

# Bilingual Baghdadis

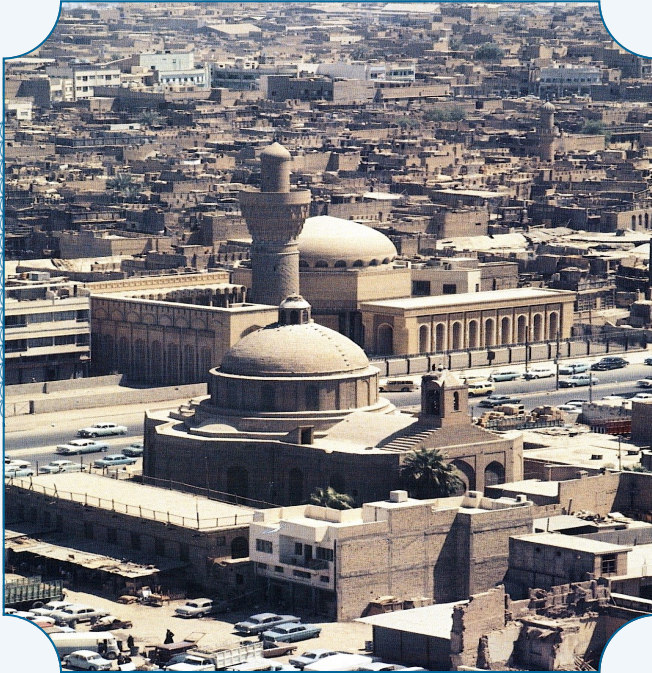
Assyrian intellectuals in the 1970s and 1980s

By

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Iraqi minorities have featured prominently in the media in recent years, especially with the rise of sectarian and radical groups in the region. News reports usually examine the eradication of these native communities, but fail to offer a nuanced historical understanding of them. This presentation will focus on the Assyrian community between the 1970s and 1980s, and highlight the ways in which urbanite intellectuals took advantage of new cultural policies and promoted their culture using press and popular culture. During this period, important literary works were produced not only in Arabic, which contributed to cross-cultural hybridization between Iraqis of various backgrounds, but also in Aramaic, the native language of the Assyrians. The production of works in Aramaic contributed to the revival and standardization of the language across the various Eastern-Aramaic dialects spoken in Iraq and neighboring countries. Along with literary productions, the formation of significant cultural clubs and organizations provided important cultural venues for Assyrians to interact and socialize, to perform plays, music, and literary works, and to engage in sports.

The research is part of Dr. Benjamin's upcoming monograph, *Negotiating Assyrians in the Modern History of Iraq (1960s-1980s)*. It is based on original sources uncovered at the Iraqi National Library and Archives in Baghdad, and in libraries and private collections in Erbil, Duhok, and Mosul in languages ranging from Arabic, Classical Syriac and modern Aramaic. It incorporates popular culture in the form of music, poetry, and oral history to take into account the cultural and artistic representations of various segments of the population. The presentation will conclude with current research projects by Dr. Benjamin which focuses on the preservation of textual and intangible cultural heritage.

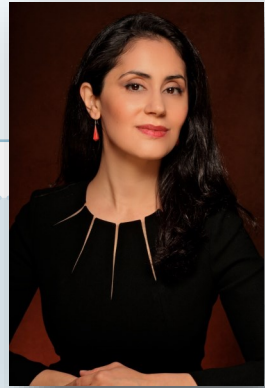


St. Mary's Latin church, located in Shorjah district of Baghdad

Armenian Orthodox church St. Gregory the Illuminator Baghdad South Gate .



## Dr. Alda Benjamen



A postdoctoral researcher at the University of Pennsylvania Museum's Penn Cultural Heritage Center, and a research associate at the Smithsonian Institution. She works as a historian specializing in cultural heritage documentation and preservation.

