Fatal Ambivalence: Missionaries in Ottoman Kurdistan, 1839-43

by

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For my family, with love
Daniel, Kaity, Mom, and Grandma Gloria
But especially for my Dad
Whose love of history is an inspiration to me always

And with gratitude to my advisors
Bruce Masters
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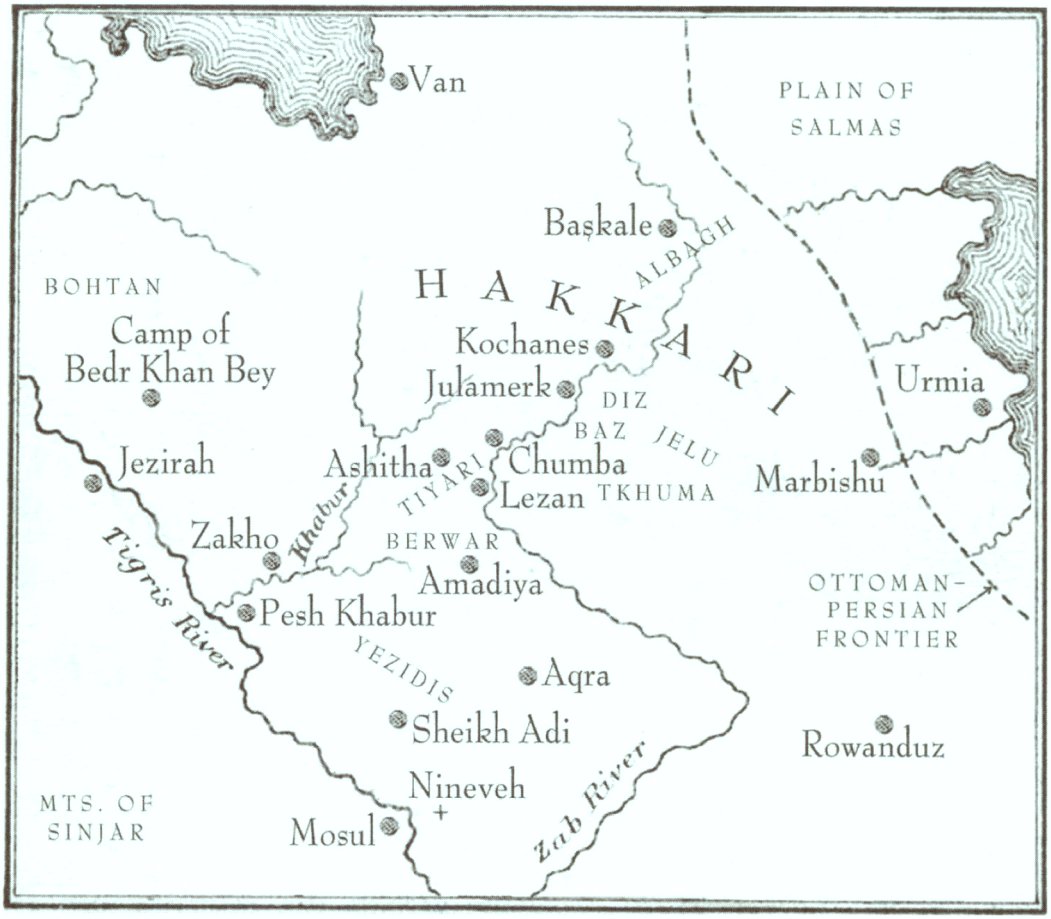

Hakkari and Central Kurdistan

"This sudden interest so explicitly and so actively shown on the part of other Christian nations towards a tribe of people [The Nestorians]…has called them forth into new importance in the eyes of the Mohammedans, and will undoubtedly be the first step to their overthrow, unless they are assisted in such an emergency by sound advice, or the friendly interference of the representatives of brotherly Christian nations at Constantinople... It will be the most cruel thing imaginable, to have excited so much attention from surrounding powers towards the condition of these able, courageous, and pious mountaineers, only to leave them to the tender mercies of Mohammedanism."

–William Ainsworth, June 1840.

Introductory Remarks

In July 1843, a coalition of Kurds from the Ottoman districts of Bohtan, Hakkari and Rewanduz under the direction of Bedir Khan Beg and Nurallah Beg, ransacked almost all of the Nestorian Christian villages in the Hakkari mountain region of Ottoman Kurdistan (southeast of Lake Van spanning what is today the border between Turkey and Iraq), killing up to 10,000 Nestorian Christians and enslaving many who were left behind.[1] The upsurge of violence occurred for complex reasons, though it set the stage for more catastrophic episodes in what became a very violent history of Kurdish-Christian relations in the following decades. The 1843 massacres not only represent a turn for the worst in intercommunal relations, they also shed light on an important failure on the part of the missionaries on the ground to see beyond their naïve idealism when they might have been able to mitigate the severity of a terrible tragedy.

This thesis analyzes the ways in which missionaries in Ottoman Kurdistan on the eve of the 1843 insurrection had ample opportunity to mediate the impending crisis, as they had the ears and had garnered the respect of the major leaders of both sides in the dispute. Their failure to do so is part circumstantial, part naïveté, and part

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[1] Casualty figures vary widely from the original estimate of 10,000 reported by Thomas Laurie, which appeared in the Times of *Times* of London that same year. American missionaries Edward Breath and Austin Wright put the number at 7,000 in the *Missionary Herald*, 42, no. 11 (November 1846), 378. The Anglican missionary, George Percy Badger, working with the surviving Nestorian Patriarch Mar Shimun to compile a list of losses suffered by each village, reported the number of casualties at 4,000 in George Percy Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals with the Narrative of a Mission to Mesopotamia and Coordistan in 1842-44, and of a Late Visit to Those Countries in 1850*, vol. I (London: Joseph Masters, 1852), 366-67.

preoccupation. As we shall see, the Anglican missionaries in particular spent much more time discussing how to foil the plans of other missionary sects than securingfor protection for the Nestorian population. Though the missionaries wrote endlessly about “brotherly love” and “political neutrality” (in the case of the Americans), these feelings were not appreciated by the Nestorian leadership who looked hopefully to the Westerners in their midst to change the status quo: their subjugation to the independent Kurdish Emirs as well as the Ottoman Kurdish Pashas. Upon their arrival, the missionaries clearly underestimated the depth of the poor relations between the Kurds and Christians and probably should have abandoned the mountain mission all together. Having decided it would be cruel to abandon the Nestorian population in such dire straits, the missionaries showed limited acumen and chose not to use all of the diplomatic means at their disposal to stave off the violence.

As a result, the missionaries, though arguably well-meaning and courageous individuals, did more harm than good in their efforts proselytize to the Nestorian Christian community living in the mountains of Ottoman Kurdistan. Both the Kurds and Nestorians of the Hakkari mountains are documented as war-like communities; societal relations were governed by the tribal code of “blood for blood.” The missionaries made these astute observations and tried to stay out of complex tribal politics. When they found that to be impossible and recognized the imminence of the Kurdish invasion, instead of calling for help or urging the stubborn Nestorian Patriarch to flee with his loyal subjects, the missionaries stood terrified by the wayside. With the onset of the Kurdish massacres, the missionaries may have narrowly escaped, but this episode was only the beginning to a course of retribution

and bloodshed that can be linked to the Armenian Genocide, for which the Kurds are often held responsible.[2]

Having recognized the error of their ways (and perhaps generally after witnessing the atrocities, for which the missionaries were blamed in the Western Press), 1843 also marked the beginning of a period in which the West (especially European governments) paid much closer attention to the Ottoman Empire's Christian communities from the stand point of foreign policy. This became evident when Britain and France pressured the Ottoman government during the Crimean War (1853) to consider them the true protectors of the Empire's Christians as opposed to Imperial Russia. The great powers also used their leverage to ensure the promulgation of the Hatt-ı Hümayun in 1856, which called for the full equality of the Empire's citizens. As for the American Federal Government in the decades after the 1840s, U.S. foreign policy was under the influence of isolationist pressures and the Western Hemisphere dominated Washington's interests. This remained the case, with a few exceptions, until U.S. involvement rose to the brink of direct action during the Kurdish-Armenian violence in the 1890s. After 1843, without the diplomatic clout in Istanbul or Washington for their cause, the American Protestant missionaries worked hard to change public opinion towards the plight of the Ottoman Nestorians through the media and other outlets.

This thesis explores the proposals made by many missionary historians, such as Gordon Taylor and John Joseph, who have argued that the strenuous efforts to

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[2] Joseph Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy 1810-1927*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 137. Grabill called the Nestorian massacres "a microcosm of the later Armenian massacres."

open a mission among the Nestorians magnified their threat in the eyes of Muslims and helped bring about their destruction. According to the Kurdish historian David McDowall, European interests in the region were "explosive and tragic" for the Nestorians, because it aroused divisions within the society that were not visible previously.[3] Historians are also suspicious of the missionary activity in Hakkari because they tend to link poor timing with casualty. This refers to the fact that Bedir Khan Beg's uprising occurred almost immediately after the American Protestant missionaries had completed construction of a "fortress-like" station in the town of Asheetha.[4] (See map, 2)

The research herein confirms that the missionaries (and we will draw a distinction between the Americans and Anglicans) operated by a code of non-intervention in local politics that makes these claims problematic. Additionally, Kurdish-Christian society in the far-moved recesses of Ottoman Kurdistan had already been in the process of redefinition before the arrival of the missionaries (Chapter 1). Since the voice of the Kurds is largely muted through the filter of the missionary sources, if Kurdish hostility was amplified by the missionary presence, it is difficult to say to what extent the aggression was directed at Christians generally or the Western agents directly. I have argued that the missionaries entered into the Hakkari region at a time when social relations had deteriorated to a point of no return. Unknowingly plunged into this inhospitable arena, the missionaries have bore an

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[3] David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2000), 40.
[4] Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992), 231.

unfair amount of blame for intercommunal violence that was beyond their control, whatever symbolic weight their presence may have carried with the native leaders.

The first chapter provides background information specific to the changing relations between the central Ottoman government and Kurdish tribal leaders in the eastern provinces where the massacre took place. It describes the nature of Kurdish-Nestorian society in the Hakkari mountains, which differed greatly from any other part of Kurdistan at the time because both communities were semi-independent (unlike in Persia or even outside of the mountainous region in Ottoman lands). At the same time as the American missionaries decided to expand their mission to the Nestorians in the mountains, having already spent five successful years with the Kurds and Nestorians at Urumiyah on the Persian side of the border (now Rezaieh in the Islamic Republic of Iran), the political climate of Hakkari entered a period of major transition and turmoil. This chapter provides substantial insights into the many forces at work altering the political and social landscape of the mountain region upon the arrival of the missionaries towards an understanding that the violence of 1843 was caused by culmination of many processes unrelated to the missionaries.

Chapter two answers two separate but interrelated questions. Firstly, what were the goals of the Protestant missions operating along the Ottoman-Persian frontier? Furthermore, how did the missions fit into the larger picture of Western relations with the Ottoman empire in the 1830s and 40s? These questions help set the stage for a discussion in chapter three of the specific missionary activity in Hakkari in the years preceding the massacre. I argue that the missionaries consciously took a back seat in matters of political significance because of their perceived priorities

imposed by both their faith and other missionaries back home. This chapter culminates with a discussion of another major missionary shortcoming in Kurdistan that was the interdenominational competition, which arguably distracted them from addressing the more pressing issues of the time.

To date, the 1843 Nestorian massacres have not formed the basis of a concentrated study on the ramifications of Christian missionary activity in the Ottoman Empire. Thus this thesis aims to add complexity to our understanding of these missionaries specifically as well as to present scholarship on missionaries generally, who have faced criticism for all sorts of transgressions ranging from ulterior political motivations[5] to hallucinating and promoting sectarian divisions in Mount Lebanon.[6] The 1843 massacres also had significant ramifications for the American missionary enterprise, which at that time was still concentrated in the Levant. (By 1844 there were less than 100 missionaries total in all of the Ottoman lands).[7] The massacres reshaped the way the American missionaries conceived of their responsibilities. This is because in the aftermath of the massacres, the Nestorian leadership railed against the missionaries for raising their false hopes and these complaints reverberated back in Istanbul. This point has been considered by the Turkish historian, Çağri Erhan, though the Nestorian community specifically and the

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[5] Jeremy Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians 1878-1896* (London: Frank Cass, 1993).
[6] Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 2-9, 25.
[7] Çağri Erhan, "Main Trends in Ottoman-American Relations," in Mustafa Aydin and Çağri Erhan eds., *Turkish-American Relations: Past, Present and Future* (London: Routledge, 2004), 12.

events of 1843 Hakkari do not factor into his discussion of the changing status of Ottoman-American relations.[8]

By focusing on Ottoman Kurdistan, this research also illuminates a part of the world of great modern significance, especially in light of the continued nationalist struggle of the Kurdish people, the roots of which can be traced back to the 19th century (though exact dates remain a matter of historical debate). Some scholars. such as Hakan Özoğlu, as well as the well known anthropologist of Kurdistan, Martin Van Bruinessen, argued that Bedir Khan Beg was only interested in greater autonomy under the Ottomans, and perhaps his nationalist characterization is a product of 20th century revisionism by an emergent Kurdish intelligentsia.[9] Though it is not within the scope of this thesis to take a side in the debate, the possibility that Kurdish leaders or their religious clerics began to agitate at this time for solidarity against the Ottomans (at the expense of the empire's Christians whom they perceived as collaborators), provides insights into another force which contributed to the complexity of Kurdistan upon the arrival of Christian missionaries.

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[8] Ibid., 12-4.

[9] Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 225. This is also the position Robert Olson, Wadie Jwaideh and Hazan Özoğlu have taken on Bedir Khan Beg's agenda. Özoğlu used the term "protonationalism" to describe him.

Chapter one

Unexpected Difficulties: Background History of Kurdistan

"…It is Kurdistan… the farthest frontier [of the Empire], a merciless place, where governors manage only by dissimulation."
-Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahat-name (Book of Travels)*, 17th century[1]

When American and British Missionaries arrived on the Ottoman-Persian frontier in the early 1830s, they encountered a society on the brink of crisis. The reasons for this development were largely political, resulting from an internal jostling for power between Kurdish tribal leaders, the Nestorian Patriarch and the Sultan, as well as increasing hostilities between the Porte and Muhammad Shah of Qajar Persia. Kurds living on both sides of the frontier were notoriously rebellious and prone to tribal strife, which exacerbated already tense Turko-Persian relations. Bedir Khan Beg, Emir of Bohtan, headed the last autonomous Kurdish emirate and was finally stripped of his power in 1847 after almost a decade of Ottoman integrationist policies. In July 1843, he and a neighboring emir named Nurallah Beg, assured the turbulent region a place in the Western consciousness when they massacred up to 10,000 Nestorian Christians in the Hakkari mountains. Though pressures imposed by the Ottoman state, as well as its perceived weakness, inspired Bedir Khan Beg's expansionist agenda, the entrance of the missionaries added further complexity to what was an already delicate political balance between the Patriarch and the Kurdish leaders. The missionary presence also created a situation in which a flurry of foreign accounts detailing the situation inundated the western press. This eventually brought

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[1] Robert Dankoff, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman, Melek Ahmed Pasha as Portrayed in Evliya Çelebi's Book of Travels* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 147.

about pressure on the Ottomans to take definitive actions against the ravages of Kurdish power.

In the first half of the 19th century, Sunni Muslim Kurds and Nestorian Christians almost exclusively inhabited the rugged, mountainous region south of Lake Van where this story takes place.[2] The Nestorians were economically and politically subservient to the Kurds in a feudal arrangement, though historically both tribal Nestorians and Kurds had been landlords over an equally ethnically mixed peasantry.[3] This chapter explores the historic place of the Nestorians in the majority Kurdish region, where Ottoman authority was weak and tribal society was defined by socio-economic status and familial relations rather than ethnicity or religion. When Anglican, Protestant and Catholic began to arrive in 1831, Kurdish-Nestorian relations were in the process of redefinition instigated by increased Ottoman intrusion in the tribal areas, which threatened the traditional privileges of Kurdish emirs, or the ruling chieftains of tribal confederacies. Various crises directed the Ottoman authorities to tighten control over the semi-autonomous Kurdish emirates in hopes of collecting greater tax revenues and enlisting Kurds in an exhausted Ottoman army. The defense of these privileges was the driving force behind the earliest formulations

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[2] This is only true of this sparsely populated region. In the entirety of Kurdistan in the 19th century, neither Kurds nor their Christian neighbors were uniform in ethnicity or faith. In addition to Sunni Islam, several large Kurdish tribes practiced Twelver Shiism, Alevism, *Ghulat* (also a Shi'a sect), Yezidism, *Ahl-e Haqq* and heterodox forms of Sufism. Along with the Dyophysite Nestorians, many Armenians as well as Aramaic and Arabic speaking members of the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) church lived in greater Kurdistan. (Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Sheikh and State*: 23-5).

[3] David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2000), 17. Also Martin Van Bruinessen, "Kurdish Tribes and the State of Iran: The Case of Simko's Revolt," *The Encyclopaedia of Kurdistan.* Accessed 10 December 2007 <http://www.kurdistanica.com/english/history/histroy-frame.html>

of Kurdish separatist ambitions that spawned fifty insurrections over the course of the 19th century.[4]

At the same time, there were complex forces acting on the Christian vassals of the major Kurdish confederacies in Ottoman Kurdistan, which began to accentuate their differences from their Kurdish neighbors along explicitly religious lines. During the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-9, in which the Ottoman Empire was defeated, Russian advances west of Lake Van lent the Empire's Christians a feeling of hope of protection by a Christian power. That hope over time worsened relations between them and the Kurds.[5] After the Russian invasion, many Christians of Kurdistan tried to leave with the withdrawing army, but the Russian army did not permit them to do so. According to a British traveler in 1838, after the Russo-Turkish war the Kurds began to regard the Armenians as partisans of the invaders and "made no scruple in plundering and often murdering them."[6] Many Christians in parts of Kurdistan already brought under the civil administration of Ottoman Pashas (usually Kurds) by 1839 were also incensed by arbitrary taxation policies that almost exclusively favored the Kurds, especially the *Kishlak*, or winter quarterage, that formed the heaviest imposition on many poor Christian peasants.[7] It became clear that in the continuing confrontation between their former Kurdish suzerains and the Porte, neither the Ottomans nor Kurds cared about the welfare of the Christian minorities, who

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[4] Kendal, "The Kurds under the Ottoman Empire," *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* ed. Gerard Chaliand (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1993)
[5] J.F. Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 17-8.
[6] James Brant, "Notes of a Journey Through a Part of Kurdistan in the Summer of 1838," *Journal of the Royal Geographic Society of London*, 10 (1840), 348.
[7] Ibid., 342-8.

expressed their grievances loudly and clearly to the missionaries arriving in their midst during the same period. This chapter pursues a more nuanced picture of the deteriorating social relations between Kurds and Nestorians as a multifaceted process only exacerbated by the missionary presence, as the native Christians appealed to them for protection against depredations by Kurds, agitating for their own rights. The missionaries sympathized and relayed their case to missionary contacts back home, though not directly to their home governments. Though they couldn't offer protection to the Nestorians in time, the missionaries nevertheless carried out important roles as caregivers to refugees in the aftermath of the sectarian bloodshed of the 1840s.

By 1841, when Nurallah Beg, Emir of the province of Hakkari, attacked the Nestorian Patriarch Mar Shimun at his residence in Kochanes (slightly north of the modern town of Hakkari, Turkey, which was then called Julamerk), inter-communal relations had reached an unprecedented low point. The violence that occurred in this decade was a relatively isolated episode in terms of severity, though it foreshadowed future catastrophic events. The causes of this development warrant a long-term analysis because it marked the first incident of sectarian violence in the tribal region.[8] The uprising was also unique as the first time a prominent sheikh in the Kurdish community manipulated the religious emotions of the Kurds and incited them against the Christians.[9] This particular detail has not been sufficiently considered in the secondary sources, which largely agree that the rise of the sheikhs, or learned

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[8] Before 1841, collisions often took place on the border, though the Kurds never disrupted the central part of the independent Nestorian country of Hakkari. In Asahel Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes* (London: J. Murray, 1841), 82.
[9] Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State,* 231 quotes Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains.* Vol. 1 (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1849), 193.

religious men, to positions of political power in Kurdish society, did not begin until after the Ottomans defeated Bedir Khan Beg in 1847, if not until the rise of Sheikh Ubayd'allah in the 1880s in the same region.

The fact of the matter is that the invasion and massacre of the mountain Nestorians had several causes. On one level, the violence was part of a larger power struggle between the Kurdish and Nestorian leaderships, "fanned by the grasping, fanatical, and insecure Nurallah Beg with the support and blessing of the sheikhs."[10] Politically, the Nestorian patriarch denied Nurallah Beg the position as the rightful emir of Hakkari, which angered him greatly. The Nestorians also refused to contribute to the efforts of the last remaining Kurdish emirs in their efforts to deter Ottoman encroachments in their domain.[11] Not surprisingly, many of the missionaries attested that the massacres were part of a deeply laid plot by Ottoman authorities to destabilize the region.[12] Some scholars, on the other hand, assign blame to the rivalry between English and American missionaries, who contested for the spirituality of the Nestorians while taking sides in the struggle in order to malign one another.[13] This latter issue will be taken up in the last chapter.

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[10] Wadie Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 66.
[11] Ibid., 69.
[12] Rufus Anderson, *History of the Missions of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Oriental Churches*, vol. i (Boston: Congregational Publishing Society, 1872), 206.
[13] John Joseph, *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 36-7, 66.

Kurdish Historiography and Source Criticism

The study of Kurdish history suffers from a dearth of research caused by both state-sponsored discouragement as well as the fact that the Kurds have traditionally kept oral histories as a result of illiteracy. The absence of Kurdish schools and academic bodies dedicated to the research and analysis of their national history has compounded the current bewilderment over the nation's share of human history and civilization, according to Mehrdad Izady.[14] Western scholarship on the plurality of the Ottoman Empire also experiences something of a blackout when it comes to the Kurds in the eastern provinces. For example, in their volume on the "Functioning of a Plural Society," Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis excluded both the Kurds and the Alevis completely. Bernard Lewis' *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, one of the most respected histories of its kind, completely ignored the Kurdish question, not to mention the Armenian one, while relegating the entire First World War to a measly paragraph.[15] Joseph Grabill provided another example of a typical blackout about ethnic diversity when he wrote that "the Turkish ethnic group was the overwhelmingly majority people of eastern Anatolia" by 1919.[16] As a result, the history of Ottoman Kurdistan to date is a compilation of mostly anthropological and political science works, which often rely on pre-modern texts, such as Xenophon's *Anabasis*, for references about those believed to be the Kurds of today.

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[14] Mehrdad Izady, "The Current State of Kurdish Historiography," *Kurdish Life,* no. 16 (Fall 1995), 4-7.
[15] See Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 237.
[16] Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy*, 170.

Fortunately, the American and British missionaries and travelers who arrived at the beginning of the 19th century provided extremely valuable sources for studying the period leading up to the inter-communal violence of the 1840s. However, analyzing the period through Western and Christian lenses is problematic for many reasons. They were often prejudiced Orientalists, smitten by the idea that the Christians of the Ottoman Empire were doomed to discrimination and persecution, often noting but dismissing evidence that the Nestorians were also belligerent and hostile to their neighbors. The missionary accounts often accentuate the differences between that which is civilized Christian culture in opposition to the barbaric and sedentary orient. For example, Dr. Grant, an American Congregationalist missionary, described the riots in Diyarbekir after the Ottoman forces were defeated at the Battle of Nizib. He reported that the Muslims of the city instigated a killing spree directed at the Europeans because of their "jealousy lest in the weak state of the country, Christianity would rise upon the ruins of Islam."[17] In this example, the missionary worldview appears strikingly black and white. They thought they were hated because of their religion, when in fact it was the Christian zeal of the missionaries that prejudiced them against the native Muslim population, be they Turk, Kurd or Arab.

