000 and they make up about 11% from the population of the province.

In the Latakia countryside, there are several towns and villages with Syriac Christian population and the well known is the district of Kasab. There are also large concentration of Syriac Christians in the city of Tartous, the Druze Mountains and Horan. There is also small presence in Idleb, Dara'a, Der Al-Zour and Al-Raqqa provinces. Syriac Christians in these areas are about 150,000.