

# The Half Truth of Prof David Romano

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Rudaw.net is a Kurdish media network, funded and supported by Kurdish Rudaw Company. On Jan 21, 2016, it published in its Opinion Section an article titled "Assyrian Bitterness and the Kurds" by Prof. David Romano, who is a regular contributor to its web site and is sympathetic to Kurdish issues. See here: <http://rudaw.net/english/opinion/21012016>

I would like to thank Prof. Romano for asserting the undisputed historical fact that Assyrians of northern Iraq and the rest of the Middle East are one of the oldest indigenous peoples of the region. I also would like to express my gratitude to him for reminding his readers that the Assyrians have maintained a clear link to the ancient Assyrian Akkadian culture, language and national territory of historic Assyria and that Assyrians did this long before modern nationalism became to be defined.

Having stated that, we must agree that we should never shy away from the whole truth. Prof. Romano implied that Kurds descend from the Medes. There is nothing solid in history that supports such claim. Consider:

1. "Though some Kurdish intellectuals claim that their people are descended from the Medes, there is no evidence to permit such a connection across the considerable gap in time between the political dominance of the Medes and the first attestation of the Kurds" (Martin van Bruinessen).
2. Prof. of Iranian Studies Gernot Windfuhr identified Kurdish dialects as perhaps Parthian in essence.

There is great ambiguity among scholars, linguists and historians to any specific linkage of Kurdish language or name. While some argue the language to be from the northwestern Iranian family, others disagree. Whereas Kurds themselves have used the term Kurdish to describe their identity, they referred to their language as *Kurmanji*, *Sorani*, *Hewrami*, *Kermanshahi*, *Kalhari* or any other dialect they spoke. Some historians have noted that it is only recently that the Kurds who speak the Sorani dialect, for example, have begun referring to their language as Kurdish as nationalism began to take roots among the population.

Earlier, Kurdish wannabe historians claimed linkage of Kurds to the Sumerians, Hittites and other civilizations as well in desperate attempts to establish historical legitimacy in Mesopotamia and all these claims have failed to warrant any serious consideration from serious archaeologists, anthropologists and historians.

Civilizations, with almost no exception, have left behind potteries, manuscripts, structures, monuments, steles, artifacts, and other remains. What have archaeologists dug out in northern Iraq that is “Kurdish”? The absolute truth is nothing.

Another worthwhile issue to address is statistics regarding populations. These statistics show a clear decline of the Assyrian Christian population in the region, which has been due to oppression, persecution and forced conversions to Islam. While accurate census of the Middle Ages populations are almost impossible to find; however, we know that the Church of the East alone, for example, had some 80 million members in Asia with the arrival of Islam. Today, that number has dwindled to a mere two or three millions, which include those in Malabar, India. Still, there are some important comparative statistics of Assyrian Christians and the Kurds and/or Muslims reported in the last 200 years or so, which if compared to most recent census would reflect this clear decline of the former group versus the growth of the latter.

Let's consider:

1. The Christian population in the City of Mosul around A.D. 1790 was half of the population of the Kurds (See Issawi 1988, 93).
2. The population of the City of Mosul, according to the census of 1849, was as follows: Mohammedans (Moslems, including Arabs, Kurds, Yezidis, Turkomen) 2,050 families; Christians 1,100 families; Jews 200 families (Badger, 1852).
3. In 1932, the population of Province of Mosul comprised of 80,000 Kurds; 80,000 Arabs and 182,000 as others that included Assyrians, Yezidis, Shabak, Mandeans and Jews (Yusulf Malek, 1932).

In the three statistics above, the population of Christians is either half or equal to that of the Muslims in general or to that of the Kurds in the City and Province of Mosul. Of course, the Province of Mosul included Nohadra (Dohuk) before the Ba'ath regime made it a separate province in early 1970s to appease the Kurds with a third province besides Arbil and Sulaimaniya for self governing. Today, the Kurds claim that Mosul is Kurdish through and through. What happened to the Assyrian population in northern Iraq? Repeated raids by Kurds on peaceful Assyrian villages caused many Assyrians to flee their homes. One example is the Kurdish repeated raids of 1830s and 1880s on the Assyrian villages of Sapna Valley (Wilmshurst 2000, 132-133). May be I should remind the professor of the Kurdish and Arab tribes ransacking and looting of Assyrian villages in and around Simele during the 1933 Simele massacre. All those villages were lost until today.