The missionaries also very often imposed an element of Islamic fanaticism into their characterizations of Kurdish crimes. Referring to his visit in 1839, Grant reported, "A few days before, these sanguinary men [Kurds] had murdered an influential native Christian in hid bed, and they openly declared that it was an act of

[17] Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes*, 20.

religious charity, for which God would reward them, to -put Christians to death."[18] Though there is little doubt that this murder took place, it was impossible for Grant to have knowledge of the motives of the killers because Grant had not yet even arrived to that city by the time the murder took place. These, and other declarations of religious fanaticism might have been exaggerated by traumatized locals who conveyed the news to Grant upon his arrival. It appears that there was little cause, except to confirm a stereotype, for Grant to have made this characterization of the Kurdish violence towards the Christians. As a result of Grant's 1841 work, or possibly the general pervasiveness of the stereotype of the Kurd as Muslim radical, later American accounts repeat the theme of charity in the murder of Christians. According to Rev. Thomas Laurie, Dr. Grant laudatory posthumous biographer, the "dervishes and Moolahs" in Bedir Khan Beg's entourage "inveighed with great vehemence against the Nestorians. It was such a work of 'charity' to destroy those 'infidels' as would meet with rich reward in Paradise. 'Kill all the men,' they cried, 'who will not receive the Koran.'"[19]

The Anglican missionary George Percy Badger also commented on the fanaticism of the Kurds, though this does not indicate a confirmation of its truthfulness. While at Jezirah ibn Omar, Bedir Khan Beg's summer camp, in 1842, Badger noted, "As the Kurds walked through the streets, they looked upon us with sovereign contempt, and told us by their insolent and haughty bearing, that they hated us, as they all who bore the name of Christ… I have no doubt that many of them were

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[18] Ibid., 22.
[19] Rev. Thomas Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1853), 336.

even then looking forward with satisfaction and rapture to the projected slaughter of the mountain Nestorians."[20] Badger spoke with unjustified confidence about the feelings of the Kurds from mere gazes and gestures. Badger's account of his 1842-3 visit was also written in 1852, almost a decade after the massacre took place. It is probable that he reflected the severity of the Kurdish population in hindsight. Also, without native testimonials, it is impossible to know with certainty whether the natives resented the missionaries, or for that matter, whether that hatred was for Christians specifically or generally directed at the foreigners in their midst.

The orientalist imagination colors the physical landscape of Kurdistan as well as the missionary perceptions of intercommunal relations. In his work on the "Nestorians or the Lost Tribes," Grant spoke both romantically and idealistically about traversing the lands of biblical scenes, despite all the reasons he had to fear for his life. Upon his first glimpse of the mountains of Hakkari, Grant wrote, "I seemed to be carried back four thousand years on the wings of time, to hold converse with the father of the faithful."[21] In a similar gesture Grant admitted that he was overwhelmed with emotion by the scenic views and exalted the area as a standing "sacred herald" and a "zion long in hostile lands." He felt as though he had been transported to Pishgah's top, a biblical mountain range located in southern Palestine.[22]

Despite these reservations, missionary accounts of the eastern Ottoman provinces provide reliable data in most instances about the state of the country, the appearance of the bazaars, descriptions of the homes in which Kurds and Nestorians

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[20] Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, vol. i, 69.
[21] Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes*, 26.
[22] Ibid., 54.

lived as well as geological insights. The missionaries also related vocational, demographic, ethnographic and botanical information in addition to insights into agriculture, typical dress, interior design, food preparation, medical practices and gender relations. Most importantly, the missionaries spent thousands of pages precisely detailing the religious observances and beliefs of the Christian communities. As for the Kurds, they are not usually the focus of missionary reports, and with no real understanding of Islamic beliefs and customs, the missionaries could not comment reliably on their religiosity. It is also questionable whether Grant's statement that the Turks thought of the Kurds as "half Muslim" was a pervasive belief.[23] In light of the paucity of sources about 19th century Kurds, it is better to recognize the deficiencies in our sources and tell a portion of the story, rather than none at all.

Missionary Historiography

As opposed to Kurdish studies, there is a great deal of scholarship addressing the question of missionaries in the Near East and attitudes differ widely. By their own descriptions, missionary activity was altruistic, both in the Protestant evangelical efforts to save souls for their own sake and in the educational and medical enterprises it undertook in the process. On the other hand, a common theme in the history of missionaries in the Near East regards them as precursors of western imperialism and colonialism, an enterprise hardly synonymous with altruism. A brief summary of

[23] Ibid., 41.

these opinions will quickly show that the crimes stacked up against the missionaries are quite severe. For example, Salahi Sonyel accused the missionaries of creating destabilizing rifts between religious minorities and the state that ultimately destroyed the Ottoman system.[24] There has been enough work on the missionaries to show that the vindication-condemnation continuum does not hold up to any real scrutiny, as there are many different sites of contact to consider and missionary groups had different, sometimes antagonistic relations with their home governments, such as the Archbishop of Canterbury's mission to the Nestorians.[25]

A major goal of this research project is a fair characterization of the impact of missionary activity on Ottoman Kurdistan, about which no comprehensive study exists. By choosing to highlight a significant, early stage of the missionary encounter, when the missionaries were still arguably in a learning process, what emerges is a theory of missionary caution and flexibility, as opposed to a broader judgment as to their overall impact on the breakdown of ethnic relations in the Ottoman Empire and the development of national consciousnesses. By offering that the missionaries involved in Hakkari in the 1840s were unaware of their unique position to mediate an impending conflict or of the destabilizing effects of a western denominational dispute played out in the east, some vindication is acknowledged for the events in question. Whether or not the missionaries internalized the consequences of their activities as ultimately sectarian and redefined their roles as more positive mediators will be the

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[24] Salahi Sonyel, *Minorities and the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Printing House, 1993), 194.
[25] Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England*, 2.

test of true altruistic intent. It is nevertheless worthwhile to turn to the debate in the field as a matter of framework.

One of the most applicable theoretical models for the inquiry into missionary effects on sectarian identity politics is Ussama Makdisi's "gentle crusade." Makdisi defined the missionary power as an essentially discursive one capable of inventing sectarian identities via the "intrusive power of the 19th century western imagination."[26] The missionaries of Mount Lebanon viewed themselves as implicated in a "historic clash between Christian progress and Islamic despotism,"[27] a sentiment that also pervaded the writing of missionaries in Kurdistan after the revolts. Makdisi's work on the missionary role in accentuating sectarian identities in Mount Lebanon in 1860 by their completely ignoring the existence of mixed communities also finds a parallel in eastern Anatolia, where the missionaries were so consumed with the idea of the Christians as a subjugated and threatened minority that they disregarded and upset "the rhythms of a dynamic society."[28] Makdisi's framework proves vital to understanding how the missionaries threatened more than just power hungry chiefs with the possibility of inviting an Ottoman presence in their affairs; they in effect threatened established and complex notions of what autonomy should look like potentially for both the Kurdish and Christian communities.

Other advocates of the negative effects of the missionaries in the Ottoman world, such as Jeremy Salt, tend to focus on the missionaries as disguised agents of western imperial machinations. In an article aptly entitled "Trouble Wherever They

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[26] Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 25.
[27] Ibid, 16.
[28] Ibid, 40.

Went," Salt brazenly declared that the missionaries came to Ottoman lands to conquer and it is thus "no wonder that the response of the Eastern Churches was so ferocious."[29] Like Makdisi, he argued that the missionary view of Ottoman society was adversarial. "In the sink of iniquity, injustice, fanaticism, and superstition" that was Ottoman society, "only the missionaries knew the truth."[30] For this reason, he claimed that the missionaries were not unaware of political realities or the ascendance of western interests in the values they disseminated.[31] A useful supplement to this reasoning can be found in the work of Joseph Grabill, who wrote that rather than serving as a direct tool of imperialism, the missionary enterprise contributed to bringing the region into the consciousness of the United States, and ultimately into U.S. foreign policy. In his view, it was impossible for missionaries to separate their activities from politics because all of their actions were inherently sectarian. By emphasizing issues of minority status, they brought into question the large cultural and legal barriers between Muslims and Christians.[32] Instead of instruments of Western imperial plots, Grabill's missionaries were harbingers of an unexpectedly intimate American involvement in Ottoman affairs. In his seemingly fair analysis, American board personnel were a liberal force in the Ottoman domains "with as much potential for disruption as for renewal."[33]

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[29] Jeremy Salt, "Trouble Wherever They Went: American Missionaries in Anatolia and Ottoman Syria in the 19th Century," *Altruism and Imperialism: Western Cultural and Religious Missions in the Middle East*, eds. Eleanor Tejirian and Reeva Spector Simon (New York: Middle East Institute, Columbia University, 2002), 145-6
[30] Ibid., 155.
[31] Ibid., 163-6.
[32] Joseph Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East*, 145.
[33] Ibid., 7.

In terms of social relations, neither Salt nor Grabill took up the issue authoritatively as their analyses focused on the missionary impact on the Ottoman state vis-à-vis international contacts. Eugene Rogan, on the other hand, argued that the most destructive legacy of the missionaries in Transjordan was the heightened sectarian tension provoked by their activities.[34] The most valuable contribution of his study remains his analysis of the powerful missionary presence in an isolated frontier region comparable to Ottoman Kurdistan. He argued that the missionaries were attracted to the Transjordan precisely because of its frontier isolation and the possibility of more effective missionary work.[35] In these far reaches of the Empire, it was difficult for the state to regulate the missionary encounter and the missionaries played an important role as interpreters of Ottoman reform in the absence of Ottoman officials. Rogan's work is instructive to the study of missionaries operating in the secluded mountains of Kurdistan because it posits that the frontier society was an especially dynamic environment: Both a receptive and ultimately problematic host for missionary work.

In contrast to the missionary histories heretofore addressed, stands J.F. Coakley's overwhelmingly pro-missionary account of the Archbishop of Canterbury's mission to the Nestorians, in which the author makes a convincing case about the merits of assessing the impact of each mission as a separate entity. Each mission, he argued, deserves the chance to be exempted from the "harsh verdict generally cast on missionaries" in light of the different cultures, missionary traditions,

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[34] Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 123.
[35] Ibid., 19.

and degrees of autonomy in which the missions operated.[36] Coakley's approach is fair, though it clearly limits him in some respects, especially apparent in his discussion of missionary competition in Hakkari. Here he emphasized the ways in which rival missionaries sought to resolve disputes in the western media, over perhaps a more probing assessment of how the competition may have closed a window of opportunity for the missionaries to have intervened positively in inter-communal mediation. In this respect, he seems to have circumvented altogether an issue that warranted more analysis. Nevertheless, throughout the narrative of events, Coakley reserves passing judgment on the Kurds for oppressing their neighbors coldheartedly, a claim universally found in the missionary documents, on the basis of an incomplete historical understanding. His insights into the craft of examining the missionaries through their own eyes, as it were, provide a helpful guide.

Filehin Min ("My Christians"): Kurds and Nestorians in Feudal Hakkari

There are a number of reasons why it is difficult to comment reliably on social relations between Kurds and Nestorians from their earliest interaction in Hakkari until the Ottomans gained control of the territory in 1514. Even in the subsequent Ottoman centuries, historians disagree widely about the status of inter-communal relations before Nurallah Beg and Bedir Khan Beg's revolt, and their characterizations range

[36] Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England*, 2-3.

from generally amicable to perpetually insecure.[37] Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis argued that as a result of their remoteness from Istanbul, the tribal Nestorians attracted little attention under Ottoman rule until the missionaries brought them to the attention of the Porte.[38] Additionally, the legal position of the Nestorians within the Ottoman Empire was vague[39] because they were not officially recognized by the state, in the sense that they lacked the political representation in Istanbul that the Greek Orthodox, Armenians and Jews had under the millet system.[40] Therefore, one finds trouble applying general scholarship on the status of Christian minorities in the Empire to the Nestorians of Kurdistan. The paucity of Ottoman sources in English translation is also a major impediment to the inquiry. Turkish, Persian or Russian impressions of Kurdish-Christian relations are also either unavailable in translation, or perhaps do not exist at all after Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname*, (Book of Travels) which covers only up to 1680. Sherefhan Bitlisi's *Sherefname*, (History of the Kurdish Nation) published in Persian in 1597 also provides little more than dynastic information for the Hakkari emirate. It is clear that in order to do justice to social

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[37] J. Joseph (1961), J.F. Coakley (1992), M. Van Bruinessen (1992) maintain the former view. A. Yohannan (1916), W. A. Wigram (1929) espoused the more antagonistic view.

[38] Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds. *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire* Vol. II (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982), 3.

[39] Joseph, *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 33-5.

[40] The "millet" system was linked to Islamic rules on the treatment of the monotheistic, non-Muslim minorities. The term can also refer to the recognized religious minority itself. The millets had legal representatives in Istanbul that counseled the Sultan on religious matters specific to the community with the goal of ensuring peaceful plurality in the Empire. Sir Stratford Canning, the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in the 1840s, interestingly thought of himself as the representative of Western Christians (both missionaries and new converts) and pressed the Sultan to establish a Protestant millet in 1850.

relations in the pre-missionary period, Ottoman and Persian sources need to be thoroughly investigated.

It is worthwhile to note that "Nestorian" was not the self-ascribed name of this Christian sect. Throughout the sources other names for the sect appear, including Syrian (referring to the liturgical language of Syriac, not the state), Assyrian, Assyro-Chaldean, The Old East Syrian Church or The Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East. A connection to the Assyrians of the Old Testament is also an inaccurate assumption to make about the Nestorians, despite having been the impetus for archeological investigations in Northern Iraq by some of the missionaries whose accounts are used here. Protestant missionaries were the first to apply the name Nestorian to the Christians they encountered as they came to discuss their doctrine. For the sake of clarity in their reports, they needed to distinguish the Nestorians from their former coreligionists of the Assyrian Church of the East, referred to as the Chaldeans. The Chaldeans are still in an "Eastern Church" in many ways (linguistically, culturally), though they realigned with the Roman Catholic Church in the 15th century as a result of Catholic missionary activity. The term Nestorian has been adopted here because it is familiar to western audiences, although today it has become practically tabooed in conversation by church members themselves. According to J.F. Coakley, the cause of the sensitivity is primarily diplomatic. Today other Christians commonly use the term Nestorian pejoratively, to denote schismatics generally and the heresy of Nestorius' pronouncement that Christ was two distinct persons rather than two distinct natures

united in a single person, specifically.[41] As this study will rely heavily on missionary documents and foreign accounts that very often use the term Nestorian, the decision was straightforward.

According to Lale Yalçin-Heckmann, there is evidence in the historical record that Kurds and Nestorian Christians lived in the mountains of Hakkari simultaneously at least as early as the 7th century AD. The Arab historian Ibn al-Athir first placed the Kurds around Hakkari in 637 in his account of Arab victories over the Kurds in southeast Anatolia.[42] Mark Sykes, on the other hand, described the Kurds living on the Ottoman-Persian frontier as those "ancient *Cordueni* who harassed Xenophon's retreat" marking the Kurds' first appearance historical appearance in the 4th century BC.[43] As for the Nestorians, archeological evidence dates some of their oldest Churches in Hakkari back to the 4th and 5th centuries.[44] There is also evidence that suggests the Nestorians were not migrants to Hakkari, but rather descendants of the ancient Khaldi people who inhabited Hakkari for twenty-five centuries and were Christianized around the time the churches were built. This is based on the account of Frederick Millingen, a British officer in the region in the 1860s who recorded Nestorian testimonies about their lineage, though they were probably altered to reflect a longer connection to the land as a consequence of their regularly threatened

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[41] Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England*, 5. Ainsworth claimed that the name was "contemptuously attached to them by the missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church" and has always been rejected by the Chaldeans (as the ones he encountered preferred to call themselves) *Travels and Researches* vol. II, 272-4.
[42] Lale Yalçın-Heckmann, *Tribe and Kinship Among the Kurds* (Frankfort am Main: Peter Lang, 1991), 44.
[43] Mark Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1915), 554. See corresponding map.
[44] Nikitine, "Shamdinan," *The Encyclopedia of Islam,* vol. 4 (1936), 303.

existence.[45] The claims of Nestorian originality in Kurdistan are also corroborated in Muhammad Zaki's, *History of the Kurds*, in which the Nestorians of Hakkari are described as descendents of Christianized Kurds converted originally from Zoroastrianism or other pagan beliefs by a Nestorian priest at an Iranic school at Edessa.[46] John Joseph, himself a Nestorian, also argued in favor of shared ancestry by referencing Kurdish tribal myths of a formerly Christian past. He argued that when the Nestorians of Kurdish racial stock converted to Islam, the ties of conversion bound the two communities in a non-antagonistic relationship.[47] These genealogical inquiries have been fairly inconclusive, owing to the difficulties in explaining the two very distinct languages of the Kurds and Nestorians. Nevertheless, it is likely that the mountain fastnesses of Hakkari provided a safe haven to the Nestorians from persecution by other Christians originally, as was the punishment for their refusal to denounce Nestorius after his view of Christ was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

Long standing coexistence between Kurds and Nestorians in the mountains of Hakkari was predicated both on survival needs and their parallel evolution of fiercely independent, predominantly tribal identities. They resembled one another by virtue of their clan-based organization, reputation for militancy, and admiration of values such as loyalty and bravery. Besides their language and religion, which defined to whom

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[45] Frederick Millingen, *Wild Life Among the Kurds* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1870) 269-71.
[46] Nemat Sharif, "A Translation: A Brief History of the Kurds and Kurdistan by Muhammad Amin Zaki," *The International Journal of Kurdish Studies,* 10, no. 1-2 (1996), 106 Credits this information to Al-Sama'ani in a footnote.
[47] Joseph, *The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors*, 37. The racial question is not definitive for our study, although a shared genealogy has also been suggested by David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 13.

the tribes paid tribute, the mountain Nestorians were otherwise indistinguishable from their Kurdish neighbors with whom they were at times related through intermarriage.[48] Nineteenth century travel accounts related that both peoples were largely pastoralist and obtained subsistence from the pasturage of their flocks, which often lead to competition for resources. At the same time we know that the two groups traded commodities, mostly different foods, with one another, as well as salt and woven cloths.[49]

Both populations also contained a mixture of settled and nomadic elements, though settled groups were few in number where agricultural capacities were low and the winters harsh in the Hakkari mountains. These rare cultivators tended to be Christians who were regularly the victims of theft by the semi-nomadic tribesmen. According to Sykes's account, tribal Nestorians were occasionally found in a condition of vassalage, but could share and often owned lands on an equal footing with the Muslim tribesmen.[50] Since both the Kurds and Nestorians contained nomadic tribal and sedentary peasant populations, the exploitation of the peasant classes was not an issue of religious discrimination, at least not on the surface. The social and political hierarchy of Kurdistan could be defined as much by socio-economic as religious or ethnic identity.[51]

The Nestorians held a special place in Ottoman Kurdish society as a minority within a minority, where the lines could be blurred. According to Claudius Rich,

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[48] Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World* (Cambridge: Cambidge University Press, 2001), 46, Joseph, 36-39.
[49] Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*, vol. I, 214-5.
[50] Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage*. 556.
[51] McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 17.

English Resident of Baghdad and Basra from 1808-1820, the Nestorian tribes were the only Christians in the East to have maintained their independence from the Muslims, "to whom they have rendered themselves very formidable."[52] (Obviously, he had no contact with the Maronites.) In fact, Rich was advised that it was less safe to pass among the Nestorians than the Muslim tribes in 1820.[53] The Kurds reportedly considered them to be their military equals.[54] According to Muhammad Pasha of Mosul (recorded in Laurie), the fierce independence of the Hakkari Nestorians was also an irritant. "These infidels know neither Pasha nor Sultan, but from time immemorial every man has been his own master."[55] Their special relationship is summed up well in a Kurdish proverb, transcribed by Edward Noel, a British commissioner in Mesopotamia during World War I, which speaks to the fact that the Kurds looked upon the Nestorians as close to their hearts: *Nav byn a ma wa muyeka nav byn a ma wa fellah chiayeka* (Between us there is but a hair's breath, but between us and the Armenians, a mountain).[56] This sentiment developed over the long duration in which the two communities shared the perilous mountain frontier between the Ottoman and Persian Empires, two empires regularly at war that vied for tribal support.

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[52] Claudius James Rich, *Narrative of a residence in Koordistan, and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh; with Journal of a voyage down the Tigris to Baghdad and an Account of a Visit to Shirauz and Persepolis*, vol. 2 (London: J. Duncan, 1836), 276.
[53] Ibid., 276.
[54] Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 118.
[55] Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 129.
[56] Edward Noel, 'The Character of the Kurds as Illustrated by Their Proverbs and Populat Sayings" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, 1, no. 4 (London: University of London, 1920), 90.

Before the 19th century, the Ottoman authorities basically practiced a policy of non-interference in the most inaccessible parts of Kurdistan. These remote areas, of which the Hakkari mountains formed the major part, were called *ashiret,* meaning simply tribe, and these fell barely within the bounds of Ottoman civil administration. No government troops entered them and no taxes for the central government were collected. As for inhabitants outside the *ashiret*, officially considered *rayat*, or subjects, they came under the ordinary Ottoman laws and were taxed accordingly. This arrangement greatly facilitated a workable coexistence between Kurds and Nestorians in the *ashiret* lands, before the state began efforts to extend *rayat* status over all of the inhabitants of empire in the 19th century. The Nestorians were regarded as a self-governing minority administered indirectly through the Patriarch, the Mar Shimun as head of the nation, to whom they paid exclusive tribute, and who was only nominally subservient to the Kurdish Emir of Hakkari.[57] The situation was much different in *rayat* territories, where extortion of the peasantry was the norm. Claudius Rich, traveling near, but outside of the Hakkari *ashiret* before Ottoman administrative reforms imposed tax collection duties on the emirs, quoted a Kurdish agha, "I allow the peasants to cultivate my estate… and I take from them my due, which is the zakat, or tenth of the whole, and as much as I can squeeze out of them by any means, and on any pretext."[58] Earlier he had observed that the status of the peasant agriculturalist resembled that of a "negro slave in the West Indies." One Kurdish tribesman once

[57] Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England*, 16-7.
[58] Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan,* vol. i, 96.

confessed to him that clans conceived of the peasants to have been "merely created for their use."[59]

It was within the context of this unchecked feudal society before the 19th century, in which the Kurds made up the majority of the lords, that the term "my Christian" evolved.[60] It reflected both an economic reality as well as a kind of affection based on shared values and mutual respect. Across the porous Persian frontier, agricultural possibilities were much greater, but Ardalan tribal rule was infamously more oppressive, especially to Christians, whose legal testimony for instance, was inadmissible against the word of a Muslim.[61] On the other hand, in Hakkari, differentiated Muslim and Christian identities existed, though they were subordinated to larger systems of allegiance and loyalty specific to local society.