Dr. Benjamen obtained her PhD in Modern Middle Eastern History at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her monographic project examines the relationship between a stronger Iraqi state and the Assyrians, a Christian ethno-religious group. Her research weaves ethnographic material, and oral histories, with original archival sources uncovered in Baghdad, and in libraries and private collections in Erbil, Duhok, and Mosul in languages ranging from Arabic, Classical Syriac and modern Aramaic. She specializes in the history of the modern Middle East, and particularly Iraq and Syria, minority communities, women and gender issues. Her scholarly publications appear in edited books, and journals. Her current research examines cultural heritage in times of conflict, and focuses on intangible heritage within agricultural domains.

Dr. Benjamen received the E.B. Smith Award for Best Dissertation in Political History, and was a fellow at the Academic Research Institute in Iraq/CAORC. She holds a Master's degree in Syriac Studies from the University of Toronto.

## (BVM) Orthodox Church

in Baghdad (1639)

A Front View of the (BVM) Orthodox church on Baghdad, founded(AD 1639).



The Saint Virgin Mary Church, the oldest church in Baghdad was founded in AD1639. It is believed to be the oldest church in Baghdad, and is popularly known among native Baghdadis as the *Baghdad Wall Church*. as it is situated near the northern parts of the old Baghdad wall, close to the Northern Gate ( Bab al-Muaddam).

The Church is an attraction point to both Christian and Muslim believers who visit the Church, all year round, to light a candle or tie a coloured strip of cloth on one of the twigs of its big olive tree, in anticipation of an answered prayer.



A photo showing the Altar of the (BVM) Orthodox Church..

## ( 1919–1994) Jabra Ibrahim Jabra

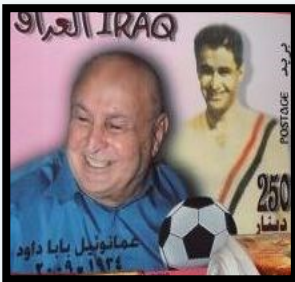
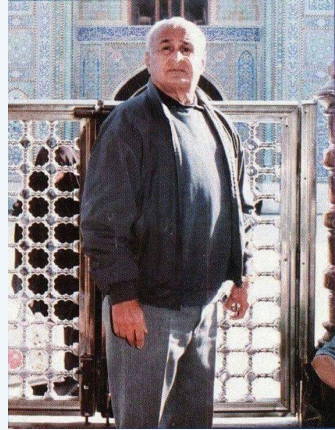
A Syriac-Orthodox author, born in Bethlehem at the time of the British Mandate. Educated in Jerusalem and later at Cambridge University. He settled in Iraq following the events of 1948.

He was a novelist, painter, translator and literary critic. He also translated numerous English works into Arabic, including Shakespearean dramas, James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. and some works of T.S. Eliot. He also wrote around 70 books including novels and translated material. His works were translated into more than 12 languages.



## ( 1934–2009) Ammu Baba

Emmanuel Baba Dawud, better known as Ammu Baba, was a former Iraqi , ethnic Assyrian international football ( Soccer) player and coach of the Iraqi national football team. In 1978, Baba was appointed as Iraq's national military football team coach, leading the team to its third World Military Championship Title, a year later beating national teams , such as Australia, Morocco and Greece, on the way to the finals where they beat Italy on penalties. The same year, he was appointed the head coach of Iraq's national team for the first time. Then he would be appointed and re-appointed on seven different occasions, during the 1980's and 1990's. Iraqis often called the 1980's as "the golden years" of Iraqi football, where Baba led the national team to numerous tournaments and titles.



An Iraqi postage stamp, demonstrating the renowned Iraq National football team: Ammu Babaa.

Throughout his coaching years, Baba was also the Olympic team head coach, where he led the team to two Olympic appearances, in Los Angeles 1984 and Seoul 1988. In addition , Baba led Iraq to three titles at the Arabian Gulf Cup Tournaments ( 1979, 1984, 1988), the Asian Games of 1982, and the Arab Nations Cup in 1988.



Lamassu or the Winged bull / lion, a typical symbol of the Assyrian civilization.





A typical annual Christmas Tree that normally decorates the public squares of Baghdad and other Iraqi provinces.



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