This is not to discount the religious element of community identities in Hakkari, which deserves special attention with respect to an inquiry about the impact of missionaries on inter-communal relations. In this matter, the use of missionary sources is done cautiously, as indicated earlier. The missionaries wrote volumes about the Nestorians and their rituals, which they deemed as only "nominally Christian." Their harsh criticisms of Christianity among the tribal mountain Nestorians were often linked to remarks about their low level of civilization, lack of education, and sometimes even their immaturity. For example, a late 19th century British missionary wrote, "They are childish in their virtues and vices, and childish in their

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[59] Ibid, 89-90.
[60] Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 24.
[61] Joseph, *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 38.

hopelessness."[62] One valid insight we can draw from the sources is that the mountain Nestorians clung to a faith they did not comprehend because the liturgy was printed in the classical Syriac –a language unknown to most of the population. According the Joseph, the only books American missionaries found in 1831 were a few translations of a Catholic catechism, some other prayer sheets and a few books written in the "obscure classical Syriac."[63]

According to the missionaries, the clergy also lacked the ability and resources to instruct the populace in matters of faith, or conduct services in a way the missionaries deemed acceptable. Badger noted that the Nestorian priests rarely gave sermons and often "mumbled through the liturgy… in so unintelligible a manner that no practical advantage can be derived therefrom." As a result, the "humanizing" precepts of the gospel have little moral effect on the people.[64] Rev. William Goodell, an American missionary stationed in Istanbul summed up the missionary belief that religion for the Nestorians was not about conviction or desire for moral betterment:

> "There is an abundance of religion in the Middle East, but it is all ceremonial. This religion of theirs has little or nothing to do either with the heart or with the life; that is, it is not necessarily supposed to exert any influence on a man's moral character… The fact is, nobody in those countries ever expects to find a man more honest, more hospitable, more benevolent, more heavenly-minded, because he prays."[65]

In another interesting anecdote that is illustrative of the war-like culture of the Nestorians, Badger described a Nestorian priest who carried his rifle into the church

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[62] Athelstan Riley, "Christians and Kurds in Eastern Turkey," *Contemporary Review*, 56 (July-Dec 1889), 459.
[63] Joseph, *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors,* 74.
[64] Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*, vol. I, 221.
[65] Rev. William Goodell, *The Old and the New, or, The Changes of Thirty Years in the East* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1853), 10.

on the Sabbath. Though he thought the priest was just taking precautions, during the service, the priest walked out to kill a boar he spotted meandering outside. According to Badger the priest told the gathering, "This our sacrifice of praise will remain where it is, but that [pointing to the boar] will soon run away."[66] Perhaps food was scarce that year (1842), surely this is a possibility, but nevertheless Badger's testimony is further proof that the Nestorians did not place a great deal of importance on religious rituals.

However, and in a bold testament to their naïveté about the realities of the Middle East, most missionaries were optimistic about their prospects for proselytizing. Grant exalted the Nestorians of Urumiyah because they "drank in instruction with child-like docility"[67] and seemed generally receptive to the educational services the Protestants offered. Justin Perkins, the director of missionary efforts in Urumiyah added hopefully, "spiritual death, rather than theological error, was the calamity of the Nestorians."[68] The missionaries clearly had high standards but also high hopes for the Nestorian community, who appeared to them ready and desirous to receive instruction. Although it is hard to speak for the masses, we know that at least the Nestorian Patriarch was not so docile and passive. According to the missionaries, his interests were more mundane than spiritual. For example, he inquired about the kinds of teachers they planned to employ in the schools and what

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[66] Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*, vol. I, 220.
[67] Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes*, 6.
[68] Anderson, *History of the Missions*, 197.

their salaries would be,[69] as opposed to questioning the precepts of the Protestant religion.

Practiced religion in tribal society was clearly far from conventional or uniform and western accounts typically convey a belief that the Kurds and Nestorians were simultaneously tolerant and superstitious. According to Jwaideh, anyone who has come in contact with the Kurds agrees that the average Kurd is either tolerant or indifferent in matters of religion, though prone to persuasion by the sheikhs.[70] Kurdish followers of various Sufi sheikhs are said to be incredibly devout and reliant on the astrological predictions of these important men, whom they believe can communicate with the prophets. Certain Sufi shrines in Kurdistan were also visited by both Kurds and Christians. The Kurds also deviated from mainstream Islamic precepts by their consumption of alcohol and gambling practices. The missionaries tended to focus on these habits derisively, which included the smoking of opium, clearly because of their own ideological bias. (Many missionaries also advocated for temperance laws within the U.S.) According to the journal of A. H. Wright, a missionary at the Urumiyah station, "Multitudes are destroying both soul and body, and are going down to a drunkard grave. When will the light, which now shines so brightly in the west, shine in the east?"[71] His account indicated that the Nestorians also took part in these practices.

According to Joseph, the Kurds have "always been liberal toward followers of other religious sects largely because of the great number of non-Muslim communities

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[69] Ibid., 218-20.
[70] Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement*, 51-3.
[71] Journal of A.H. Wright entries dated April 28 (alcohol), August 22 (Opium) and November 28, 1842 (quote) in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 3.

that have lived among them."[72] When disputes arose, as they often did between rival Kurdish tribes, the Nestorian Patriarch was know to arbitrate and likewise, the Nestorians would seek the good offices of a Kurdish tribal chief of sheikh. One indication of the tolerance of Hakkari society was conveyed in a chronicle by Mark Sykes about a group of three Jews he once met on route to a town called Dereyazor.[73] They were traveling unarmed with various goods claiming to be members of "the great Hakkari community," who lived in the towns and villages of that district. Sykes concluded, "These Jews, whose residence in this part of the country is of great antiquity, are practically immune from robbery, and can travel in their own districts without fear. Like their co-religionists elsewhere, they amass wealth where other people would starve."[74] This points strongly to the conclusion that in matters of faith, neither the Kurds nor Nestorians interfered much with one another. Long-standing physical proximity and familiarity appear to have lead to the establishment of strong in-group bonds that transcended religion.

Evolving Ties With Empire: Historical Outline

The heart of Anatolian Kurdistan first came under Ottoman rule in the early 16th century as a result of Kurdish participation in the Ottoman rout of the Persian

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[72] Joseph, *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 36-7.
[73] Somewhere in transit "between Girdi country into that of the Shirwan," in Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, appendix page 553, 558-61. This is in the northernmost point of modern day Iraq on the border between Iraq, Turkey and Iran.
[74] Ibid., 431.

Safavid Shah Ismail at the Battle of Caldiran in 1514.[75] Sultan Selim's Persia expedition in 1514 was greatly dependent on the diplomatic efforts of his Kurdish advisor, Mevlana Idris Bitlisi, who organized the Kurdish chieftains in Eastern Anatolia in cooperation with other Janissary regiments.[76] This expedition brought Hakkari into the Ottoman realm, and despite Ottoman-Safavid competition for the loyalty of each other's Kurdish subjects, often by offering them material gains, Hakkari never left the Ottoman sphere (and remains today in Turkey). Kurdish chieftains were by no means passive partners in the state-tribe interaction. Fluctuating allegiances necessitated careful administration of the Kurdish emirates, amounting to their consolidation in a policy Özoğlu called "unite and rule."[77] As a strategically important frontier zone, Ottoman Kurdistan demanded close attention from the Ottoman Empire, and Bitlisi was charged with the task of establishing an administrative framework that would both integrate Kurdish tribes into the Ottoman system while preserving the power of the local nobility.[78] The Ottoman conquest did not result in the destruction, but in the preservation of the emirates and consolidation of the emir's position within each emirate. According to Özoğlu, Bitlisi used his intermediary position effectively in the interests of both the Ottoman state and the Kurdish emirs who were mutually dependant.[79] The fragmented Kurdish tribes needed the Ottoman state for protection as much as the Ottomans wanted to create a buffer zone against the Safavid threat. At the same time, the presence of more than

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[75] Prior to 1514, the Ottoman-Safavid border traced the Euphrates River.
[76] Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), 47-8.
[77] Ibid., 53.
[78] Ibid., 53-4 and Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 158,
[79] Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 48-9.

one strong state in the vicinity gave local chieftains more leverage in dealing with the suzerain state; they could threaten to switch loyalties to keep the Ottomans out of their affairs. Moreover, local rivals in the tribal areas were not dependent on popular support if they desired to overthrow the sovereign chief, as they could attempt to invoke the aid of the rival state. In several emirates, the ruling families were thus split into pro-Persian and pro-Ottoman branches.

The Kurdish emirate system predated the Ottoman conquest in some form and even after the Ottomans incorporated the region, the political organization resembled that of the Qaraqoyunlu and Aqqoyunlu Turkman confederation-states that governed central Kurdistan between the fall of Tamerlane in 1404 and the Ottoman conquest in 1514.[80] The Kurdish emirates were essentially territorial based tribal entities either based on a single tribe, in which case the emir was the hereditary chief of that tribe, or it could be based on an agglomeration of tribes, as was the case in Hakkari, where the emir was the chief of a tribe which bound the others together, usually through intermarriage.[81] Thus when accession disputes between rival claimants in the ruling family emerged, as they very often did, Kurdish elders, Nestorian tribal leaders, as well as the Patriarch himself became involved in a potentially destabilizing state of affairs. In order to prevent the Safavid, and later Qajar, Empire from exploiting the political weakness of the loosely organized Kurdish emirates, Bitlisi developed specific tribal policies that allowed the state to intervene in accession quarrels, and recommend loyal Kurds to positions of power, as long as they did not replace the

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[80] Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 137.
[81] Tom Sinclair, "The Ottoman Arrangements for the Tribal Principalities of the Lake van Region of the Sixteenth Century," *Ottoman Borderlands,* ed. Kemal H. Karpat (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 119.

entire family.[82] According to an imperial decree of Suleyman I, the Ottomans recognized the hereditary succession of the emir as well as his right to collect taxes, mint coins and protect his lands.[83]

Early Ottoman tribal policy also involved dividing the Kurdish emirates into a number of *sanjaks,* or districts, which allowed the Ottomans more control through an administrative structure above the tribal level without compromising tribal autonomy directly. As a result of this policy, Kurdish emirs became heavily dependent upon Ottoman favor to maintain their positions of power and the Ottoman state found a favorable environment in which to interfere with the Kurdish tribal structures.[84] Tribal conflicts within the leading tribe in Hakkari were further worsened by this policy in the middle of the 16th century, when the Ottomans disconnected two of the most fertile *sanjaks* on the southern border of Lake Van and joined them to another emirate. This both distorted the economic balance of neighboring emirates as well as created competition for control over the remaining arable areas.[85]

Despite the fact that the state drew district borders and reorganized them at will, the most inaccessible emirates, such as Hakkari, enjoyed a colossal degree of autonomy and were officially referred to as *Kurd Hukumeti*, or Kurdish governments. In these regions, the institution of tax-farming was never imposed, payments to the central treasury were completely pardoned and some emirs received government

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[82] Ibid., 134.
[83] Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 158, Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 53-4.
[84] Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 54.
[85] Sinclair, "Ottoman Arrangements," 132-33.

salaries in return for pacifying local dissent and serving as on-call frontier guards.[86] Stephen Longrigg, an unsympathetic critic of Ottoman tribal policy as it was carried out in Iraqi Kurdistan over the course of over 300 years, also wrote that military contributions could be withheld by the stronger begs "if the correct tone were maintained." This prompted him to describe the general Turkish policy towards the Kurdish states as one of "commitments avoided, of the fruits of Empire expected without the labours."[87] In his view, Ottoman "misrule" in the centuries preceding the early 19th century reforms, made it impossible for the state to confront the tribes in any successful way because the tribes who knew nothing but the tribal code and viewed their weak ties to the Empire opportunistically.

There are numerous reasons why the Ottomans amended their policies of non-intervention in the Kurdish regions at the beginning of the 19th century. The recent success of the Greek war of independence in conjunction with the success of the Sultan's vassal Mehmet Ali against the state, struck a cord with the Ottomans that both military and civil administrations needed thorough centralization. The reforms were costly and necessitated the introduction of a more direct system of tax collection, the unfortunate result of which was the redefinition of the existing power structures that previously favored the autonomy of the Kurdish emirs in the *ashirets*. The reforms, known as the Tanzimat, or restructuring, period (1839-1876) were motivated by the necessity of self-preservation and stylized, at least in principle, on civic tenets of equality born out of the French Revolution. Over time the reforms

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[86] Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 158-9, 161.
[87] Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 2002), 43.

changed the relationship between the state and its citizens by reshaping notions of citizenship. In principle, no matter a citizen's race or religion, his security of life and property were guaranteed inside the Empire. In return, the state demanded that all citizens were loyal to the sultan and the Ottoman administration. These were two simultaneously disruptive reforms for tribal society in Kurdistan, which were also used by the missionaries and Western governments as a pretext for defending the Empire's Christians throughout the second half of the 19th century.

In addition, Ottoman centralization allowed the administration to take revenge on those Kurdish subjects whose loyalty they did not trust. This sentiment had been growing as early as 1806, when the Ottomans began to face tremendous difficulties quelling tribal violence in the Kurdish emirates where a few strong emirs were in the process of consolidating large confederacies, namely the Baban, Soran, Bohtan and Hakkari, all of which competed with one another.[88] The rationale was that if the Greeks and the Egyptians, both formerly vassals of the Porte could defeat the already weakened Ottoman army and achieve independence, the Kurds were equally capable of asserting themselves: Therefore, they could not be trusted to remain autonomous. Tensions mounted when Kurdish emirs, such as Bedir Khan Beg, refused to respond to the call of the Ottoman government's demands for tribal contingents to be sent to the war against Russia in 1828-9.[89] Ottoman distrust was brought to a head after the Battle of Nezib in 1839, in which many Kurds supported the Egyptian general Ismail Pasha in his defeat of the Ottomans. According to Von Moltke, a German lieutenant

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[88] Hakan Özoğlu, "Nationalism and Kurdish Notables in the Late Ottoman-Early Republican Era," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33, no. 3 (August 2001), 390.
[89] Arshak Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Harvill Press, 1948), 55.

serving the Ottoman army at Nezib, the Sultan had to reconquer wide regions within the territory of his own state and the fighting was at times furious.[90] The Ottomans suffered many casualties often fighting thirty to forty days to occupy just one Kurdish stronghold.

The Ottoman campaigns to subdue Kurdistan and turn the formerly autonomous emirates into *vilayets*, or provinces to be administered by the Porte, actually took place over the course of forty years between 1806-47. This is because the earlier Ottoman policy of stepping into accession disputes and imposing Kurdish chiefs whose loyalty they could depend on first seriously backfired in 1806 in Sulaymaniyah (now the capital of PUK controlled Iraqi Kurdistan). There, a member of the hereditary family stabbed the Ottoman governor of Koy *sanjak* who was aligned with the Ottoman emir prospect. For three years the Baban Kurds led an offensive against the Ottoman armies allied with some Kurdish tribes who had joined them out of rivalry with the Babans. The Baban tribes were eventually defeated reinforcing inter-tribal rivalries in that part of Kurdistan.[91]

Again in 1833, when the Ottomans under Rashid Muhammad Pasha attacked the Kurdish Emir Muhammad of Soran in Northern Iraq, whose confederacy extended all the way north to the border of Bedir Khan Beg's Emirate of Bohtan, Bedir Khan Beg refused to join forces with Muhammad of Soran, leading to Muhammad's defeat and capture. Rashid Pasha ultimately succeeded in inducing Muhammad to surrender by appealing to the sheikhs in his entourage about the injunction against waging war against other Muslims. In the end, deserted by his own people, Muhammad

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[90] Ibid., 49.
[91] Kendal, "The Kurds under the Ottoman Empire," 18.

surrendered and was assassinated in short order after he was harangued about Muslim solidarity and fraternity for all to see in Istanbul. Meanwhile, the Sultan's armies wrecked havoc in Kurdistan "leaving a trail of fire and blood."[92]

In 1836, Rashid Pasha attacked Bedir Khan Beg's capital unsuccessfully and suffered heavy losses at the hands of the virulent defenses of Bedir Kahn Beg and his allies. This prompted the Sultan to offer Bedir Khan Beg nominal independence, though the emir refused to be made into an official agent of the Porte. Nevertheless, he expressed his allegiance and paid off corrupt Ottoman officials with many gifts. He even consented to the Ottoman officials by allowing them to recruit a specified number of Kurds for the newly reforming Ottoman army.[93] As Sheikh Ubeyd'allah would later suggest, Bedir Khan Beg in fact paid a large sum to the sultan for his semi-independence at a time when almost all of the other Kurdish Emirs had been overtaken.[94] It is clear that Ottoman attempts to incorporate the Kurdish Emirates, short of Bedir Khan Beg's, were ultimately successful as a result of tribal disunity, though in a few instances the Kurdish emirs happily accepted terms with the Ottomans that left them with the same, if not more authority, than they held previously. Kurdish emirs often allied themselves with the Ottomans in the hopes of receiving portions of pashaliks in reward for their efforts. This was true in the case of Nurallah Beg, the Emir of Hakkari, who was largely responsible for massacring the Nestorians in 1843.

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[92] Ibid., 20.
[93] Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan*, 56.
[94] Özoğlu, "Nationalism and Kurdish Notables in the Late Ottoman-Early Republican Era," 392.

Kurds and Christians alike in Kurdistan resented Bedir Khan Beg's concessions, especially as he continued to enlarge his emirate with the perceived support of the Porte. It also appears that in some cases, he used force to exact tribute from the tribes in order to support the war effort he purported to be waging against the state. Young men refusing to serve neither him nor the Ottomans immigrated to Persia and "every pass on the caravan routes was swarming with armed bands lying in ambush to pillage travelers," Safrastian quoted an anonymous source from the period. "The general insecurity prevailing from Mount Ararat to Baghdad was now worse than before the promulgations of the Hatt-ı Sherif of Gülhane [1839] because Ottoman pashas attempted to capture Kurds for the army."[95] That being said, Bedir Khan Beg did manage to amass the support of many, who continued to support his resistance to the Ottomans. In many places, Kurdish and Christian peasants received him as the prince of Kurdistan, and missionaries Grant and Badger both attested to the emir's popularity and respect.

Despite the secular inclinations of the Tanzimat reforms, it is clear that they prioritized Islam in a number of ways, and the Empire retained the status of a Caliphate until 1924. There are interesting parallels in the ways the Empire used Islamic rhetoric in the Kurdish provinces to intimate their position as natural rulers while the missionaries simultaneously "enlightened" Christians in those remote areas and thus generated the development of solidarity amongst them.[96] Both groups clearly prioritized their independence above all else. In fact, before the eruption of sectarian

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[95] Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan*, 57.
[96] Kendal, "The Kurds Under the Ottoman Empire" *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, ed. Gerard Chaliand (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1993), 21.

violence in Hakkari in the 1840s, the Ottoman military occupation of Kurdistan served as a cause for unification of Kurds and Christians. As early as 1815, extortionate taxation, pillage and the military occupation itself provoked uprisings in several provinces of Erzuroum and Van, where both Kurds and Armenians took part as a measure of self-defense.[97] According to Safrastian, the joint Kurdish-Armenian forces offered pertinacious opposition to the Ottomans. It has been suggested that the "fiendish treatment" by the Ottomans of the regions' women and children demanded a certain amount of cooperation between Kurds and Christians.[98] Even after the 1843 massacre, there is evidence that Kurds and their Christian neighbors fought together against the Ottomans and Persians, notably under the direction of Sheikh Ubayd'allah in 1880. This coordination raises suspicions as to the wholeheartedly "nationalist" agendas of these later movements and definitely complicates attempts to understand inter-communal relations in this region as either genial or antagonistic.

[97] Ibid., 18.
[98] Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan*, 56.

Chapter two

Missionary Motivations on the Ottoman-Persian Frontier

"Are you not aware that Franks are not allowed in this country? You are the fore-runners of those who come to take our country…"

–Kurdish elder of the Leihun tribe, Tiyari 1840.[1]

There is good reason to believe that the American and British missionaries in the Eastern part of the Ottoman Empire did not think of themselves as political agents or forerunners of imperialism in the Near East. But, the above quotation forces us to consider the reasons why the Kurds made this association. Europeans had pursued religious and mercantile objectives in the Middle East since the 11th century crusades. This left a lasting negative impression on the region's Muslims that carried beyond the shallow Mediterranean coastline penetrated by the Europeans. In particular, the anti-Muslim invective and clear Christian sympathies of the "Franks," as Arab chroniclers called them, greatly alarmed the Muslim population.[2] Among nineteenth century Kurds, the conflation of all Europeans (and by extension, North Americans) with the Franks of the eleventh and twelfth centuries may have reflected Kurdish fears of foreign domination as well as the fact that they had made virtually no connections with Europeans until the arrival of Protestant missionaries to Kurdistan in the 1830s. It is possible that the use of such an antiquated term as "Franks" also invoked a sense of Kurdish pride in history's most famous Kurd, Salah al-Din, who

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[1] William F. Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia Vol. II* (London: John W. Parker, 1842), 242.

[2] See Francesco Gabrielli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984) for numerous examples.

retook Jerusalem from the crusaders in 1187 and dealt a monumental defeat to the Christian occupiers.

The relationship between the nineteenth century inhabitants of Kurdistan and the Protestant Christian missionaries was complicated; it is also difficult to fully discern from limited and one-sided sources. Nevertheless, it is clear that both American and British missionaries came to Kurdistan with specific, preconceived notions of their objectives, and these will be the focus of the current chapter. The American and British missionaries may have pursued different objectives in their Nestorian missions, but both parties severely underestimated the difficulties they were to face accomplishing their goals among the Nestorians without arousing the suspicions of the majority Kurdish population. Also included in this chapter is a general discussion of the Kurdish reaction to the arrival of the missionaries, which provides important context to the next chapter's spotlight on two of the missionaries and their cordial and confusing relationship with the two Kurdish emirs who collaborated in massacring 10,000 people, or one-fifth of the Nestorian community in Hakkari in 1843.

The Americans, having already dealt with a mixed ethnic population of Nestorians and Kurds in Urumiyah since 1834, were more prudent, especially in sending a doctor to the mountains first in 1839 to administer medical care to both groups before widening the scope of their missionary activity. The Americans also sought out the approval of the local Kurdish emirs and Nestorian clergy before commissioning the building of a missionary outpost in the village of Asheetha (meaning avalanches, which occurred there often) in the Hakkari mountains

beginning in 1842. The Americans' caution regarding the scope of their activities was done to prevent becoming embroiled in local political squabbling, but may well have been inadequate as it achieved the opposite effect.

As for the British, what was known as their "Assyria mission" had barely gotten off the ground at the time of the Kurdish uprising against the Nestorians. Their representative, Rev. Badger, arrived to the mountains later than the American Dr. Grant, and only spent five weeks in contact with the Nestorian Patriarch and Bedir Khan Beg before he was forced to flee the region due to the violence in 1843. In consequence, Dr. Grant was responsible for allowing most of the opportunities the missionaries had to prevent or mollify the severity of the catastrophe to get away from him. He also had a better understanding of the dynamics of the region having spent more time with the its leaders and with a similarly ethnically divided population in Urumiyah. In addition, Grant's memoir informs us that he had knowledge of Bedir Khan Beg's impending attack on the Nestorians, including information about the projected severity of the massacre.[3] The fact that neither Grant nor Badger was capable of preventing the tragedy demonstrates what the missionaries believed to be their obligations and limitations, as well as the antagonistic relationship between the two missionary groups: a subject I will return to in the concluding chapter. It is important to understand how the missionaries and their sponsor organizations defined their duty to native Christians as well as the majority Kurds in order to arrive at a fair judgment as to the responsibility they should bear for the violence of 1843.

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[3] Dr. Asahel Grant, *Memoir of Asahel Grant, M.D.* Compiled by Rev. A.C. Lathrop with his commentary (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1847), 157-8.

The American and British Protestant missions operated by different guiding principles that reflected the cultures from which the missionaries came and the broader agenda of each nation within the Ottoman Empire. Inherent to each mission was a sense of moral responsibility to the Nestorians because of what the missionaries perceived as their perilous and destitute condition under the rule of the Kurds and Turks. The main difference lay in the path to salvation. Broadly speaking, the Americans sought converts and proclaimed a clear disinterest in overturning the balance of power in the Ottoman Empire, despite all the injustices about which they wrote home. The British, on the other hand, expressed disdain for officially converting the Nestorians to the Anglican Church. They strove to perfect the doctrinal and ritual "errors" of the ancient church with the goal of harmonizing the Anglican and Nestorian churches in order to convince the Nestorians that the British were the rightful protectors of their community in the face of further oppression.[4]

Both the American and British missionaries were originally fascinated by the antiquity of the Nestorian Church. This inspired both to render assistance to the Nestorian clergy in the education and improvement of their laity by establishing schools and providing copies of the liturgy. But where the British saw a chance to portray the similarities between themselves and the Nestorians as a pretext for offering assistance, the American missionaries stressed the errors in need of correction. For example, both Christian missionary sects made note of the fact that the Nestorians observed many different fasts through the year. The Anglicans were

[4] Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals,* vol. ii, 352.

confused by this but commended it as healthy for the spirit.[5] In the American sources, the fasts are referred to as wasteful and pointless. Justin Perkins, head of the American mission at Urumiyah even dubbed the Nestorian fasts "little more than a senseless routine of forms" and called the sound of their prayers "a chattering noise," which he claimed was no more than "an artful contrivance of Satan."[6]

Nevertheless, the Nestorians were a very special community in the American missionary imagination. The Americans were taken by the simplicity of the Nestorians and their churches as well as the many doctrinal similarities to Protestantism, such as their rejection of the auricular confession. Perkins affectionately referred to the Nestorians as the "Protestants of Asia."[7] They especially admired the Nestorians' historical role as missionaries famous for spreading the gospel to India and China during the Abbasid period.[8] This partially imagined history of the Nestorians as the missionaries of a former age formed the basis of many lengthy pieces in the *Missionary Herald*.[9] The idealistic Americans thought of themselves in a way as "rekindling" their missionary zeal; though first they would have to turn them into real Protestants.

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[5] Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*, vol. ii, 187.
[6] "Nestorians of Persia: Excerpts from the Journal of Justin Perkins," *The Missionary Herald*, 33, no. 1 (January 1837) Accessed through APS Online. See also Justin Perkins, *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia, among the Nestorian Christians with Notices of the Muhammedans* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1843), 253.
[7] "The Nestorians Mission," *Missionary Magazine*, 37, no. 10 (October 1857), 371.
[8] Rufus Anderson, *History of the Missions*, vol. I, 84.
[9] "Missions of the Nestorian Christians in Central and Eastern Asia," *The Missionary Herald*, 34, no. 8 (Aug 1838), 289-99. Accessed through APS Online.

For the Anglicans, according to J.F. Coakley, the verb "missionize" did not carry the same meaning as proselytize.[10] In the Victorian era, the Church of England initiated contacts with other branches of Christianity that promised to reinforce its belief that Anglicanism's ecclesiastical lineage was descended from ancient sources. Accordingly, they ignored doctrinal differences and focused on education in the name of brotherly love to all Christians.[11] According to Badger, who wrote volumes about the beliefs and rituals of the Nestorians, even the widest doctrinal gulf between them concerning the nature of Christ could be easily amended by proving to them that it was really no more than a "misunderstanding of language."[12] By this he did not intend to convert the Nestorians, but rather to prove (both to the Nestorians and Anglicans back home) that they had once been one in the same Christian "stock" and perhaps still were. They tried generally to commend the traditions of the Church and its laity and did not determinately alter their ways, though they wanted to promote sound doctrine as a service to those whom they considered their ecclesiastical relatives.[13]

Horatio Southgate, an American Episcopalian missionary, best expressed the sentiments of his mission, (which later became affiliated with the Church Missionary Society in England) when he referred to the Episcopal church as the "younger sister in the Western world" of the Syrian church which desired only to partake in "friendly correspondence" in a letter signed by seven Episcopal bishops to the Patriarch in

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[10] Coakley, *The Church of the East*, 2.
[11] Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches,* vol. ii, 285.
[12] Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals,* vol. ii, 355-6.
[13] Coakley, *The Church of the East*, 2.

1841.[14] Southgate wrote, "The Church of England has long contemplated with great spiritual sorrow the divided and distracted condition of the Catholic church of Christ throughout the world [as a] serious impediment to the diffusion of gospel truth.." Furthermore, he argued that in the advancement of "Christian education and in promulgation of religious truth," in order to form a poised front against "paganism, Mohammedanism, and Judaism," religious differences between Christians needed to be shelved. "Let us avoid the points in which the two Churches still differ and leave the producing of a closer mutual conformity to the blessing of God."[15]

Though the Anglican missionaries professed a non-proselytizing and non-sectarian agenda (American missionaries purported the latter also), the desire to inform Eastern Churches about the character of the Anglican Church clearly had political motivations –especially since they consistently highlighted similarities. The Anglican missionaries played a crucial political role in attempting to prevent the Nestorians from sympathizing with Imperial Russia, as they saw the Armenians doing. Through the missionaries, the British tried to prove themselves worthy of the guardianship role over the Empire's Christians in order to counter Russian encroachments into the Ottoman political domain after the 1833 Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi.[16] This treaty embodied the Russian threat and also indicated the decline of British influence in Istanbul; it declared that the Sultan would close the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits on Russia's command, barring passage to the Black Sea. According to Frank Bailey, the British felt that Hünkâr Iskelesi "placed the sultan in

[14] Letter dated May 2, 1841 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 4.
[15] Same letter in Ibid.
[16] Frank Bailey, *British Policy and the Turkish Reform Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), 39.

the lap" of the Tsar and abrogated a previous treaty between Britain, France and the Porte assuring equality of the foreign powers in the straits.[17] The threat was real enough to encourage the British to more actively to engage in Ottoman affairs in order to "maintain the territorial integrity" of the Empire –something of a pretext for protecting British trade routes. While diplomats like Ambassador Lord Ponsonby worked tirelessly after 1833 to persuade Mahmud II that Britain was a more sensible ally, the missionaries courted the Empire's Christian communities by offering them the protection they might have otherwise sought from Russia.

In contrast, in the 1830s and 40s, America had little diplomatic presence in Istanbul, having only sent its first official Ambassador in residence, David Porter, to Istanbul in 1831. Before 1830, when the Americans and Ottomans signed a treaty establishing diplomatic relations (as well as permitting free passage of commercial ships through the straits), the Ottoman government did not make any distinction between the British clerics and the American missionaries and regarded the members of the English speaking Protestant churches as having the same "British" identity.[18] This perspective was gradually effaced in Istanbul over the course of the following decades, though the Kurds and Christians of the rural parts of the Empire were slow to make national distinctions. The State Department did not establish formal relations with Persia until 1883, after a Presbyterian missionary there implored his brother-in-law, a congressman, to do something about the fierce hostilities raging on the Ottoman-Persian frontier.[19] Like the British, American designs regarding the balance

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[17] Ibid., 59-61.
[18] Çağri Erhan, "Main Trends in Ottoman-American Relations," 12.
[19] Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy*, 137.

of foreign influence over Ottoman affairs were not entirely absent in 1834 when the Board sanctioned Justin Perkins to set up a mission to the Nestorians in Urumiyah. Rufus Anderson, Foreign Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, wrote that American missionary efforts were sent partially to protect Western and Central Asia "against encroachments of the late ambitious and bigoted autocrat of Russia."[20]

Though it was never considered optimal, there were no delusions on the part of American Protestant missionaries that their survival in the region rested on the help, protection and sometimes advocacy of British consular officials, who had more firmly established relations with both Istanbul and Tehran. Anderson began his outline of the aims of Protestant missionaries in Western Asia in his history of the Board's activities with a clear directive that the missionaries "rely on the English to secure a predominant influence in the government of both Turkey and Persia."[21] American missionary efforts simultaneously relied on the British for safe passage and resented their seemingly inevitable predominance over the missionary realm. This is clear from the fact that American missionaries would later play a decisive role calling on their diplomats and U.S. warships to take a more active role in Ottoman affairs – especially those that pertained to Ottoman Christians and to aid in the protection of the missionary endeavor. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that U.S. participation in Ottoman affairs only rose to the brink of direct involvement during the Armenian

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[20] Rufus Anderson, *Foreign Missions: Their Relations and Claims* (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1869), 2-3.
[21] Anderson, *History of the Missions*, 2-3.

massacres, which began in the 1890s,[22] though the U.S. also demonstrated its official support for the Cretan insurrection of 1866, the revolutionary movement in the Balkans as well as Zionist immigration to Palestine.

Dabney Carr, who replaced David Porter as U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in October 1843,[23] outwardly declared his intentions to protect American missionaries by whatever means possible, going as far as dispatching the *USS Independence* in 1844 to explore the eastern Mediterranean coastline in order to "inquire into the safety and prosperity of the missions (in Palestine)."[24] On the other hand, in the 1840s, the relationship between the U.S. diplomatic legation in Istanbul and the missionaries scattered throughout Ottoman lands could also be contentious. For example, in May 1841, the Maronite Patriarch in Lebanon, aggravated by the rate of conversion, among other things, pressured the local Pasha to call on the Porte to expel the missionaries. When the Porte delivered a communiqué to David Porter asking him to urge the missionaries to leave Lebanon (though he stressed his concern for the safety of the missionaries should the tensions increase), Porter replied that the American legation could neither force the missionaries to withdraw nor take responsibility for them.[25] Clearly, for the American missionaries in the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire and Persia at the time of Bedir Khan Beg's uprising, diplomatic connections had hardly become a significant force. Instead, they

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[22] Çağri Erhan, "Main Trends in Ottoman-American Relations," 23.
[23] "Uncle Sam and Turkey: Our Diplomatic Relations With the Ottoman Empire," *New York Times* (January 6, 1895), 21. Accessed through www.nytimes.com.
[24] Micheal B. Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 130-1.
[25] Çağri Erhan, "Main Trends in Ottoman-American Relations," 15-6.

maintained active contacts with British consuls in nearby Mosul, Baghdad and Tabriz.

However profound an influence the American missionaries exerted in rousing the U.S. government to action in later years and in forming the American imagination about Ottoman peoples, most American evangelist stations in the Middle East never served to stake out territorial claims for the U.S. Their chief ties to the Near East comprised missionary and philanthropic work. According to Michael Oren, this was in stark contrast to the European preachers who often "doubled as political agents."[26] The Americans only bemoaned the inequalities between Christians and Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, though they found the conditions much worse in Persia. In their reports, the missionaries disparaged Islam as a fraudulent, retrograde faith and in response to these reports, ABCFM members expressed support for a campaign to nullify the death penalty in Islamic law; this mirrored an important issue for many Congregationalists in contemporary America. For the most part though, the Americans left the reformation of Ottoman laws up the British, a task British Ambassador Sir Stratford Canning took very seriously anyway and focused their efforts on spreading the Gospel. Thus, even though the American missionaries in the Middle East were imbued with a general sense of American exceptionalism (in addition to a lingering Manifest Destiny), they interpreted it as a warrant for capturing souls, not as a blueprint for acquiring territory.

Far more than the Anglicans, the American missionaries placed as their paramount goal the purification of religious practice and the reinvigoration of the

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[26] Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy*, 131.

missionary spirit of the Nestorians.[27] Towards that end, they focused on educational initiatives among the Nestorian Christians and systematizing spoken Syriac into a literary language to improve literacy. This led to one of the first initiatives of the American missionaries –the establishment a functional Syriac press in Urumiyah in order to print liturgical and educational materials. Within two years of their arrival, the press was on its way from Malta equipped with type sets already engineered by the British,[28] testament to the fact that the American missionary effort relied on ground previously covered by the British. Within one year, four schools with 180 pupils were up and running with one specialized for Kurdish students, who clamored for equal opportunities when the missionaries arrived.[29]

The American missionary, Dr. Grant, a Congregationalist from upstate New York, not only implemented the school for Kurds in Urumiyah and acted as its superintendent, he also spearheaded the project to extend the mission eastward into the Hakkari region, which had until then been passed over by the mission. In opening the school for Kurds despite his numerous other commitments, which included operating an extremely overcrowded infirmary, Grant embodied the American missionary spirit in the age of the "Second Great Awakening:" a peculiar mix of compassion and zealotry. He ventured literally alone into the mountains in search of Nestorians in need with "a readiness to face danger, and even death," which he

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[27]Rufus Anderson, *History of the* Missions, vol. i, 84.
[28] Joint letter from Urumiyah station to Rufus Anderson dated December 29, 1835 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 553.
[29] Same letter in Ibid.

believed was "implied in the command to take up the cross."[30] Rev. Thomas Laurie, with whom Grant spent much time in Urumiyah, wrote that Grant swore never to leave the field "till I have reasons which I can plead at the judgment seat, where I expect soon to stand."[31] Here speaks the 19th-century conscience. Death was imminent, and the world a valley of tears: better to die young on the field battling for good than to live a long life in comfort.

Implicit in all of this good, seemingly selfless work, scholars have argued, the American Protestant approach was rife with arrogance and brazenly ethnocentric.[32] According to Joseph Grabill, they saw themselves as carrying out a moral renovation of the world through exporting a superior and particularly New England brand of Protestantism to the "nominal Christians" of the Middle East.[33] As opposed to the Anglicans, American Protestants frontally criticized rites they found idolatrous and challenged an ignorant priesthood to explain their understanding of the scripture, which, according to the missionaries, was very limited. It is true that Grant's drive to seek out those mountain Nestorians was partly inspired by visits from Nestorian clergy expressing their desire for education and medical attention, though Grant was

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[30] Rev. Thomas Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 118. As it will be relied on more later, it deserves mention that Reverend Laurie supposedly wrote *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians* as a compilation of Grant's own letters and journals, though he never cited these works by date or indicated where one entry ends and another begins. It is also fair to say that the tone of the entire work, published nine years after Grants death, is more of a tribute than objective history. Nevertheless, Laurie's work is special for its detailed chronological approach from which the reader can gain many insights into Grant's successes and failures working with the mountain Nestorians.

[31] Undated Letter from Grant to James L. Merrick (he had accompanied the Grants originally on their journey from America in 1835) in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 3.

[32] According to Joseph Grabill, Michael Oren, and Jeremy Salt.

[33] Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy*, 5.

troubled as much by what he viewed as their complete ignorance and inadequacies as educators. According to Grabill, the American missionaries generally were overconfident and confrontational. "New England forebears of the missionaries had conquered a forest and transformed it into Puritan commonwealths… with this heritage, the American religionists in Turkey were taking on with confidence their brash job of altering Eastern Christian ways."[34]

This cultural superiority was most clearly manifested in the manner the American missionaries framed their obligations; they consistently used terms that contrasted Christian civility and Muslim barbarism. Eli Smith and H.G.O. Dwight, the first two Americans to explore Kurdistan before the establishment of a mission in 1834, reported that an American "lever on a Christian fulcrum could overturn the Muslim 'delusion.'"[35] Without true political clout, this provocative statement probably referred to tackling social inequalities on a more local level, though later missionaries swore to stay out of local political feuds because they feared it was too dangerous to their safety. From the beginning, and partly due to the warnings of British officials, the missionaries arrived already prejudiced against the Kurds. The earliest encounters with the Kurds almost always involved some kind of delay, incursion or scare, confirming the stereotype, British warnings, and their conception of the Christian world as morally and culturally superior.

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[34] Ibid., 10.
[35] Eli Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith and Rev. H.G.O. Dwight in Armenia; including a journey through Asia Minor, and into Georgia and Persia, with a vist to the Nestorian and Chaldean Christians of Oormiah and Salmas*, vol. ii (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1833), 136.

These first glimpses of Kurdish society –often meetings with intimidating, black-turbaned horsemen on the paths of Kurdistan –helped strengthen solidarity with the Christians as well as commit the missionaries to a code of non-involvement in the chaotic politics of Kurdistan in order to prevent future inconvenience. Based on these experiences, the American board fittingly advised the missionaries not to offend local mores. Unfortunately, according to Joseph Grabill, this wise advice was impossible for the missionaries to follow. "Puritanism, by its eager commitment to a city built on a hill for all to see, required conflict with competing ideas."[36] On the contrary, the American missionaries in Kurdistan on the eve of the violence of 1843 held fast to their code of political noninvolvement, though had they not, it is hard to believe the outcome would have been any different for the Nestorians.

Another result of these frightening first contacts was that the Kurds entered the missionary imagination as the dark and ill-natured oppressors of native Christians. The Kurds faced the same fate as the Turks, who were also essentialized in the American public imagination as 'ignorant," "ruthless," "unspeakable," and "terrible"[37] because the missionaries constituted their main source of information. The fact that the missionaries also persistently dichotomized East and West provides clear insights into the depth of this sense of American cultural superiority, while also detracting from the veracity of the narratives they present. As the only reporters present in Hakkari during the violence of the 1840s, the missionaries framed the events for the popular press and their reliability as witnesses to ethnic violence

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[36] Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy*, 7.
[37] Cyrus Hamlin, *Among The Turks* (London: Carter, 1878), 356; Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy*, 43.

remains a divisive issue in both Ottoman and missionary scholarship. Today's readers must take into consideration that an English-speaking middle-class Christian, habitually biased in favor of their coreligionists, tended to assume that the Nestorians were somehow better behaved than the Kurds, especially after the first motion to suppress the Nestorians occurred in 1841.

As the first chapter addressed, the assumption of the missionaries that the Kurds and Christians were from entirely different cultural stock had little basis in fact. "Blood for blood" was the code by which the mountain Nestorians lived, a code no different from that of Bedir Khan Beg, Nurallah Beg or any of his tribesmen. Frederick Coan, an American missionary in Urumiyah during the last decades of the 19th century, had no sympathy for the Kurds, but in his memoirs he gave evidence of the willingness of both Kurds and Nestorians to engage in robbery, murder and subterfuge.[38] *The Missionary Herald* is also filled with reports attesting to the "wildness and savageness" of the Nestorians as well as testimony to the "provocation they gave to the Kurds,"[39] though most of these characterization were published only in the years after Bedir Khan Beg's uprising. This may point to the efforts on the part of the missionaries to deflect blame from themselves for the atrocities.

Justin Perkins, the author of many *Herald* reports, also spoke freely about the ferocity of the Nestorians of Hakkari. In one issue, he recalled having asked his guide, a Nestorians from Duree, whether the Tiyari tribesmen had ever sacked his village. Yes, the man replied quickly, "five or six times by the Tiyari people; and not

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[38] Frederick Coan, *Yesterdays in Persia and Kurdistan* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2006), 202.
[39] "Visit of Messrs. Laurie and Smith to Asheta and Julamerk," *Missionary Herald*, 41, no. 4 (April 1845). Accessed through APS Online.

our village only, but all the villages of Berwar, both Nestorian and Koordish."[40] Frederick Coan's father, Rev. George Coan was also a missionary who spent time in Urumiyah. He wrote in 1851, "The Nestorians are continually embroiled in quarrels… my very soul was made sick by their endless strife."[41] From these example it seems that despite their subjectivity, the missionary sources do provide us with honest characterizations of both groups and therefore, at times also reliable information from which to draw conclusions about social relations and organization.

Western Diplomacy and Protestant Missions in Historical Perspective

The history of Ottoman relations with Europe in the 18-19th centuries often unjustly focuses on the waning authority of the "sick man of Europe" and the achievement of various capitulatory treaties, which tipped the power balance in the direction of the West. On the contrary, there is ample evidence to prove that a two-way dialogue, initiated at times by the Porte in the service of its interests, took place between the Ottoman Empire and western European nations.[42] In fact, it was Sultan Selim III in the late 18th century who opened the lines of communications to an unprecedented degree in search of mutually beneficial arrangements with European governments. Mainly, the Sultan sought out French military consultants to modernize

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[40] "Letter from Mr. Perkins June 27, 1849," in *Missionary Herald,* 46, no. 3 (March 1850), 97. Accessed through APS Online.
[41] "Mr. Coan's Visit to Central Kurdistan," in *Missionary Herald*, 48, no. 3 (March 1852), 71-3. Accessed through APS Online.
[42] Ussama Makdisi argued interestingly that Ottoman modernity itself portrayed the hallmarks of Orientalism (in the derogatory Saidian sense) in its regard for its periphery "nations," such as the Kurds, Arabs and Armenians, "as backward and not-yet-Ottoman, as hindrances to as well as objects of imperial reform." Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *American Historical Review*, 107, no. 3 (June 2002), 770.

the Ottoman army. He eagerly introduced new military and naval schools and recruited French officers as teachers and lecturers in schools in which the main language of instruction was French.[43] The French were well regarded for their services by the Sultan as well as the academy graduates, and that regard, in turn, helped lower trade barriers. This high standing also translated into privileges beyond commercial benefits; the French arrogated to themselves a special protectorate over the Empire's Catholics.

Even after the expulsion of the Crusaders, interests in the souls of Middle Easterners, later Ottoman subjects, remained great, especially on the part of French and Roman Catholic Lazarist, Jesuit and Capuchan missionaries who remained active in the Empire. The French claim of protection over both Catholic natives and missionaries was puzzling to many other European governments, though they expressed clear jealousies, as they found this right had not been established formally by treaty. It was long debated by the House of Lords in England, according to Badger, who said that by the year 1842, the only admission in formal treaties between the Ottoman Empire and France established their ability to protect their convents in Jerusalem.[44] The first Protestant missionaries arrived in the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, though permanent efforts only began after a chaplain of the British East India Company, Henry Martyn, appeared in the Persian Gulf in 1810. The Church Missionary Society, founded in London in 1799, sent some of its most respected members to Ottoman lands shortly after Martyn's early death in 1812.

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[43] Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 59-60.
[44] Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, vol. ii, 4.

Like the French government, the British had sustained diplomatic relations with the Ottomans as early as 17th century as a result of trade with the Empire. By the 19th century, these British consular officials yielded considerable authority in Istanbul, Tehran and in local urban centers and were instrumental in helping to assure that both American Protestant and Anglican missionaries were not subject to partial and discretionary Ottoman laws. British officers also advocated on behalf of the missionaries in such a way that the line between missionary and diplomat was not always clear, especially in the case of the British Ambassador to Istanbul, Sir Stratford Canning, who played an important role in Near Eastern diplomacy.[45] As a "missionary-statesman," a term used by Niyazi Berkes, Canning firmly believed that civilization and humanity would only come to the East with the spread of the Protestant faith.[46] Canning worked determinedly after 1844 to obtain recognition for foreign Protestants and the Protestant millet, which was only realized in 1850. This status recognition was important as it granted Protestants civil immunities from the central government. Before 1850, the Ottoman state recognized only the Jews, Greek Orthodox, Armenians and the Catholics as of 1831, as self-governing minorities whose highest dignitaries resided in Istanbul.

Canning also sought to extend the principle of *laissez-passer* underlying the Anglo-Ottoman Commercial Convention of 1838, also called the Convention of Balta Liman, to the field of religion and, by using the principle of freedom of conscience, to

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[45] "Retirement of Sir Stratford Canning," *New York Times* (June 24, 1852), p. 3. Between 1808-1852, Canning served as English Ambassador to Turkey "five or six times."

[46] Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964), 149.

abolish the prohibition on apostasy.[47] Unfortunately, as passionate as Canning was about matters of faith, his personality was often a detriment. Sir Henry Layard, archeologist, historian and later British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire during the 1860s, described Canning as a brutish and tactless diplomat. He was regularly known to treat Ottoman officials with disdain and disrespect.[48] As a result, both the Muslim Ulama, or the religious authorities, and Bishops of the Eastern Churches upheld the prohibition on apostasy with the intention of curtailing the rate of conversion, religious animosities created as a result and their political consequences. Canning, later given the title, Stratford de Redcliffe, was also one of the most blatant Orientalists in the sense that did not believe that independent Ottoman modernization was possible without the overthrow of Islamic institutions. He wrote in an 1856 memorandum to the Earl of Malmesbury, "Europe is at hand, with its science, its labour, and its capital. The Koran, the harem, a Babel of languages, are no doubt so many obstacles to advancement in a Western sense."[49]

Outside of Istanbul, prominent British dignitaries also played a decisive role in frontier politics, most importantly in helping to settle a heated border dispute between the Porte and Persia at the beginning of the 1840s. After the Ottoman defeat by the Egyptians at Nezib in 1839, the situation along the Persian frontier deteriorated

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[47] Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* 150. On the convention, see Frank Bailey, *British Policy and the Turkish Reform Movement*, 125. It abolished all monopolies as well as allowed Britons to trade freely anywhere in the Turkish dominions.

[48] Henry Layard, *Autobiography and Letters*, vol. ii (London: J. Murray, 1903), 83-5.

[49] David Gillard, ed. *British Documents on Foreign affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Part I: From the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the First World War, Series B: The Near and Middle East 1856-1914*, vol. i: The Ottoman Empire in the Balkans 1856-1875 (University Publications of America, 1984), 20.

rapidly, according to the reports of Captain James Brant, then British Consul at Erzurum, who kept regular correspondence with Canning in Istanbul. Brant's reports testified to the problems caused by the movements of nomadic Kurdish tribes between territories only loosely attributed to the Ottoman, Persian or Russian Empires, some of which were inspired to agitate to preserve their autonomy after the Egyptians defeated the Ottoman army. The Persians complained of "unprovoked attacks" by Ottoman Pashas, and complained that the Ottomans aggravated the contumacious Kurds into immigrating to Persia. Likewise, the Ottomans resented the Persian occupation of Sulaymaniya (in northern Iraq today) between 1840-2 and argued that the surrounding province of Zohab, then under Persian control was actually ceded to the Ottomans in a 1639 treaty.[50]

In August 1842, Brant reported that he had received a letter from Belool Pasha of Sulaymaniya stating that the Persian tribes had been encouraged to continue plundering other tribes across the border "by the Turks not making reprisals."[51] At the same time, Persian governors tried to seduce Kurdish Ottoman governors, such as Nurallah Beg of Hakkari, to renounce their allegiances to the Sultan.[52] Brant's reports illustrate the precarious situation on the frontier on the eve of the Nestorian massacre and the information he relayed to Sir Stratford Canning ultimately led the Porte to stake out stronger claims along the Persian frontier.[53] The Ottoman authorities would need to show they could pacify Kurdistan in order to justify their

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[50] Richard Schofield, ed. *The Iran-Iraq Border 1840-1958* Vol. 1 (Trowbridge: Redwood Burns Ltd., 1989), xxxix-xli.
[51] "Captain Brant's Frontier Reports" August 8, 1842 in Ibid., 36.
[52] Ibid., 36-7.
[53] Ibid., xvi-ii.

claim of ownership, even if they intended to maintain the Kurdish leaders in reformed roles as Ottoman civil servants.

The British realized that "bad fences make bad neighbors" and took decisive action in 1843 by convening, with the compliance of Russian officials, the Quadripartite Turco-Persian Boundary Commission, which sought to establish a fixed border to reduce tensions along the frontier. Without question, the British had an eye towards protecting their commercial interests in the Shatt al-Arab –where the Tigris meets the Euphrates and forms an outlet into the Persian Gulf– to preserve for themselves an overland route to India through Ottoman Mesopotamia. The passage was then part of the Porte's Basra vilayet that shared a border with Persia. The British also wanted to preserve some of the strength of the two feuding empires in order to stave off Russian encroachments; their imperialist rival had just acquired provinces in Armenia and Georgia (as well as former Ottoman territories on the western shore of the Black Sea) as a result of victories in the Russo-Turkish War in 1828. The stability of the Ottoman and Persian empires as buffers against further rival imperialist expansion became important strategies of both Russian and British policies in the Middle East at this time.

Brant's accounts and the resulting actions taken by British powers in 1843 with the establishment of the boundary commission were instrumental in averting war between the Ottoman and Persian Empires, though their efforts failed to draw a boundary until 1847 or quell Kurdish dissent. Brant suggested to Sir Stratford Canning that he urge the Sultan to remove untrustworthy and incompetent Pashas in the frontier zone, many of whom were Kurds, and to engage the Ottoman military in

policing the border.[54] These suggestions eventuallycontributed to the final disintegration of the Kurdish emirates by 1847, but the response was far from immediate. Only after the massacres of 1843, was the missionary outcry also a significant factor in urging Western governments to increase pressure on the Sultan to gain tighter control of Ottoman Kurdistan. Brant's frontier accounts from 1840-2 never referenced information gathered from a missionary source.

The staggered response of Western governments failed to "calm excitement" as Brant had advised in 1843 and led to the unfortunate demise of those who got in Bedir Khan Beg's way (such as the Yezidees as well as the Nestorians). Though the Ottomans were eventually able to reign in Bedir Khan Beg in 1847 due to the influence of Stratford Canning in Istanbul and others, one can argue that the Ottoman military and administrative reforms were in fact the cause of the instability in Kurdistan in the first place, which inspired Bedir Khan Beg to enlarge his emirate at the expense of the Nestorians in 1843. By incorporating Kurdish emirs into the Ottoman bureaucracy, the state also intensified tribal strife in Kurdistan. As these new Pashas struggled to fulfill their obligations to the Sultan, or in many cases exploited the people under the guise of carrying out Ottoman tax collection, leading local families became divided in their allegiances.

These shifting power dynamics, produced by the Ottomans, but partially driven by Western involvement, had a lasting impact on intercommunal relations in Kurdistan, especially in Hakkari where there lived two semi-autonomous communities. These issues are essential to understanding the political breakdown that

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[54] Letter dated August 21, 1842 in Ibid., 39.

occurred in Kurdistan concurrent with the missionary arrival. It is not difficult to see how the missionary labor with the Nestorians magnified their threat in the eyes of Muslims at a time when it seemed clear that the Ottomans wanted to completely incorporate the Kurdish emirates into tax-paying Ottoman districts. Though the only Kurdish voices available to us are filtered through biased missionary accounts, even these sources signal that the Kurdish leaders feared for their survival and suspected that the missionaries had powerful connections to Ottoman authorities, though the Americans tried to resist this association. This assumption made their close relations with the Christians all the more dangerous.

In spite of the Western impact on Ottoman decision making in this decade, the details of which are a subject for future research, Ottoman authorities were not docile bystanders in the boundary resolution. They also distrusted the missionaries. Laurie suggested that Ottoman authorities even expressed some embarrassment about their failure to subdue their unruly provincial areas. He wrote that in 1843, the Porte denied three American missionaries seyahat tezkeresi, Turkish for edicts or firmans, to join the Nestorian mission "on the grounds that it could not, at present tolerate Franks in the mountains. Determined to subjugate Kurdistan, it wished to do so without the embarrassment occasioned by their presence."[55] To start, from the overall tone of Laurie's work, it is clear he had a political agenda that involved accusing the Ottomans both of complicity in the anti-Christian violence as well as aversion towards the Christian missions. The explanation for the rejection of the seyahat was clearly Laurie's subjective rationale, considering an Ottoman minister would never

[55] Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 319.

have made such a statement about their motives. But, Laurie made an astute observation that the missionary presence in Ottoman lands provided a corps of reporters, whose flow of firsthand information from the region would later lead their respective nations to become involved in Ottoman affairs.

Although the word embarrassed is probably too politically charged, for it implied that Laurie believed the Ottomans were up to something reprehensible, certainly the Ottomans were irked by something that caused them to slow the arrival of missionaries to Kurdistan in the early 1840s. Çağri Erhan has argued that, at first, the modest activities of the missionaries in Ottoman lands did not "cause any trouble" but parallel to the increase in the missionary activities in the 1830s and 40s, more and more problems arose. A major part of his discussion is based on the negative reactions from the clergy of the Oriental churches, which began to prompt the Porte to action on their behalf. The Porte often tried to remedy complaints by its Christian subjects against the missionaries by limiting their movement and prohibiting their activities.[56] The Turkish Historian, Dr. Uygur Kocabaşoğlu's study of the negative impact of the American missionary schools may also tell us something about the anti-missionary attitude of the Ottoman authorities, though the author focused on how the schools promulgated nationalistic ideas and formed negative perceptions of Turks. It is plausible that the Ottomans felt disempowered because the missionaries knew the realities of provincial life much better that the Ottoman elite. Kocabaşoğlu wrote, "Ottoman intellectuals only began in the first quarter of the 20th century to discover Anatolia," while "missionaries already knew... the values, patterns of behavior,

[56] Çağri Erhan, "Main Trends in Ottoman-American Relations,"12-4.

desires, prejudices and expectations of the different ethnic and social groups living there."[57]

The Missionary Encounter in Kurdistan

In 1810, the same year that British emissary Henry Martyn arrived in Shiraz, Persia, a group of Samuel J. Mill's followers at the Andover Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, enlivened by the religious revivalism of the "Second Great Awakening," persuaded Congregationalist and Presbyterian officials to found the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The Board embodied the spirit of the Second Great Awakening, described by Grabill as "individualistic, pietistic, disestablishmental, and optimistic."[58] It was a unique institution for its diverse composition of clergymen from different denominations, industrialists, physicians and lawyers, all excited about exporting their brand of the American Protestantism.[59] Though there were many missions preceding it, contact with the Kurds and Nestorians of the Eastern Ottoman provinces and Persia began with the research expedition of Rev. Eli Smith and Harrison Gary Otis Dwight in 1829-31 and

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[57] Uygur Kocabaşoğlu, *Kendi Belgeleriya Anadolu'da Amerika; 19. Y üzyilda Osmalı İmparatorluğu'ndaki Amerikan Misyomer Okulları* (Istanbul: Arba, 1989), 220. Section translated from Turkish by Hans-Lukas Kieser in "Some remarks on Alevi Responses to the Missionaries in Eastern Anatolia (19th-20th centuries)" in *Altruism and Imperialism: Western Cultural and Relgious Missions in the Middle East*, eds. Eleanor Tejirian and Reeva Spector Simon (New York: Middle East Institute, Columbia University, 2002).
[58] Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy*, 7.
[59] Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy*, 87.

later officially with the establishment of an American Protestant missionary outpost at Urumiyah in 1834 by Justin Perkins.

Smith and Dwight's mission to the Kurdish hinterland reflected a shift in the motivations of the American Board; having found it imprudent to continue its failed evangelism of Jews and Muslims by 1829, they turned their attention to the "degenerate churches of the East."[60] Smith and Dwight reported to Anderson that their interest in the Nestorians was sparked by an article in a Virginia publication entitled "Chaldees in Persia," written by Dr. Walsh, the chaplain of the Church of England in Istanbul.[61] According to Anderson, the British at Tabriz confessed to an almost entire ignorance of the religious doctrines and character of the Nestorians and Smith and Dwight desired to see whether "the churches in this western world had any duty to perform to them."[62] So partly in the spirit of saving the degenerate, partly out of desperation on the part of the American missionary enterprise, Smith and Dwight set out to do their research. The "rediscovery" of the Nestorians was an exciting moment in the history of the American Board; many seminary students throughout New England became fascinated by the habits and customs of the Nestorians as well as inspired to contribute (monetarily) to the cause of lifting them out of spiritual and material depravation. Dr. Grant's work especially made ample reference to the research of Smith and Dwight, attesting to the lasting images they left in the minds of American Board members.

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[60] Tibawi, *American Interests in Syria*, 60.
[61] Anderson, *History of the Missions*, 85.
[62] Ibid, 85-6. Based on reports by Smith and Dwight in Rev. Eli Smith, *Researches*, vol. ii, 176.

After traversing the Ottoman-Persian frontier in 1830-1, Smith and Dwight returned enthusiastic about the prospects for American missionary success among the Nestorians. They asserted that the Eastern Churches were doctrinally in a terrible state and the members lived in poverty unparalleled in the American imagination. In one section of their *Researches*, Smith recorded that one Bishop's quotations from scripture during a dispute "betrayed but a slight knowledge of the word of God."[63] They also found that although they enjoyed the simplicity of the Nestorian service, they found it completely lacking in spirituality. "I think I never saw so little reverence, and so much carelessness in divine worship."[64] But this was not the only rude awakening to the reality of life in Kurdistan. Smith and Dwight found villages of Nestorians on the Persian side of the frontier completely enslaved to their Persian aghas. Mar Yohanna, the Nestorian Bishop of Jamalava (the larger district in which Urumiyah lies), confessed to them that none in the village had a moment's peace to learn to read, let alone study their belief system. "You" the Bishop said, "can attend to such things, but we, both men and women, are obliged to labor with all our might to get money for the Moslems. Even if a boy sits down to read, a Moslem comes up before he is aware, and with a blow upon his neck, says, 'Give us money.'"[65]

Smith and Dwight quickly decided that the Nestorians, especially in Persia, were not only in need of spiritual rejuvenation, but also needed to be saved from a state of bondage. It is likely that the entire corpus of American missionary writing devoted to the suffering of the Christians at the hands of the "depraved" Kurd,

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[63] Ibid., 241.
[64] Ibid., 191.
[65] Ibid., 220-1.

Persian and Turk found its first eloquent elaboration in the work of Smith and Dwight. They formulated their appeal to the American Board and to the Protestant imagination perfectly –through the mouthpiece of a destitute Nestorian peasant. "Why do you leave us thus?" he asked. "We are your brethren. It is your duty to come and deliver us from this yoke of bondage."[66] American Evangelicals were moved by the appeal to their spiritual duty and responded enthusiastically with personal donations. These early encounters and the negative perception of the Muslim population they engendered helped shape the sensibilities of later missionaries dramatically. On one level, the Protestants saw it as their duty to provide material aid, education and a path to salvation. They were also delivering a vision: one of the world free from the corruption and discrimination of Islamic society.

Another lasting assumption Smith and Dwight instilled in the Board about the current state of the Nestorian community were rumors about French Catholic missionaries in Baghdad busily converting Nestorians to favor of the papacy. Later research done in the region by William Ainsworth (an Anglican) and his Chaldean translator showed that the Nestorian Patriarch, the Mar Shimun, resented these conversions greatly. He said to Ainsworth during an 1840 interview, "We never changed our forms of worship, but we keep to, and abide by, what was delivered to us by the apostles and our fathers; therefore you must know that we never change our doctrine nor our forms of worship."[67] Ordinary Nestorian tribesmen in Hakkari, also appeared hostile towards the specific activities of Catholic missionaries. Ainsworth recorded the testimony of one Nestorian who belligerently inquired whether his party

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[66] Ibid., 221.
[67] Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches*. vol. ii, 247.

was composed of any "Catholics or bad men."[68] According to Ainsworth, both Christians and Kurds alike were fond of reminding him that it was only by their favor that his appearance was tolerated in their country. At that time, it was the most dangerous to be confused for a "Papist."

As for the specific interest of the British in the Nestorian community, Rev. Henry Leeves, an agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Istanbul, made the first contact with them indirectly. He hired a Chaldean Bishop named Mar Shevris to seek out the Nestorian Patriarch in Hakkari on their behalf in 1824. His mission was to disseminate Syriac copies of the Psalms and ask the Mar Shimun to translate the New Testament into Kurdish.[69] Smith and Dwight later (1833) validated that the British had commissioned this project, but joked that it was of no use to the Kurds because he had transcribed the Kurdish translation in Syriac characters. According to Smith and Dwight, not only was the Syriac alphabet unknown to the Kurds, but it was also "ill adapted to express the sounds of their language."[70] Later, when both American and British contacts improved with the Kurdish emirs, it became clear that such a project would have been completely futile anyway; as such, the Kurds were rarely the targets of Protestant missionary efforts.

After the brief visit of Mar Shevris on behalf of the British in 1824, the next important Briton to journey to eastern Anatolia was William Ainsworth in 1835, though his motivations at that time had nothing to do with promulgating the Gospel. As the former editor of the Edinburgh *Journal of Natural and Geographic Science*,

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[68] Ibid., 218.
[69] Coakley, *Church of the East*, 18-19.
[70] Smith, *Researches*, vol. ii, 189.

the Royal Geographic Society commissioned him to undertake the "Euphrates Expedition" in 1835, in an attempt to chart a water route for steamships to India by the river beginning in Anatolia. On this expedition, Ainsworth picked up a translator named Anton Isa Rassam, a Chaldean living in Mosul who had been educated by missionaries in Cairo. Though their expedition was a failure, Ainsworth and Rassam became good friends and Rassam, though he never officially denounced his Chaldean faith and allegiance to the Pope, became a zealous adherent of Anglicanism on a visit with Ainsworth to Oxford. In 1835, Rassam even married an Englishwoman, Matilda Badger, whose brother coincidentally played a prominent role as a missionary to the Nestorians in Kurdistan on the eve of Bedir Khan Beg's uprising. After another mission with Ainsworth to the Hakkari region, Rassam was officially installed as the British Vice Consul in Mosul in 1840.

The second Ainsworth-Rassam mission was financed by the Church Missionary Society and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; many of their reports appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Geographic Society*. On this trip in 1839, they trekked through the Hakkari mountain region and stopped to speak with hundreds of Christian villagers. Ainsworth was very successful in articulating the similarities between the Church of England and the Assyro-Chaldean faith, especially south of the Hakkari mountains, in such a way that native bishops relished the possibility of accepting aid from a "true ally." Interestingly, the conversations Ainsworth reproduced in his account indicate that the native bishops never entirely understood Ainsworth's goals as being beyond altruistic. A Chaldean bishop from Amadiyah, who scorned being referred to as a Nestorian, said to Ainsworth, "we are

all worthy of the pity of those who can afford it." His desperation was clear as he spoke painfully of the "oppression, neglect and oblivion" his people suffered at the hands of the Ottoman Pasha of Mosul.[71] Ainsworth was sensitive to the bishop's sorrow and the two discussed improvements in the education of people, to the delight of the bishop. On the other hand, it is clear that dignitaries of the Eastern Church took pride in the antiquity of their tradition and excitedly took part in theological discussions unaware of the missionaries' ulterior motives.

Not unlike the Nestorians, the Kurds greeted foreign emissaries often suspiciously but also hopeful that they might offer them some assistance liberating themselves from their state of poverty. First and foremost, however, the Kurds saw the missionaries as different and therefore potential enemies. We know that the Kurds felt threatened by the Europeans because of numerous references to an outpouring of anti-European sentiment in 1839 after the Battle of Nezib in the works of both William Ainsworth and Reverend Laurie. The Kurds of Mardin and Diyarbekir were especially violent.[72] They rioted, pillaged and murdered in response to the Ottoman defeat, which they blamed on European innovations in military tactics.[73] According to Laurie, Grant heard himself cursed in the streets of Mosul and "people openly declared their purpose of killing every European in the place." In the backlash following Nezib, Kurds, presumably those that had been allied to the Ottomans, ransacked Mardin, fearful that they were in danger of losing territory for siding with

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[71] Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches,* vol. ii, 213.
[72] Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes*, 20-22.
[73] Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 111.

the losers. Mohammed Pasha of Mosul quickly restored Mardin from anarchy, but this was an equally brutal affair.

Even before the missionaries officially established themselves in Kurdistan, other Europeans who ventured into parts of Kurdistan to do archeological research often left the natives with very bad impressions of Westerners. This was especially true of Dr. Friedrich Schultz, a German traveler sent into Kurdistan by the academy of Paris in 1829 to explore the famous Vannic inscriptions as well as take scientific calculations. Schultz's name is ubiquitous in missionary sources, not for his original research, but because he was murdered by Nurallah Beg east of Hakkari during the first year of his work. The reason for his murder is easy to understand; missionaries purported in hindsight that Schultz treated the country as though it were his for the taking. He is said to have entered the country with considerable baggage and to have offered valuable presents to chiefs, who were hence led to believe that he was in possession of belongings of inestimable worth.[74] Dr. Grant gives a slightly different version of the story based on the testimony of native Chaldeans and Armenians, which held that Schultz had recently made a visit to the orpiment mines[75] and that the Kurds believed he had found them to contain gold and thus would cause an army to come and take possession of their country. Schultz also took many notes about the country and collected specimens that furthered the suspicions of the Kurds.

Schultz's memory in the missionary sources invoked the perceived Kurdish distain for the West and his murder was an important warning to future missionaries

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[74] Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches*, vol. ii, 295.
[75] These were found all over Hakkari at the time. Orpiment is yellow mineral that looks like fool's gold used in dye.

and travelers. The circumstances of his death certainly taught the missionaries a valuable lesson about how to carry oneself in dealings with the Kurds. One had to be extremely cautious about one's choice of words and conscious of even one's minute actions. Based on the experience of Schultz, Ainsworth, despite his interests in scientific calculations, opted not to take notes in public. Grant made similar concessions and never visited a single mine or collected "scarce a single mineral or plant, lest they should take him for a spy."[76]

The quote in the beginning of the chapter speaks to the negative response of the Kurds to the missionaries, which was the result of a culmination of different factors not limited to their relationship with the Christians. There were also many instances of Kurds reacting positively to the missionaries and this went beyond immediate self-interest such as Bedir Khan Beg's befriending of Dr. Grant because of the services he rendered as a physician. Grant spent a lot of time discussing religion generally and Christian rites with Bedir Khan Beg and his interested cadre of sheikhs and Sufis.[77] Smith and Dwight, for all of their exposition on the poverty and neediness of the Nestorians, provided us with an interesting insight into how some Kurds, mostly in Persia, viewed the missionary interest in Kurdistan positively; it was an opportunity to liberate themselves from their own abusive Persian overlords. In one instance, Smith and Dwight met an old Kurdish shepherd who cried out, "Aha! You are just the men I have been wanting to see for a long time." Though he confused them for Russians, the man excitedly told the Americans, "Our governor here oppresses, beats and kills us. This is Kurdistan: the Kurds are many, and the Kuzul-

[76] Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 147-8.
[77] Ibid., 276.

Bashes (Persians) are few. When are you coming to take the country and allow us a chance to beat and kill them?"[78] Obviously, this is not exactly the reaction Smith and Dwight expected (or even knew how to respond to), though it is still a very different first encounter scenario than we have seen anywhere else. The authors used this event to further press their case for the boorishness of the Kurds. They even went as far as to characterize the Persians as a more civil sort, and called the Kurds the most uncivil people they had ever met.[79] Grant, on the other hand, met pleasant and polite Kurds in his journeys who welcomed him into their homes "with all the politeness of the most polished Oriental."[80]

A comparison of the missionary objectives of the Americans and the British shows that both groups were preoccupied by their respective religious and religio-political agendas. As a result they were detached from the pressing issues facing the inhabitants of Kurdistan: those being predominantly political insecurities soon to be manifested in ethnic hostility. This helps explain why neither group was able to abate the onset of sectarian violence between the Kurds and Nestorians. American missionaries, especially Grant, sought to reform the Nestorian church and were proudly politically neutral. The British interest in the Nestorians, on the other hand, was motivated by the desire to curb Tsarist expansionism while both sought to hinder the efforts of the other missionary groups. Despite differing degrees of connections to politicians in their respective nations, the missionaries themselves never expressed a desire to take over the region, or even see local seats of power shift hands before

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[78] Smith, *Researches,* vol. ii, 234.
[79] Ibid., 273.
[80] Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes*, 40.

1843. It was not until Bedir Khan Beg and his accomplices rose up against the Nestorians in a wave of brutality that the missionaries registered the seriousness of interethnic hostilities and saw themselves as the outright protectors of Christian survival in the Near East.

Despite their stronger political connections, the Anglican missionaries had barely sunk their teeth into the region at the time of Bedir Khan Beg's uprising. They and the British consular officials in Mosul and Istanbul, therefore, proved incapable of offering protection to the Nestorians in time. They later blamed this lapse on the disinterested and complicit Ottoman authorities such as Muhammad Pasha of Mosul.[81] The Americans, notwithstanding their lack of political connections, on the other hand, refused to take action preemptively on behalf of the Nestorians because they disavowed becoming involved with political affairs. Clearly, adhering to this idealistic neutrality was a major mistake that also resulted in the rapid ejection of both the American Protestant and Anglican missionaries from the Kurdish mountains. Also, all of their differing values and approaches to the missionary field aside, on the ground in Hakkari, these differences meant practically nothing. Mar Shimun cared little for these distinctions and often told both Grant and Badger that he was interested in how they could be of service to the Nestorians. Basically the Patriarch considered the two men allies in what he perceived as their Christian coalition against the ravages of the Kurds between 1841-43. Hence, we see that the missionary presence in Kurdistan disturbed the political landscape in two different but equally foreboding

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[81] "Memorandum Respecting the Persecution of the Nestorian Christians by the Turks, Persians and Khoordish Chiefs, 1876," in, David Gillard ed. *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* Part I, Series B, vol. 6, 271.

ways. In Kurdish circles, the missionary ties to the Nestorians foretold of greater Ottoman incursions into what they viewed as their rightful domain. In an equally incorrect and fatal assumption, the Nestorian Patriarch expected the missionaries to bring about their temporal salvation.

Chapter three

The Limits and Consequences of Political Neutrality

"Even the very catastrophe which has now occurred was anticipated by me and distinctly pointed out, but to have been governed by such anticipations would have been to walk by *sight* and not by *faith."*

-Dr. Asahel Grant, 1844[1]

Dr. Asahel Grant embodied the spirit of political neutrality that Rufus Anderson, secretary of the ABCFM, stressed repeatedly in his correspondence with American missionaries. Grant consistently maintained a distance from the complex web of alliances that dominated politics in the Hakkari region from the moment he began his travels there in 1839. This is clear from his duality in professing an unmistakable feeling of kinship to the Nestorians while he retained cordial relations with Kurdish emirs, to whom he extended respect and unconditional medical attention. As early as his first conversation with the Patriarch Mar Shimun in 1839, Grant remained aloof toward intercommunal politics. At the same time, Grant's correspondence indicated that he was hardly naïve about the growing potency of hostilities between the Kurds and Nestorians. In the end, the American missionaries' failure to broker a less violent resolution to the escalating hostility between the Kurdish emirs, Bedir Khan Beg and Nurallah Beg, and the Nestorian tribes loyal to the Patriarch, was a tragic consequence of Grant's own priorities and those of the American missionaries generally, though they were also distracted at the time by the actions of the Anglican missionaries that arrived in Hakkari in November 1842.

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[1] Asahel Grant, "Dr. Grant's View of the Nestorian Mission," *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 22, no. 6 (Feb. 10, 1844) Accessed through APS Online.

However tragic a missed opportunity this was in hindsight, it is arguable that Grant maneuvered in implacable seas. In a land governed by ambitious men where the "blood for blood" law reigned, from the beginning, the missionaries were mistaken for useful allies in a struggle in which they had no desire to take part. This is not the same story presented by John Joseph and other historians such as Martin Van Bruinessen and David McDowall. All three have leveled harsh claims on the missionaries in Kurdistan for causing schisms in the Nestorian community, which "made an attack on an otherwise formidable foe possible."[2] Joseph, himself a Nestorian (today, "Assyrian"), is especially unsympathetic to the Americans, though he blames missionary activity generally for upsetting what was previously a delicate balance of power in the region. He accused Grant and the Americans of encouraging the Nestorians to see themselves as a privileged community –even one of the lost tribes of Israel. In doing so, the missionaries raised false hopes about their desire to lift the native Christians out from the strong arm of Kurdish tyranny.

According to Joseph, the missionaries' meddling and instillation of new hopes caused the Nestorians to become "haughty," which ultimately raised the suspicions of the Kurdish Begs that the missionaries were conspiring with the Nestorians to take over what was the rightful domain of the Kurds.[3] The missionary historian J.F. Coakley, in his effort to vindicate the Anglicans, also indicts the American missionaries, and Grant specifically, for hastening the onset of ethnic violence in 1843.[4] On the contrary, this chapter argues that the American missionary showed

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[2] McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 45-6.
[3] Joseph, *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 51-4.
[4] Coakley, *The Church of the East*, 33.

ambivalence towards political realities in Kurdistan as a matter of prioritizing the diffusion of the Gospel and was wholly unaware of the sectarian ramifications of his presence. Though the missionaries certainly believed and hoped for the eventually dominance of Christianity over the region, Grant never expressed these thoughts to anyone besides other missionaries in private correspondence, nor did he act in biased way towards either the Nestorians or the Kurds.

As a result, I find that the claim that the missionaries promoted intercommunal strife may have carried weight in Mount Lebanon or elsewhere (see Makdisi's *Culture of Sectarianism*), it is not a fair claim to level on the missionaries of Ottoman Kurdistan. Salahi Sonyel also charges the missionaries as troublemaking agents of change, who "inculcated liberal and revolutionary ideas" in the minds of the Ottoman Christian subjects while "clandestinely trying to convert the Muslims as well."[5] None of these accusations really apply to 1840s Kurdistan. On the contrary, Dr. Grant was truly a philanthropist in the purest sense. He saved many lives and could have probably saved more, but he arrived on the scene at a bad time with the wrong playbook. The year following the bloodshed he contracted typhus from the refugees he was tending and died on April 24, 1844, aged just 36.

As the previous chapter argued and Grant's memoir clearly stated, American missionaries highly cherished their commitment to remaining free from political entanglements. They preferred to focus instead on a strictly evangelical agenda. They believed that if they became embroiled in local political squabbling, they would endanger the safety of the missionaries as well as diminish their prospect of saving

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[5] Sonyel, *Minorities and the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire*, 449.

souls. This chapter explores Grants interactions with both the mountain Nestorians and Kurds between 1839-43 to demonstrate that Grant knew quite a bit about the seriousness of the impending invasion of Nurallah Beg and Bedir Khan Beg and made a conscious choice not to try and mediate a resolution in order to remain true to the values set forth by the ABCFM. Ultimately, the Nestorians suffered the most as a result of Grant's fatal hesitations and strict adherence to a code of political neutrality; but the violence had negative consequences for the missionary endeavor as well. Obviously, the murder and dispersal of the mountain Nestorians in 1843 forced both American and Anglican missionaries to abandon their efforts preemptively. More severe was the fact that Grant's neutrality caused both the Nestorian and Kurdish leadership to suspect him of duplicity on numerous occasions in the preclude to the attacks.[6] Grant's expressions of political neutrality were clearly not well received by the Nestorian Patriarch, who expressed more bitterness towards the American missionaries than about the Kurdish marauders in an interview with Sir Henry Layard after the storm had passed. According to Layard, Mar Shimun said, "It is to be regretted that.. those who were endeavoring to civilize and instruct his flock.. intended upon reducing the Nestorians to their own helpless condition of infidelity."[7]

This quotation illustrates the need to return to the issue of the bias in Western sources as it pertains to the veracity of the missionary accounts –upon which the following account of Grant's involvement in the violence of 1843 is based. It is hard to believe the figurehead of the Nestorian community, however depressed he felt after

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[6] Justin Perkins, "History of the Patriarch's Hostility to the Mission," *The Missionary Herald*, 45, no. 1 (January 1849), 26. Accessed through APS Online.
[7] Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon; with Travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and the Desert* (London: John Murray, 1853), 424-5.

the Kurdish attack, would refer to his constituency as in need of civilization or in any way helpless. On the contrary, most Western testimonials corroborate the fact that the mountain Nestorians were an extremely fierce people feared for their military prowess. Perhaps the Patriarch lamented the illusion of their invincibility that contributed to their destruction. Nevertheless, Layard's account of his discussion with the Mar Shimun still should not be taken at face value.

That the Patriarch expressed disapproval about the American missionaries after 1843, though, is verifiable. In the *Missionary Herald* report from 1849, the American Board traced the beginning of the Patriarch's "present hostilities" to the massacres of 1843. According to the report, the Mar Shimun told the Russian Consul at Tabriz,

> "The origin and cause of all those disorders among the Nestorian people were the Americans. Not a minute were they easy and quiet; Schools are opened, where they give instruction. They have deceived the people, and are still deceiving them… The whole Nestorian nation will soon be overrun, and the Nestorian religion will have taken its departure."[8]

Reports from the Urumiyah station between 1846-9 by Justin Perkins attest that the Nestorian Patriarch used all of his connections in Persia to try to close the mission there. Perkins characterized Mar Shimun as crazed in light of the Patriarch's avowal to the Muslim village leaders in Urumiyah that it was their prophet Mohammed's wish that the Nestorians remain under the tutelage of the Muslims. He reportedly said, "What business have these European ambassadors to attempt to rescue them?"[9]

If the account is true, this amounts to major about-face on the part of Mar

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[8] Justin Perkins, "History of the Patriarch's Hostility to the Mission," *The Missionary Herald*, 45, no. 1 (January 1849), Accessed through APS Online.
[9] Ibid., 26-32; Also see the ABCFM Annual Reports in *The Missionary Herald* from the issues dated Jan. 1847, p. 126; Jan. 1848, pp. 163-5 and Jan. 1849, pp. 126-8.

Shimun that can probably be linked to the intervention of the Anglican missionary George Percy Badger in 1844, who according to Rufus Anderson, consistently sought to prejudice the Patriarch against the Americans after 1842.[10] Anderson also posited that Mar Shimun only became hostile to the Americans at Urumiyah because they had refused to give money to his surviving brothers when they demanded it as retribution for the missionary involvement, as they saw it, in the attacks.[11] But other Nestorians had doubts about the American missionaries, subsequently after the first wave of violence in 1843. According to Rev. Stoddard, the Nestorians in Urumiyah blamed the Americans for their tragedy.[12] They clamored that Dr. Grant's building, referring to his mission house at Asheetha that the Nestorians had enthusiastically help to build,[13] and which suspiciously escaped destruction by the Kurds, had caused the Kurdish violence.

Our reliance on documents written by the missionaries is a problematic (but ultimately unavoidable) issue, especially in reference to the descriptions of the massacre itself in which there is a large propensity for embellishment. Many of the missionaries who reported details of the tragedy to ABCFM members in New England received their information from refugees who had fled to Mosul, Baghdad or

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[10] Anderson, *History of the Missions*, vol. i, 216.
[11] Ibid., 321.
[12] Letter from Rev. D.J. Stoddard to Mr. C. Stoddard, October 10, 1843, ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 4.
[13] On the Nestorians helping to construct the Mission house, Letter from Grant and Hinsdale to Rufus Anderson dated November 3, 1842, ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 4. This structure was not destroyed by the Kurds probably for strategic reasons, as they could use it as a garrison, though in a meeting in June 1843, Bedir Khan Beg promised Grant that he would leave the structure intact (and even overlook the inhabitants of that small valley if they agreed to pay tribute). Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 335.

Urumiyah. The missionary accounts dwell on the severity of the Kurds and typically use dramatic language to describe the difference between the forces of the Nestorians and their adversaries.[14] This was exemplified in Thomas Laurie's summary of the violence. He was in Mosul in July 1843 when news of the destruction broke:

> "The Kurds passed from place to place, slaying the people and burning the houses at their leisure, generally without even a shadow of resistance. The panic-struck Nestorians seemed alike incapable of flight not defense, and awaited in agonizing suspense their turn to suffer."[15]

Grant was also away from Tiyari during the violence, having decided to leave his mission house in Asheetha on July 11, 1843 only days before the attack to treat the illness of a Nestorian melek, or tribal chief, nearby named Berkho. Thus, neither Grant nor Laurie could have personally bore witness to the Nestorians as being idle waiting for the Kurdish warriors to decimate them. Based on previous accounts of the military ferocity of the Nestorians and their possession of formidable arms, it is difficult to reconcile those people with the pathetic and defenseless victims the missionaries described in these accounts. Remember Badger's account of the Nestorian priest who brought his rifle to Sunday services with him. How had this formerly formidable foe been so easily transformed?

While the Nestorians became sheep for slaughter, the missionaries did not have a kind word to spare for the Kurds. Laurie added that "one was at a loss whether to mourn more for the living or the dead," as he feared further exactions by the Kurds

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[14] See for example journal entry of A.H. Wright dated August 26, 1843 about the arrival at Urumiyah of two brothers of Mar Shimun in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 4.

[15] Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 354.

and probably for his own life.[16] As much doubt persists about the accounts, there is no question that deeply sorrowful men prone to accusations and religious stereotyping produced them. They were especially angered at the lost Christian lives to the evil menace they perceived in the Muslim spirit "urged on by the same spirit of fanaticism which dictated the memorable watchwords, 'The Koran, the Tribute, or the Sword.'"[17]

Besides the second and third-hand descriptions of the massacres, the missionary sources also provide us with useful information about why the Nestorians had difficulty fending off the attack. In particular, the missionaries took note of squabbling between the Nestorian meleks, which heavily contributed to their lack of preparedness. This was most clearly proposed by Rev. Stoddard in a letter from October of that year. "The success of the Koords is mainly owing to the divided counsels of the Nestorians. Had they been as one man, with their rugged country and their well known prowess, they would have repelled thrice their number. But there among them internal hatred no doubt caused their ruin."[18] Laurie added important details to this line of reasoning. He wrote that many Nestorian tribal elders refused to allow their warriors to serve under the Mar Shimun in May 1843 despite his pleading and some were so hostile to the Patriarch that they allied with Nurallah Beg instead.[19] Berkho, for example, expressed such disapproval with the Mar Shimun's opportunism in soliciting support from the Ottoman governor Mohammad Pasha of Mosul (who

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[16] Ibid., 356.
[17] Letter from Grant to Rev. Wayne Gridley dated January 12, 1842 in Grant, *Memoir*, 131.
[18] Letter from Rev. D.J. Stoddard to Mr. C. Stoddard, Urumiyah Station Dated October 10, 1843 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 4.
[19] Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 319.

was not only a severe ruler but also in the process of aggrandizing himself at the expense of Kurds and Nestorians alike), that the melek was happy to see the Nestorians loyal to Mar Shimun decimated by the Kurds.[20] According to the *Missionary Herald,* Berkho even told Grant that if the Kurds had not destroyed them, he would have done it himself.[21]

The missionaries reflected at length about the causes of the massacres *ex post facto*. In these accounts, the American missionaries displayed a biased hindsight, claiming that they had long suspected the Kurds and Turks would form a united front against the Empire's Christians, however unsubstantiated that hypothesis remains. In his 1872 history for example, Rufus Anderson wrote that the "object of the Osmanlis had long been to subjugate both the Koords and Nestorians."[22] In the name of retaining the Board's approval for their work with the Nestorians in Urumiyah, the missionaries washed their hands of any blame for the massacres in their correspondence with Anderson and laid blame, instead, onto the Ottoman authorities they believed had aided Nurallah Beg and Bedir Khan Beg. Laurie also wrote that the Ottomans, who had wanted to rid the land of Christians, merely hired the Kurds to do so.[23] As I will address later, the British scientist-missionary William Ainsworth was the only one who officially assumed some of the blame for the violence, though he

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[20] Mohammad Pasha was known pejoratively as "Inje Bairakdar," or the Little Ensign because he brutally put down rebellions and was known to impale people alive. Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 206-7; Badger, *Nestorians and Their Rituals*, 72-5.
[21] "Mountain Nestorians," *Missionary Herald*, 41, no. 4 (April 1845), Accessed through APS Online.
[22] Anderson, *History of the Missions*, 206.
[23] Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 334-5.

also expressed consistent disapproval with Grant's ways of courting the favor of Nestorian and Kurdish tribal leaders.[24]

The Anglican missionary George Percy Badger also railed against the Ottoman authorities for complicity in the attacks in his 1852 history of the Nestorians. According to Badger's comprehensive chronological survey, after Nurallah Beg assumed the title of Ottoman governor of Hakkari in 1840, he took the liberty of imposing the *Kharaj* (a land tax) on the Nestorians of Hakkari: a lawful but unsurprisingly despised alteration of the power structures in the region. He instructed his tax-collectors to press on despite resistance and supposedly allowed his men to spread carpets across the alters of churches, an act of desecration, in order to compel payment.[25] To foment further dissension, Nurallah Beg threatened Nestorian villages aligned to Mar Shimun and his rival, Suleiman Beg (Nurallah Beg's nephew whose power Nurallah had usurped). Nurallah Beg also lured Nestorian meleks to his side with incentives such as the church revenues that traditionally belonged to the Patriarch. But as in the American versions, the Turks also played a prominent role in Badger's account. He reported that in 1841 a command came down from the Ottoman governor of Erzurum dividing Nurallah Beg's emirate into two equal parts, with his nephew Suleiman Beg (to whom Mar Shimun had pledged his allegiance) ruling in Julamerk and himself in Başkale. According to Badger, it was exactly the kind of

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[24] "I extremely regret that the mission I was engaged in should have hastened a catastrophe" in Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches,* vol. ii, 254-5. Ainsworth may have accused Grant of bribing his way into the hearts of these men, though overall he referred to the American mission as "most successful and praiseworthy" in Ibid., 303.
[25] Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals,* vol. i, 262.

manipulation necessary to provoke the quarrels and rancor that would lead inevitably to Ottoman accession to power in Hakkari.[26]

These accusations against "agents of the Sultan" were not lost on the journalists who eventually reported the story in the mainstream media, though they also portrayed the missionaries in a negative light. The *Times* of London, which did not report the massacres until September 1843 (and even then it left out the names of the real Kurdish perpetrators of the massacre) weighed heavily on the "imprudent zeal of rival missionaries that first excited the apprehensions of [Mohammad] Pasha of Mosul causing him to "let slip the dogs of war" on the unfortunate Nestorians." The *Times* argued that Mohammad Pasha attacked because he was led to believe, incorrectly, that the American missionaries were helping the Nestorians to defy the authority of the Sultan.[27] In this account, the Ottoman authorities are not accused of communicating directly with the provincial governor, but the act was carried out in order to prevent a feared Christian mutiny against the state. This hypothesis is clearly flawed, since we know that Mar Shimun, desperate for allies in late spring of 1843, unwisely reached out the Mohammad Pasha for aid, which amounted to his confirming the Pasha's information that "the government of Tyari would not be withheld from him much longer."[28]

An even more prominent theme in the missionary accounts was that divine providence was responsible for the Nestorian tragedy. In a chilling and strangely unemotional sounding statement to the editorial board of the *New York Observer and*

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[26] Ibid., 262.
[27] "Massacre of the Nestorian Christians," *Times* (London: September 6, 1843), 3/c. Microfilm collection, Wesleyan University.
[28] Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*, vol. I, 188.

Chronicle in October 1843, Grant wrote that not only had he anticipated the attack, but God had ordained it because the "Nestorians, doubtless, needed humbling."[29] This providential thinking, as well as their incessant fatalism (clinging to the belief that the impending cataclysm between the Christian and heathen worlds was predetermined), helps explain why the missionaries felt powerless to affect conciliation in Kurdistan. The missionary accounts surrounding the Nestorian massacre therefore enrich our understanding of the inescapable, polarized worldview of the individuals who constituted one the chief sources of information about what was happening in the interior of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. They show that for all the problems uncovering objective history in the missionary accounts, these records possess tremendous value in their elucidation of the missionaries' major mistake in Ottoman Kurdistan: their failure to see themselves in conciliatory roles or as agents of social change.

Grant Courts Kurdish Favor

On the eve of his departure from Urumiyah, where he had been working since 1836, to survey the prospects for setting up a mission with the mountain Nestorians, Grant was very positive and enthusiastic about what he thought the American mission could achieve there. During the previous years, many Nestorians from the mountains had ventured east to the Urumiyah station in need of medical attention. As a result of these visits, the missionary doctor was impressed that the mountain tribes formed

[29] Grant, "Dr. Grant's View of the Nestorian Mission," *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 22, no. 6 (Feb. 10, 1844) Accessed through APS Online. The letter is dated October 17, 1843 though publication was delayed.

"the principal field of our future labours" and set out to bring them into communion with the mission, even though this was against the advice of his superior, Justin Perkins, who feared it was too dangerous.[30] According to a letter to his brother, Grant had "long been anxious to visit the Nestorian Christians inhabiting the almost inaccessible mountains of the lawless and sanguinary Kurds… where no European had before penetrated."[31] (Though we know this part was not true as even Grant gives an account of Dr. Schultz's murder in 1829). Furthermore, the Patriarch resided in the mountains at Kochanes and the missionaries had been operating in Persia for five years without meeting the formal head of the Nestorian Church. (Though they were in contact with him through other high-ranking Nestorian Bishops). Grant's motivations were clear: things were going well enough in Urumiyah for him to leave and there was a sizeable Nestorian population the missionaries had yet to reach. According to Laurie, Grant's biographer, "Grant's soul was grieved at every day's delay. He longed to fly to their help at once."[32] As we shall see later on, Grant was also greatly motivated to reach the Nestorian Patriarch before the "enemies," referring to other evangelical churches of the British and French variety, could "fill his ears with slander."[33]

Though missionary competition was a factor, Dr. Grant's main ambition was to disseminate the gospel as widely as possible. Early on, Grant was even optimistic about the prospect of conveying that message to the Kurds. It is evident from the account of his first travels, published in both Boston and London in 1841, Grant

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[30] Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes*, 10.
[31] Letter to Ira Grant dated December 15, 1839 in Grant, *Memoirs*, 99.
[32] Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 89.
[33] Ibid., 89.

wanted to convince his western audience that the Kurds also formed "a most hopeful class for missionary enterprise."[34] Though romanticism formed a part of this hope, Grant also found that the Kurds often expressed "inquisitiveness for general information and concern for their educational improvement," which he thought the missionaries might provide for them. However futile this idea later seemed to him in hindsight, Grant remained open minded about the idea and never hesitated to engage in discussions with Kurds he met about life in Kurdistan, matters of faith and often his own country, about which Kurdish dignitaries were especially interested to learn –most notably about Western steamships and weapons.

There was another important facet to Grant's altruism: as a missionary-physician, Grant felt passionate about helping as many people as he could as an integral part of his religious duty. This is nowhere more evident than in Grant's "Appeal to Pious Physicians," which he wrote in 1836 urging doctors of faith to prove their love of Jesus by joining the missionary service.[35] Not surprisingly, Grant's medical knowledge and collection of emetics (very common prescriptions at the time) proved very useful in gaining him entry into the homes of prominent dignitaries –a fact Grant surely recognized. According to the preface to the account of his first visit to Hakkari, Grant felt "that to relieve the sufferings of the body is the most ready way of access to the heart."[36] Thus, Grant indiscriminately treated Muslims and Christians wherever he went. As a result, he attained a reputation that defrayed robbers and saved his life more than once. According to his memoir, Grant was afforded respect

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[34] Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes*, 41.
[35] "Appeal to Pious Physicians," Appendix I in Grant, *Memoir*.
[36] Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes*, 3.

by even some of the most "bigoted Mussulmans," whom he'd seen bow down to kiss his feet or the floor on which he stood.[37] On one occasion, Grant recorded a dialogue with a Kurd (the two communicated in Turkish) in which it is clear that Grant's medicinal skills gained him good repute in Kurdish circles. Note how Grant also elucidated an important feature of Kurdish society that contrasted with the more familiar caricature of the bloodthirsty Kurdish miscreant:

> Grant: "I wish to visit your tribe, how would they treat me?"
> Kurd: "Upon my eye, they would do everything for you."
> G: "But you say they are thieves and murderers. Perhaps they would rob and kill me."
> K:"No, no; they wish to have you come, but you are not willing. We never rob our friends. You come to do good, and no one would hurt you."
> G: "But many of them do not know me"
> K: "They have all heard of you, and would treat you with the greatest kindness if you should visit them."[38]

Grant spent five weeks with the Nestorian Patriarch at Kochanes from late October through December 1839. After which, Grant paid his first visit to Nurallah Beg having received a dispatch that the emir had taken ill. Grant shrewdly and respectfully arrived at Nurallah Beg's dressed in the Kurdish style (he had been outfitted in the traditional shalvar pantaloons by the Mar Shimun) and with the thick beard he had been cultivating. Grant also made a good impression because of his mastery of Turkish, the *lingua franca* of the country, which allowed him to converse directly with the emir. After treating what turned out to be Nurallah Beg's cold, Grant stayed in the castle the whole night to watch after him. It was this caring gesture, in

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[37] Grant, *Memoir*, 208.
[38] Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes*, 12-3.

addition to his reverential appearance and functional remedies that made the Emir of Hakkari respect Grant very much.[39]

Grant described the first fateful meeting in his memoir. "He rapidly recovered and said he owed his life to my care."[40] From that point on, Nurallah Beg insisted Grant sit by his side at the dinner table and even allowed Grant to eat from the same dish as the emir. He encouraged Grant to remain in his country, where he "should have everything as he pleased."[41] In an additional gesture of respect, the Emir's close companions began to call Grant "Hadji," meaning pilgrim, a term usually designated to Muslims upon their return from Mecca.[42] Grant, the Congregationalist doctor from upstate New York had been transformed into the "Hakim Hadji," (Hakim meaning doctor), whose service to the emirs of Kurdistan eventually thrust him into the political arena he so desperately wished to avoid.

Clearly, Grant's associations with the Kurdish leaders amounted to a relationship of mutual convenience. But the special relationships that Grant forged with them calls into question the obvious contradiction between Grant's ardent belief that Islamic rule imperiled the native Christians, on the one hand, and his desire to remain politically neutral on the other. Having gained entry into the homes of the most prominent Kurdish men in Kurdistan, Grant shrewdly used these visits to insure that the Kurds would not interrupt his plans to build a missionary compound

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[39] Gordon Taylor, *Fever and Thirst* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2005), 104-5.
[40] Grant, *Memoir, 111*.
[41] Laurie, 148-9.
[42] Grant, *Memoir*, 121.

(schoolhouse, infirmary) in Asheetha.[43] With these interests in mind, Grant put his prejudices aside and willingly did basically whatever was necessary to secure the trust of the Kurds.

On one notable occasion it seemed as though these requirements became more than Grant was morally disposed to do as it directly threatened his apolitical repertoire. One month before the first massacre, in June 1843, Grant paid a visit to the camp of Bedir Khan Beg at Jezirah ibn Omar, the location of the emir's cooler summer camp, three days journey west of Asheetha. He had postponed the visit for a while in order to appease an anxious Mar Shimun, but eventually decided it couldn't do more harm than good. When he arrived at Jezirah, Nurallah Beg was already there (presumably preparing to coordinate their men for the attack) and told Grant not to "frustrate his plans by negotiating terms of peace for the Patriarch."[44] The purpose of the visit was plain politics. Bedir Khan Beg wanted to use Grant as a messenger, to show the Patriarch that the agents of Western powers (the missionaries) were little more than pawns he could manipulate. Grant was told to inform the Patriarch of his offer to leave the Nestorians in peace if they offered to submit themselves to the rule of Nurallah Beg. Grant was forced to comply for fear of the safety of his mission and he told the emirs that he would inform the Nestorians of the offer but "could not advise them regarding its acceptance or rejection." According to Grant's unpublished autobiography, he spent ten days with the Bohtan and Hakkari emirs and witnessed

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[43] Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 146-7.
[44] Grant, "Life in Koordistan," unpublished and unpaginated manuscript in ABCFM *Archives* 35, vol 2.

the preparations being made for the invasion. The two chiefs had spoken "as freely to me on the subject as though I had been one of their own number."[45]

According to Taylor's biography of Dr. Grant, mullahs urged Bedir Khan Beg within earshot of Grant to kill as many of the infidels as possible.[46] This is not the only major claim in his account that I have not been able to corroborate in any of the documents. Nevertheless, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that pointed anti-Christian feelings formed a part of the emir's justification for destroying the Nestorians of Tiyari, though other political motivations are easier to verify. Gordon does not cite this section, though he probably extrapolated from the work of Sir Austin Henry Layard. According to Layard, the chief cause of the massacre of the Nestorians was "Sheikh Tahar," who urged Bedir Khan Beg to "prove his religious zeal by shedding anew the blood of Chrisitians."[47] Layard goes on to describe the Sheikh as one of Bedir Khan Beg's principal advisors and a fanatic known to throw a veil over his face in public that his sight would not be polluted by Christians. "He exercises immense influence over the Kurdish population, who look upon him as a saint and worker of miracles."[48] If this were true, it would not have been unlikely for men like Bedir Khan Beg and Nurallah Beg, whose power was often challenged, to attempt to garner legitimacy by following the advice of a well respected religious man. According to Bruinessen, this Sheikh Taha I, a Naqshbandi tariqat leader of the Sadate Nehri family, was probably the first sheikh to wield considerable political

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[45] Ibid., n.p.
[46] Taylor, *Fever and Thirst*, 287.
[47] Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains,* vol. I, 193.
[48] Ibid., note on page 193.

influence, though he has not received much scholarly attention.[49]

Grant returned to Asheetha dismayed as ever and overcome with depression. He wrote in desperation to his colleagues that they should offer extra prayers for the safety of the Nestorians, though many of these letters did not arrive in New England before the massacres occurred in July. Grant expressed that he knew war was imminent and that the Nestorians had not made the proper preparations. According to his unpublished manuscript, "Life in Koordistan," Grant had little to tell the Nestorians in Asheetha besides "pray for guidance." He replied to a Nestorian villager's inquiry, "Is there danger?" "Yes, even unto death." The village chiefs likewise went to Grant for advice in the face of swirling rumors and appeals to surrender preemptively from their Kurdish ally Suleiman Beg. Grant told them that they should be unified in their council and actions. Exactly what this would mean in terms of practical politics he did not say.

"Blessed are the Peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9)

This was the biblical instruction Grant frequently quoted in his many close calls with politically charged situations in Kurdistan. But Grant's interpretation of the line did not imply a desire to negotiate or facilitate compromise –such modern criteria cannot be imposed on the 19th century missionary perspective. As products of the Second Great Awakening, these missionaries were more concerned with cultivating the good in individuals; they would have to save souls before embarking on the

[49] Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 231.

reformation of broader societal injustices. Grant understood the verse to mean strict non-interventionism and an affirmation of his purely missionary, as opposed to political, function. It was clear from his first meeting with the Nestorian Patriarch on October 26, 1839, that this would form the basis of a major rift between the two men.

At this first and long-awaited meeting, the Patriarch's thoughts were absorbed with the temporal as much as the spiritual world and Grant was hesitant, if not wholly disinclined, to respond to his worldly concerns. According to Grant, the Mar Shimun's first inquiries "related to [his people's] political prospects, the movements in Turkey, the designs of the European powers with regard to these countries; and why they did not come and break the arm of Mohammedan power, by which many of his people had so long been oppressed."[50] Grant never tells us in his own account how he responds to these concerns, but Laurie's rendition of the exchange concludes with Grant's offering them simple guidance: "Follow peace with all men."[51] Though he didn't offer any pledge of support to the Patriarch at this time, Grant at least observed that Mar Shimun's political situation was impressively taxing. "To preserve harmony among his own fierce tribes, and with the Kurds around, might tax the wisdom and patience of more celebrated statesmen."[52] Without a doubt, Grant sympathized with the difficulty of Mar Shimun's predicament, but he lacked the interest, as well as perhaps the confidence, to intervene in complex tribal politics.

Grant likewise avoided political conversations with the Kurdish emirs. Speaking to the Kurdish Pasha of Amadiyah in 1839 about his lost fortunes, the Pasha

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[50] Grant, *Nestorians of the Lost Tribes*, 82.
[51] Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 314.
[52] Ibid., 146.

having lost sway over many of the twelve thousand villages he used to control, Grant said, "I could not but regard the topic as one of great delicacy, especially as what we should say might be carried by the birds of the air to the now dominant authorities, where nothing but evil could be the result." Grant continued, "I therefore evaded a direct reply, and changed the conversation by deserved encomiums upon the charms of the scenery."[53] It was small gestures like this one in which Grant showed both his distaste for political conversation as well as a prejudice against the Ottoman authorities who had been harsh in suppressing the Kurds since the campaigns by Rashid Pasha began in 1834. Who knows what kind of repercussions might have been visited upon the missionaries if they were suspected as sympathizers with the displaced Kurdish provincial rulers?

As little of an interest as Grant showed for Hakkari politics, he expressed to his Western audience a strong urgency about reaching out to the Nestorians because he deemed them ill-equipped to survive what he viewed as the impending struggle against the "empire of Mohammedan delusion." Grant wrote in 1841,

> "I had been brought at length, through many perils, to behold a country from which emanated the brightest beams of hope for the long-benighted empire of Mohammedan delusion… I looked at them [the Nestorians] in their present state, sunk down into the ignorance of semi-barbarism, and the light of vital piety almost extinguished upon their alters, and my heart bled for their condition. But hope pointed her radiant wand to brighter scenes when… like a morning star, these Nestorians shall arise to usher in a glorious and resplendent day. But, ere that bright period shall arrive, there is a mighty work to be done –a conflict with the powers of darkness before the shout of victory. Let us arm this brave band for the contest."[54]

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[53] Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes*, 40-41.
[54] Ibid., 54-5.

This passage gets to the heart of how Grant understood his mission to the Nestorians and his ambiguous language in the last line forms a major part of this discussion. What did he mean by "arm this brave band for the contest?" The terminology of competition between darkness and the light of piety can be found elsewhere in missionary texts, so it is more than likely he was referring figuratively to arming the Nestorians with the Gospel so they might be spared on Judgment Day. Nevertheless, it is ironic that Grant used language with such militaristic undertones considering he never spoke explicitly to the Nestorian Patriarch about preparing for the actual invasion.

Though he never divulged his thoughts with his friend the Patriarch, there is clear documentation that Grant suspected Kurdish malevolence even before he received direct intelligence from the Kurdish Emirs on the matter. The main source containing Grant's premonitions about a future period of violent turmoil in Ottoman Kurdistan is his correspondence with other missionaries. On January 1842, Grant wrote to Rev. Gridley, "In all probability they [The Nestorians] will fall and cease to be an independent people."[55] By May 1843 the probability turned into certainty. "I am strongly impressed with the idea that these Mohammedan lands may become the theatre of war."[56] Having only general fears to speak to before his visit to Bedir Khan Beg's camp in June 1843, it is likely that Grant's premonitions emanated from

[55] Letter from Grant to Gridley dated January 12, 1842 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 4.
[56] Letter from Grant to Gridley dated May 5, 1843 in Ibid.

Christian notions about the Day of Judgment which prophesized that the "deepest darkness precedes the dawn."[57]

The symbolism Grant used in his forecasts in addition to their destructive overtones blurred the lines between faith and reality. Specifically, Grant's memoir contains New Testament verses about the end of days to describe his observations in Kurdistan. In an entry dated June 18, 1841, Grant referred to threatening political realities as "wars and rumors of wars," as well as famines and civil strife as precludes to "the glorious reign of the Prince of Peace."[58] He also told Rev. Gridley that they ought to "prepare for a severe struggle –the last great battle."[59] This last great battle could hardly have meant war only in this small mountainous recess. Clearly, Grant foretold more broadly the "demolition of the civil persecuting power of Islam,"[60] if not exactly the second coming of the King of Heaven. Then again, in a number of places, Grant also described the impending catastrophe as "the storm needed to purify the atmosphere,"[61] referring perhaps to an end of days scenario suitable for the Messiah's reign.

Another important characteristic of Grant's writing is the way in which he framed the political struggles in Kurdistan as the fulfillment of God's will. In May 1843 for instance, just before the massacres began, Grant referred to the reigning anarchy as a divine intervention, or "God preparing the way by his movement among

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[57] Letter from Grant to Anderson dated July 1, 1843 in Ibid.
[58] Grant, *Memoir*, 115. "Wars and rumors of war" in Matthew 24:6 and Mark 13:7 (New International Version)
[59] Letter from Grant to Gridley dated May 15, 1842 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 4.
[60] Letter from Grant to Gridley dated May 5, 1843 in Ibid.; Excerpted in Grant, *Memoir*, 156
[61] Same letter in Ibid.

the nations in these Mohammedan lands."[62] As a man of prodigious faith, Grant not only believed that everything that occurred in Kurdistan was God's doing, this fact also made it all ultimately just. This belief informed the advice he was willing to offer the Nestorian Patriarch during the period leading up to 1843, when small incursions by Kurds followed by Christian retaliation were not uncommon. 1841 was an especially difficult year in the mountains and Kurdish-Nestorian relations deteriorated rapidly before Grant's eyes. From the southeast, the Rawanduz Kurds plundered Nestorian villages at Berwar, killing two; this was followed by a plague of locusts during a widespread famine.[63] That same year Nurallah Beg also sent assassins after Mar Shimun who had taken a fortuitous excursion to Berwar to check up on his agitated allies. Grant interpreted the events as part of God's plan, a test of Christian will power and most importantly, a sign of their poor faith. "I feared they might be chastened yet more severely in the loss of their independence and consequent oppression and suffering, unless they would speedily repent and return to the Lord."[64] Grant used their misfortunes to urge the Nestorians to pray more regularly and with conviction, insisting that it was their "departure from God" which caused their woes from the Kurds.[65]

In response to Kurdish terror, Grant never condoned retribution, as was the tribal norm. When the Patriarch wanted to avenge the deaths of the Berwar

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[62] Same letter in Ibid.
[63] "The want of good government, the ravages of the Kurds, and the existing famine (for there has been almost a famine for two years past), have nearly finished the work of depopulation which the Russians began in their late war with Turkey." In Letter Grant to Rev. Gridley dated June 24, 1841 reprinted in Grant, *Memoir*, 122
[64] Laurie, *Grant and the Mountain Nestorians* 188.
[65] Ibid., 188.

Christians, Grant insisted that it would not be advisable to do so, especially on the Sabbath. "He asked them whether they could hope for the blessing of God on the desecration of his holy day and whether they had not better spend it in prayer for his guidance?"[66] Despite Grant's condemnation of further acts of provocation, the Nestorians reciprocated the Kurdish plunders with ferocity after a short time passed and Grant had already left for Asheetha. According to Grant, the Nestorians retaliated by seizing six or seven Kurds, decapitating them and hanging the heads over a bridge as their defense against future Kurdish attacks.[67] After the Nestorian reprisals against the Rawanduz Kurds in early winter 1842, Grant wrote back to Rufus Anderson disapprovingly. He felt it "showed more boldness than discretion, to say nothing of its injustice and he rejoiced not having been there at the time."[68] It was in early 1842 that Grant's correspondence really began to express lamentation that there was nothing he could do to ease the situation. He wrote to Rufus Anderson, "there little room for discouragement" with the equally bellicose Nestorians, who had retaliated with such brutality.[69] The thoughts he recorded through the following year in his memoir were full of defeatist and demoralized hypotheses regarding the prospects for the survival of the Nestorians.

Though this isolated episode is evidence that Grant's message of peace and piety was not getting through to the Nestorians, Grant also missed opportunities to sue for real solutions by refusing to take part in tribal council negotiations at two

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[66] Ibid., 189-90.
[67] Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes*, 50.
[68] Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians,* 214.
[69] Letter Grant to Anderson dated March 15, 1842 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 4.

crucial junctures. In the summer of 1842, as the Ottoman army approached to lay siege to Amadiyah, the entire Hakkari region was awash with confusion about how to defend it. The Nestorian meleks contemplated forming an alliance with the Kurdish Begs, including Nurallah Beg and Bedir Khan Beg, who planned to fight off the Ottomans. This was a scheme Mar Shimun rejected outright. Mohammad Pasha, himself hoping to gain a piece of Amadiyah's tax-farming also fell in line against Nurallah Beg and his allies: Bedir Khan Beg and a few powerful Nestorian meleks. Grant recalled in his memoir on August 14, 1842, that Mar Shimun attempted to involve him in the negotiations at a meeting with these meleks. The Patriarch told Grant he had no intention in taking part in the battle for Amadiyah, preferring to "lose his independence to the Turks than the Kurds." According to Laurie, Grant had expressed to the Board that the Patriarch would do well to make terms with the Turks though he never told this to the Nestorians. (He believed the missionaries would have endangered themselves monumentally by encouraging that kind of alliance).[70] In the end, the fact that Mar Shimun decided not to participate in the defense of Amadiyah, led to a crushing defeat of the Kurdish legions. This inaction was probably one of the most important events solidifying the enmity between the Patriarch and Nurallah Beg –which culminated less than a year later in the massacre.

Mar Shimun once again solicited advice from Dr. Grant about what course to pursue with Bedir Khan Beg when the missionary spent the Easter holidays in 1843 with the Patriarch and his family. Dr. Grant replied, "follow peace with all men" and reiterated to the Patriarch that he could and would not interfere in "questions of war

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[70] Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians* 214.

and peace."[71] In the first months of 1843, as Grant continued to frequent the tents and barracks of the Patriarch's enemies (both Kurdish and Nestorian) despite his rebukes, the Patriarch began to perceive the missionary's actions as disloyalty. Nevertheless, the Patriarch continued to view Grant as a valuable ally. In May 1843, Mar Shimun finally decided to visit Nurallah Beg despite his better judgment that the Beg just wanted to threaten the Patriarch into submission at some price. According to Grant, while the Patriarch was with Nurallah Beg, hopefully brokering a compromise, Mar Shimun sent a dispatch to Grant asking the doctor to attend the negotiations. After little or no deliberation, Grant refused the invitation on the grounds that the Patriarch just wanted him for political business.[72]

It is clear that although Grant and the Mar Shimun both misinterpreted one another's expectations and needs, Grant and the American missionaries did nothing directly to cause or hasten the Kurdish-Christian violence. Yet, Grant's rhetoric of political neutrality was not well received by either group. In a meeting with Nurallah Beg in early 1843, the emir expressed to Grant his suspicions that the American missionaries were building a bazaar at Asheetha.[73] Nurallah Beg saw many Christians making daily wages building the complex and feared Grant's political neutrality was a cover for creating lopsided economic opportunities that would allow the Christians too overthrow them. The Mar Shimun's frustrations were obvious to comprehend. Had the missionaries not arrived in Kurdistan and made it clear that they wanted to stay, it is impossible to say whether the massacres would have occurred. First of all,

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[71] Ibid., 314.
[72] Grant, "Life in Koordistan," in ABCFM *Archives* 35, Vol. ii.
[73] Ibid, vol. ii, n.p.

Kurdish desires for self-aggrandizement were definitely strong. Also, Grant didn't even go to the tribal councils to relate a sense of how inclined the Nestorian meleks were to a peaceful resolution. On the other hand, the Mar Shimun might have pursued peace with the Kurdish emirs if an alternate missionary voice had not led him to believe that Western Christian nations were the on the verge of bringing an end to their subservience.

But this was also no fault of Grant's, like J.F. Coakley would like us to believe, though he was the major missionary personality during most of the period before the massacre. With the arrival of George Percy Badger in November 1842, Grant was no longer alone in the valleys and peaks of Hakkari. The missionary sources argue over whether Badger urged the Mar Shimun not to seek reconciliation with Nurallah Beg in February 1843 when a messenger arrived from the emir claiming that he wished to "establish a lasting treaty of friendly alliance" with him. According to Badger, whose account of the meeting is extremely terse, the Mar Shimun was completely indisposed to making peace with the Kurds and declined to attend the meeting with Nurallah at first because "the weather prevented him."[74] Badger added that the Patriarch eventually conceded to attend a meeting with Nurallah Beg only because he feared that Grant had become so close to Nurallah Beg that if he rejected the proposal the "Americans might lead Nurallah to avenge them."[75]

In a completely different rendition of the events, as told by the American missionaries Thomas Laurie and Azariah Smith, who interviewed many people in

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[74] Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*, vol. i, 246-7.
[75] Ibid., 248.

Hakkari in 1845, when Nurallah Beg's messenger arrived and his piece translated, Badger recommended specifically that the Patriarch not seek the friendship of the Kurds. Instead, he told them to apply for aid, if necessary, from England, which he said was able and willing to grant him the fullest protection. "And so, the emir could not get the ear of the Patriarch."[76] As follows, according to the American missionary sources, Badger, unlike Grant, was portrayed as though he did not particularly care about promoting peace between the Kurds and Nestorians.

J.F. Coakley, on the other hand, stood by Badger's innocence in the matter of this February 1843 meeting, accusing the American missionaries of purposefully maligning the Anglican in the name of vindicating themselves to the readership of the American missionary journal. Coakley wrote, "Badger must have in reality promised to recommend Mar Shimun's claims to the British Ambassador."[77] Coakley, in advocating Badger's honesty, urged us for some unknown reason to "respect Badger's assertion that the Syrians delivered their refusal without any advice from him" (quoting his *Nestorians*, vol. 1, 247) on blind faith. Coakley also insists that Badger was telling the truth when he wrote that the missionaries had "very little influence," the massacre having been already "planned and anticipated (quoting again Badger's *Nestorians*, vol. i, 189)."[78]

The interdenominational competitiveness of the missionaries adds another layer of bias to the missionary sources and it makes it basically impossible to make sense of this controversy, especially without a thorough testimony from Badger about

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[76] "Visit of Messrs. Laurie and Smith to Asheta and Julamerk," *Missionary Herald*, 41, no. 4 (April 1845); Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians*, 285-6.
[77] See note 80 in Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England*, 373.
[78] Ibid., 373.

the meeting or other supplemental non-missionary sources. We simply cannot corroborate either Coakley's or Laurie and Smith's version of the ideas Badger may have inculcated in the mind of the Patriarch, contributing to his decision, at that time, to ignore the request of Nurallah Beg for a serious discussion of future events. Looking at the disdain the Patriarch later showed for all of the Protestant missionaries (see page 86 above), the hostility expressed by the missionary groups towards one another in these accounts seems to have had major significance in terms of alienating the Patriarch and therefore making dispute resolution more difficult. A.L. Tibawi, in his study of Protestant missionaries in Syria, made a very relevant and similar claim that interdenominational competition had the propensity to diminish the moral stature of the Protestant missions.[79]

Take for example, Badger's own account, wherein he unabashedly denigrated Dr. Grant and the American mission on numerous occasions to the Patriarch, which served ultimately to distract Mar Shimun from the real pressing political issues. In March 1843, Badger presented the Patriarch with a completely irrational ultimatum (being the Grant had already built and began teaching at his school) forcing him to choose either the Anglicans or the Americans to stay and offer services to his people. "I showed him, moreover, that it would be injudicious, and would by no means satisfy us to have schools among his people by the side of theirs [The Americans], and pressed upon him to decide what plan he would pursue under existing conditions."[80] The Patriarch told Badger he had no loyalties to the Americans and

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[79] A. L. Tibawi, *American Interests in Syria 1800-1901* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 310-1.
[80] Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*, vol. i, 248.

basically dodged the question of the schools saying that he held the Americans and their doctrines "as cheap as an onion."[81] Perhaps the Patriarch lied to Badger to put off making a decision about more schools (later the Patriarch wrote a letter to the Church Missionary Society stating his approval)[82] but this case provides an illustrative example of how interdenominational competition between the Anglicans and Protestants made it difficult for any one of them to gain the trust of local leaders.

Interdenominational Competition: Background and Consequences

Besides Tibawi, other missionary historians have picked up on the dangerous ramifications of interdenominational competition. Joseph Grabill, for example, suggested that the missionaries to the mountain Nestorians failed to understand the "political implications of their religious disputes" because they "put theological loyalties above discipleship to Christ." In doing so, Grabill argued, Badger and Grant "augmented a petty feud between Kurdish and Nestorian leaders," which grew into open conflict for "attention from foreigners and then into a veritable war."[83] Using Grabill's analysis as a point of departure, I suggest that the rivalry had more significant consequences for the efficacy of relating to the Nestorian leadership that had "lost all confidence in their former spiritual guides."[84] Besides bewildering the

[81] Ibid., 248.
[82] See letters in the preface to Ibid., 3-12.
[83] Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy*, 136.
[84] "The Nestorian Christians," *Boston Daily Courier*, XVI, no. 2027 (Boston: October 2, 1843), 1. Accessed through APS Online.

Patriarch, it is clear that the missionaries were so preoccupied competing for preeminence saving the souls of the mountain Nestorians, that they overlooked ways in which they might have acted on their behalf, if not necessarily in a coordinated way. In the end perhaps this is the real charge the missionaries should be held accountable for, as opposed to the vague claim their activities led to the rapid deterioration of Muslim-Christian relations in central Kurdistan,[85] among other more direct accusations, which have proven difficult to substantiate.

There is ample evidence in the historical record that both the Anglican and American missionaries cared deeply about the activities of the other missionary groups. They criticized one another in their accounts for their beliefs and complained about one other's malicious intentions to frustrate their work. Badger notably raved continuously about the bribing of both the Kurdish and Nestorians leadership by American Protestant "dissenters" and other Catholic emissaries, while he used exactly the same tactics. Grant likewise bemoaned Badger's activities in his correspondence. Shortly after Badger's arrival to the mountains, Grant wrote a letter to his brother Ira in New York, in which he summarized Badger's actions as malevolent and irrational. He angrily referred to Badger's audacity "to shun the Americans while the Papists, with all their abominations, are acknowledged as brethren!"[86]

There is an interesting contradiction between the language used in the work of missionaries for a wider audience (ie. contemporary publications) and the motivations they expressed within correspondence limited to other missionaries. The former

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[85] Bruinessen, *Agha Sheikh and State*, 230.
[86] Letter from Asahel Grant to Ira Grant dated March 24, 1843 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 3.

tended to deny any interest in conversion or disruptive sectarian intentions. According to an American missionary stationed in Istanbul, Dr. William Goodell, "We tell them frankly you have enough sects among you already and we have no design of setting up a new one or of pulling down your churches or drawing any members from them in order to build up our own."[87] This kind of self-praise was mirrored in the work of Ainsworth on behalf of the Anglicans. He once explained to a Nestorian villager that the Church of England was "truly laboring not to increase the power of any particular sect, but to unite the Church throughout the world in brotherly love and sound doctrine."[88] As peaceful and non-sectarian as these motivations sounded, the reality was that competition for the job of Nestorian keeper was ubiquitous in the minds of British and American missionaries and both mobilized their Nestorian missions out of documented fear of encroachment by other missionary groups.

Though the Americans derided the English in their early correspondence – calling them "destitute of religion –a nation of atheists and infidels,"[89] they also expressed tremendous anxiety about the Jesuit missionaries, who began to infiltrate the plains of Urumiyah by 1838.[90] This was not the first time the Americans expressed specific hatred for the Jesuits. In a letter from the Urumiyah station to Board Secretary Anderson in 1836, the missionaries celebrated the benefit of being so removed from other Europeans, which rendered the native communities

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[87] William Strong, *The Story of the American Board* (Boston, NY and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1910), 92.
[88] Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches*, vol. II, 285.
[89] Unsigned letter to Rufus Anderson dated February 17, 1836 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 553.
[90] Anderson, *History of the Missions*, 318-9.

"comparatively virtuous" having not yet been "contaminated by European contact." The "odious and crafty Jesuits" are mentioned as specifically dreadful Europeans.[91]

European Catholic missionaries took notable interest in the Nestorians because they saw the Chaldean community, which inhabited the region closer to Mosul, as a vital partner in their missionary efforts. Recall that the Chaldeans and Nestorians once belonged to the same faith community until a political feud in the 16th century resulted in the Chaldeans' pronouncement of loyalty to the Pope. These native Chaldean (or derogatively referred to by the Protestants as "Papist") bishops often accompanied Italian priests to help promote the Catholic mission to the Nestorian community. Grant and Hinsdale described one such occasion in a letter to Anderson in 1842. They wrote that a Chaldean bishop from Elkosh (just north of Mosul) and an Italian priest from Tome arrived at Tiyari with gifts for Mar Shimun "doubtless hoping that it would render their arguments more effectual." In the same correspondence they insulted the intelligence of the "Papists," whose gifts were refused by the Patriarch, as though the Protestants attempts at conversion had been more successful. (They were not, actually.)[92] According the Grant and Hinsdale, the Catholics showed perseverance in their efforts despite the Patriarch's "obstinate behavior" towards them. Upon their departure, according to the Americans, the Chaldean bishop blasphemed Dr. Grant "out of jealousy."[93]

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[91] Unsigned letter to Rufus Anderson dated February 17, 1836 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 553.

[92] According to Rufus Andersons, *History of the Missions*, 332, at the end of 1846, eleven years after setting up in Urumiyah, the total number of converts was a mere 50.

[93] Letter from Hinsdale and Grant to Rufus Anderson November 3, 1842 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 4.

In the 1840s, the missionaries fully shared in the anti-Catholic bigotry that seethed out of Puritan New England.[94] In Grant's letters to Rufus Anderson before he set out to visit the mountain Nestorians in 1839, he repeatedly reiterated his fear that the Vatican had an immediate interest in the mountain Nestorians. For the militant Protestants of New England these fears became the ultimate spur to action, and of all of the arguments marshaled in support of the Hakkari mission, this seems to have carried substantial weight. Grant's personal competitive zeal was pointedly directed towards the Catholics; he even referred to the French consul in Mosul, Paul-Émile Botta as "bigoted Papist," despite the fact that he gave kindly assistance both to them and to the English. Other Americans described the Pope as the antichrist, the "man of sin" and "son of perdition" described in Paul's Second letter to the Thessalonians.[95] In addition, one of the first works printed by the Urumiyah press in modern Syriac was entitled, "22 Plain Reasons for Not Being a Roman Catholic."[96] But in reality, Protestant fears that the Catholics could gain a foothold in Hakkari were sadly misplaced. The Catholics only really nibbled at the fringes and made unsuccessful visits into Nestorian country in the 1840s.

With the anti-Catholic sentiment confined to the margins, the major tension relevant to the Nestorian community in Hakkari on the eve of the Kurdish attacks was between the Anglicans and the American Protestants; and these tended to be intensely personal. Not only did Badger refer to American Protestantism as a "religion without

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[94] Taylor, *Fever and Thirst*, 183.
[95] Letter from A. L. Holladay to Rufus Anderson December 10, 1838 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554, vol. 3.
[96] Anderson, *History of the Missions*, 196.

creed,"[97] he also wrote that he was personally compelled to reach out to the Nestorians because of the "damage" he saw the Americans doing, referring to their direct efforts at conversion.[98] In his view, the Nestorians were in danger of being stripped of their noble creed by the "latitudinarianism" of the American Protestants, whom he referred to as "dissenters" or often, "schismatics" with their divisive proselytism. The Anglican missionary Ainsworth also liberally hurled insults at Dr. Grant in his travel account; even describing Grant's heroic solo winter journey into Hakkari in 1839 as vile opportunism. (Granted, this story is romanticized Laurie's account to an almost equal degree of ridiculousness.) Ainsworth wrote that in that journey, Grant had purposefully trudged through snow and horrible conditions in poor health only to get to the Nestorian Patriarch ahead of him. He also accused Grant of bribing everyone he encountered. "Grant came a month before us bearing valuable presents from the mission to the Patriarch and his brother, to their female relatives, to many of the priests and to some of the Kurdish Begs."[99]

Though resentment for Grant and the Americans is pervasive in Badger's account, some of the insults he leveled at Grant were even more severe than Ainsworth's. In one section of his 1852 memoir, Badger accused Grant of having made a pact with the devil by asking Nurallah Beg for permission to build his mission house in Asheetha. According to Badger, Grant was so engrossed with carrying out his plans that he was completely oblivious to Nurallah's real "designs," of which, of course Badger was in perfect knowledge, writing as he did in hindsight. As a result of

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[97] Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, vol. II, 351-2.
[98] Badger, Ibid., vol. I, 11.
[99] Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches*, vol. ii, 254-5.

Grant's supposed selfishness, Badger argued, the Kurds manipulated the American missionary in order that Grant actually prepared vital fortifications for the Kurds within Nestorian country:

> "I am inclined to believe, from the after-fate of the building [Grant's], that the crafty Emir, in giving his permission for its erection, secretly entertained the hope, that at no distant day it would be of essential service to him in his designs upon the indomitable Nestorians. He had not as yet sufficient power or authority to attempt himself the erection of a fortress in the Tyari country; but under the guise of friendship for Dr. Grant, to whom he was indebted for his valuable profession services, and of good-will towards the Nestorians who manifested some regard for him, he gave his sanction to the building of a mission-house, which he eventually hope to turn into a castle."[100]

This obviously amounted to a harsh accusation of negligence. To explain Badger's motivations for making such a claim, we must look back to the fierce battle of words played out in the Western press in the aftermath of the Nestorian massacre.

The interdenominational rivalries described above were also immensely significant in that they tainted the presentations of the Nestorian massacre in the Western media. The reportage, partly as a result of the missionaries themselves commenting in editorials, was consistently framed by the struggle between the missionary groups, which lead to the simultaneous public discovery of the plight of the Nestorians embroiled in the unbrotherly conduct of the missionaries. David Gaunt argued that the massacres "woke" public opinion in Europe and the United States to the "victimization" of Ottoman Christians, the hostility of the Kurds, and the possibility of Ottoman collusion in their persecution. Above all else, Gaunt considered Bedir Khan Beg's attack an "important milestone for public opinion

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[100] Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals,* vol. i, 186.

concerning international protection for religious minorities."[101] Notwithstanding the importance, on its own, of generating international attention for the crisis of the Nestorians, by presenting the massacres as intimately tied to the inter-Christian polemic, the missionaries also became targets for negative public opinion in the aftermath of the Nestorian massacres.

According to Coakley, the first unkind words were printed by Henry Layard, then affiliated with the British Embassy in Istanbul. He reported his analysis of the events to a London newspaper, *The Morning Chronicle* in a dispatch that appeared in London on September 5, 1843 and was reprinted in dozens of American newspapers throughout the following month.[102] Layard reported that the chief cause of the bloodshed was the bickering between different missionary sects in Mosul, for which the chief responsibility was Badger's. Furthermore, Layard held the Americans "blameless" and argued, "had the Church of England cooperated with them as Protestant Christians, instead of opposing them as heretical enemies, the disasters which we have described would not have occurred; as it is, one of the most ancient sects in the world.. has been sacrificed to the religious quarrels of American Independents, English Puseyites, and French Roman Catholics."[103] In the summer of

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[101] David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2006), 32.

[102] Some American papers edited the text for length, not content. My analysis is based on parts quoted by Coakley in the London version and "Horrible Massacre," *Madisonian for the Country*, VII, no. 18 (Washington, D.C.: October 12, 1843), 4f. Accessed through American Historical Newspapers online database including Early American Newspapers Series 1 - 5, 1690-1922.

[103] Quoted by Coakley, 40, though the same text appeared in the *Madisonian*, *The Constitution* (October 18, 1843), The *Southern Patriot* (November 14, 1843). All accessed though America's Historical Newspapers online database including Early American Newspapers Series 1 - 5, 1690-1922.

1843, Anglican missionary newsletters also accused Badger of besmirching the good name of the Church of England. Many printed articles citing Badger's unwarranted meddling and opposition to the American missionaries. Coakley cited a particularly glaring example in an Evangelical newspaper called the *Record* that called Badger an "emissary of evil doing an incalculable degree of mischief."[104]

Grant's conscience would not allow these reports, which denounced Badger and held himself entirely devoid of fault in the affair, to go unanswered. In order to set the record straight, Grant told the *New York Observer* (at that time a Presbyterian publication), in a letter dated October 17, 1843, the entire history of events as he saw them leading up to the massacres of 1843. He wrote that Mohammed Pasha of Mosul had been trying for years to subdue the Christian mountaineers; the struggle over Amadiyah in the summer of 1842 had distracted him slightly, but the idea was always there. The controversy over the Asheetha mission house, he wrote, was also nothing but lies and exaggeration. He argued that the same claims had been filed against Paul-Émile Botta, the French Consul, when he constructed a place for he and other French excavators to live in Khorsabad (in Northern Iraq today). The Pasha of Mosul denounced both as castles foreshadowing the advance of foreign powers into his territory.[105] As for the poor relations between he and Badger that Layard highlighted in his widely disseminated version of the events, Grant retorted in his *New York Observer* letter that the Americans had sought "by every proper means to cultivate a

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[104] Cited in Ibid., 40. *Record* articles dated June 29, 1843 (page 3) and July 6, 1843 (page 4).

[105] Though the letter is dated October 17, 1843, it actually appeared in *The New York Observer and Chronicle*, 22, no. 6 (February 10, 1844) Accessed through APS Online.

friendly relation." If they failed, "the responsibility must rest with Mr. Badger for any evil arising from his opposition to us." But this quarrel, Grant stated unequivocally, had nothing to do with the disaster visited upon the Nestorians.

Whether American readers took these rebukes seriously, future research is needed to say even to what extent anyone was paying attention to events unfolding in Ottoman Kurdistan. Nevertheless, in between 1843-7 many American newspapers printed stories about the Nestorians that spoke to the rising interest in the well-being of the Eastern Christians while often criticizing the missionaries for their inability to protect them. The editorial staff of *The New York Observer*, on the other hand, responded to Grant's editorial acknowledging that neither his nor Badger's "proceedings were the cause of the late lamentable change in the conduct of the Turkish government towards the Nestorians, as had been alleged by certain Episcopalian writers in the Levant."[106] Following this affirmation, the editors proceeded to condemn the missionaries nevertheless for their injudiciousness in failing to cooperate with one another at the expense of the Nestorians.

This chapter has taken up two distinct ways the missionaries naïvely made it very difficult for themselves to escape blame for the Nestorian massacres of 1843. Firstly, in operating by a code of non-intervention, the American missionaries hampered their ability to truly promote peaceful initiatives between the Mar Shimun and his enemies. In some sense it could be argued that Grant vaguely urged the Nestorians to make peace with their enemies but they failed to do so by their own volition. Invited to negotiations, where his commonsense might have made a

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[106] "The Massacre of the Nestorians," *The New York Observer and Chronicle*, 22, no. 8 (February 24, 1844) Accessed through APS Online.

difference, Grant refused; thus he was an easy target for John Joseph and J.F. Coakley to haul over the coals. This analysis has pursued a more nuanced picture of the missionary activity between 1839-43 to show that the competition between the American and Anglican Protestant missionaries was a much more significant factor by distracting the missionaries from suing for peace and alienating the Nestorians, who were "unaccustomed to the subtleties of polemics," and therefore "completely bewildered by them."[107]

Furthermore, it is fair to claim that the missionaries in 1840s Kurdistan, new to the field like so many other Protestant missionaries around the world, were still in a learning process and were ultimately unaware of the tragic consequences of their actions. The non-interventionist agenda of the Americans frustrated the Nestorian Patriarch while Badger's derision of the Americans in his meetings with the Patriarch also led the Nestorians to doubt the goodwill of either community. In the end, the Nestorians unwisely did not prepare for the coming war and aggravated the situation with acts of provocation while the missionaries, even if they had been able to see through their idealism and preoccupation, would not have had enough time to amend their ways in order to avert the catastrophe.

In a famous pronouncement, the missionary historian Jeremy Salt argued that the missionaries were on the whole "trouble wherever they went."[108] Many other scholars, such as Martin van Bruinessen, John Joseph, Salahi Sonyel and others have asked us to consider the missionaries' fundamental role in accelerating the

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[107] "The Nestorian Christians," *Boston Daily Courier*, XVI, no. 2027 (Boston: October 2, 1843), 1. Accessed through APS Online.
[108] Jeremy Salt, "Trouble Wherever They Went: American Missionaries in Anatolia and Ottoman Syria in the 19th Century," 143.

confrontation in the Ottoman Empire between minority communities and the state. A closer look at the missionary actions and attitudes shows that they had little influence in hastening a crisis in Kurdistan in 1843, which seems to have been long in the making. Unsettled feuds of long standing were still rife between the Kurds and Christians, and the growing power of the former, fostered then by the countenance and support of the ambitious Bedir Khan Beg, made them all the more impatient that the Christians should no longer be an independent community living within their rightful dominions. By looking at a very early missionary encounter in the Ottoman Empire, it is still possible to see the missionaries as slaves to their limited worldview, instead of outright indicting them for provocation or the demise of peaceful coexistence in Kurdistan. Whether the missionaries learned anything from their mistakes in Kurdistan in 1843 will be the true test of Salt's hypothesis.

Further research of mine into the latter half of the 19th century has shown that from their labors among the Nestorians, mostly in the Persian territories, the American missionaries left an overwhelmingly positive legacy. The American missionaries introduced the potato, a staple crop, to Urumiyah that has outlasted even the missionaries there.[109] They provided healthcare and vaccinations that may have saved the lives of many adults and children. In addition, Neo-Aramaic emerged as a written language capable of reviving the national consciousness' of a small but significant minority population of the Middle East. Justin Perkins and Asahel Grant established an American educational and humanitarian presence that endured in Persia through the dark days of World War I. In the end, still standing in Urumiyah is

[109] Letter from A. L Holladay to Rufus Anderson dated May 16, 1839 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 554.

an agricultural and medical college, both remnants of the missionary enterprise that lasted there until 1918. As for Grant's mission outpost at Asheetha, all traces of missionary labor there have disappeared; as was unfortunately also the fate visited upon the Nestorians in that part of the Ottoman Empire.

Conclusion

Writing about the desperate condition of the Kurdish national movement in the late 1920s, Bedir Khan Beg's grandson, Sureya Bedr Khan lamented, "The Kurd, unlike the Christian, had neither the right nor the opportunity to complain of his lot, either to the government, which was nominally his own, or to the world…"[1] Though he never mentioned the missionaries explicitly (and obviously referred to more recent events at the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the betrayal of the British in mandate Iraq), Sureya's commentary on the partial lines of communication from the interior of Kurdistan to the outside world, forces us to consider what constituted the most important outcome of the missionary presence on the Ottoman-Persian frontier. What Grabill has called, "the worst bloodshed among this people since the 13th century,"[2] and arguably the first severe case of interethnic violence in Kurdistan, the events of 1843 marked a turning point both in Kurdish-Christian relations as well as the in the way the missionaries began to think of themselves in roles as protectors of the Eastern Christian communities.

One reason for this change in opinion on the part of the missionaries was the response to the violence by the Western powers, which was anything but prompt or adequate. When reports of the atrocities made it from British Vice-Consul Rassam in Mosul to Sir Stratford Canning in Istanbul in July 1843, he wired correspondence

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[1] Sureya Bedr Khan, "The Case of Kurdistan against Turkey," (1928) reprinted in *International Journal of Kurdish Studies*,18, no. 1-2 (Jan 2004): 113-55. Accessed though Academic Onefile Online.
[2] Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy*, 137.

back to London. By August 26, 1843, Lord Aberdeen, then Foreign Secretary under Prime Minister Robert Peel, instructed Canning to tell Ottoman authorities,

> "Her Majesty's government expected that the Porte would issue peremptory orders to the Pasha of Mosul to use the most energetic measures for the preservation of the Christians within his district from a repetition of like outrages, which could not fail to produce a most painful and unfavourable impression on all Christian nations."[3]

Acting on these instructions, Canning met some resistance from the Ottoman authorities. He reported on September 17, 1843 that the Porte had assured him that the "Nestorians were the aggressors." Even if they desired to act, an Ottoman official also told Canning that their military, at that time, "was not strong enough to enter into a contest with the powerful Khoordish Chiefs."[4] After relaying this information back to London, the British legation in Istanbul decided to concentrate on the refugee crisis and the restoration of Nestorian prisoners, many of them women and children. Short of a military intervention, Canning was able to convince the Porte to send a Turkish advisor named Kemal Effendi to consult with the Pasha of Mosul. During his time there reports of Bedir Khan Beg's men butchering these prisoners continued to flood Canning's desk.[5] According to Kemal Effendi, Bedir Khen Beg denied any participation in the poor treatment of the prisoners.[6] It was not until November 27, 1846 that the Porte agreed to a military engagement with Bedir Khan Beg "in the spring of the following year" after three years of direct correspondence from London.

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[3] "Memorandum Respecting the Persecution of the Nestorian Christians by the Turks, Persians and Khoordish Chiefs, 1876," in, David Gillard ed. *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* Part I, Series B, vol. 6, 272.
[4] Ibid., 272-3.
[5] Ibid., 277.
[6] Ibid., 279.

As we have shown, the 1843 massacres marked a significant milestone in the history of Protestant missions in Ottoman lands. The American missionaries learned the impossibility of political neutrality in Kurdistan, as well as the danger of interdenominational rivalries to the stability of the missionary endeavor. The massacres also forced the missionaries to consider themselves as protectors of the Ottoman Christians for the first time, especially in light of possible Ottoman collusion in Kurdish persecution of the Nestorians and the ineptitude of the British government, the major diplomatic voice in Istanbul, to take a bold stand in favor of the Nestorians. The American missionaries specifically were forced to endure the sluggish and ineffectual British diplomatic response in Istanbul to the massacres, which made it even more apparent that the Empire's Christians could not yet depend on the West to stave off future violence. The Americans, disillusioned, had neither their own government, nor British consular officials to help them towards that end.[7] Hopefully future research into the correspondence of the American Ambassador to the Empire (David Porter until October 1843) will deepen our understanding of the U.S. government's role as well as perhaps indicate the effects of the massacres on Anglo-American relations in Istanbul, the British, having after all, claimed to speak out against the massacres on behalf of all "Christian nations."

More importantly, the Nestorian massacre of 1843 was an immensely significant event in the history of Kurdish-Christian relations, often overshadowed by the tragedy that befell the Ottoman Armenians at the outset of the 20th century. We remember that during that nationalist-inspired carnage of 1915, many Nestorians

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[7] Justin Perkins, series of journal entries dated December 2, 1846-February 20, 1847 in ABCFM *Archives* 16.8.7, Reel 555.

suffered greatly alongside the Armenians at the hands of the hands of both Turks and Kurds. Later in 1933, these refugees who had relocated to camps in Iraq were again massacred at the hands of the newly formed Iraqi army.[8] The fact that the Americans bore witness to the Nestorian massacres in 1843 was fundamental in securing the interest and protection of the ABCFM for over 75 years through the tumult of World War I in Turkey. I offer this thesis as a contribution to the scholarship of other historians attempting to disentangle this tragic history from modern political agendas. Though this thesis explores the origins of Kurdish-Nestorian hostilities in what is today southeastern Turkey –a region whose multi-ethnic past seems impossible –the region's Kurds still face monumental political and economic crises, intensified by their inhabitance of the heavily militarized, mined and monitored border between Turkey and Iraq. Their suffering in the 20th century and the continued denied recognition of self-determination is a tragic history onto itself.

[8] Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 170.

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