Therefore, the five Assyrian members in Northern Iraq Kurdish parliament (KRG) that Prof Romano refers to are not a Kurdish favor to Assyrians, as he insinuates. The persecution, oppression and other unfair actions against the Assyrians by Kurds in

particular and Muslims in general, have forced the Assyrians into exile and the Diaspora, which led to the decimation of the Assyrian population to the current pathetic levels in northern Iraq and in northeastern Syria, southeastern Turkey and northwestern Iran as well. The five Christian seats are symbolic and if placed next to the other one hundred Kurdish Muslim seats, their influence in decision making is a non-factor.

While the Kurdish leadership propagates to the world that it protects and supports the lesser ethnic and religious groups in the region, such as the Assyrians, Yezidis, and Shabaks, it practices the contrary from behind the scenes. For example, the Kurdish leadership supports Kurdish history revisionist, such as Fadhil Mirani, Mehrdad Izady, Diayako Xarib and others who continue in their meticulous plans to Kurdify historic Assyria and go further in their outrageous claims that Assyrians are Christian Kurds. In addition, they continue to corrupt the true history of Assyria and paint it as Kurdish. For example, Kurdish authorities have set road signs that refer to Khinis as “heritage of Kurdistan”. Khinis was set up by the Assyrian King Sennacherib (704 – 681 BC) to celebrate the construction of a complex system of canals to supply the capital Nineveh and its hinterland with water. Additionally, Kurdification of Assyrian cities and villages names continues. Consider changing Nohadra to Dohuk and Arbil to Hawler. The KDP officials and security forces force Assyrians to raise Kurdish flags in many Assyrian villages and on top of Assyrian offices. The Kurdish leadership continues to interfere in the Assyrians’ internal affairs and creates pseudo organizations that are under its control. Also, in the January 2005 Iraqi national elections the KDP blocked the arrival of ballot boxes to many Assyrian towns and villages in Nineveh Plain. It is estimated that over 150,000 Assyrians were deprived from voting. By rigging the elections, the Kurdish leadership either controls those that occupy these seats, buys their silent in regards to the illegal and oppressive practices of the KRG or apply constant pressure on the independent members in the said parliament. Therefore, it should be understood that the only free Assyrian voice would then come from the Diaspora, a voice that the author should respect and not unfairly criticize.

Prof Romano then embarks on a mission to show that the Assyrians were not the victims that they claim always to be, that they raided on neighboring communities in 19th century and before and worked with the British colonialists to help them quell rebelling Muslims, including the Kurds. I would like to remind the professor that raids by Kurdish tribes on Assyrian villages in Hakkari, modern Turkey, prompted repeated battles between Assyrian and Kurdish tribes. If Assyrian raids were so harmful against the Kurds, how would the professor explain why all the Assyrian villages in Hakkari region are under Kurdish control today and have been since WWI? The joining of the British RAF materialized only after they were left as refugees by Kurds and Turks after WWI concluded. Furthermore, The RAF force was not Assyrian exclusively when it was established as it included Kurds, Arabs and Turkomans as well, although it became one

later. It was the Assyrians who lost 750,000 souls at the hands of Kurds and Turks during WWI. All what the Assyrians needed from joining the British Forces was to protect themselves, their families and to return to their homes.

Finally, Prof. Romano states that, "... without the YPG and the Peshmerga, the Assyrians of northern Syria and Iraq would all likely be dead, lying in some jihadist-dug mass grave." This is an utterly false statement. Interviews with survivors of ISIS onslaught in the Yezidi region of Sinjar, for example, suggest that the peshmerga and the Barazani leadership in Arbil misled them about ISIS threat and have abandoned them when they came under attack. The fall of Mosul on the other hand and the city occupation by ISIS was planned during meetings in Arbil and Barazani admitted to having these meetings taken place, but claimed that the participants were in Arbil for protection. The Third Army Division is historically stationed in Mosul. Most of its brigades withdrew from Mosul, with the exception of the under armed and under manned Sixth Brigade, without firing one single bullet. The Peshmerga Kurdish forces withdrew as well in an organized manner. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, Masoud Barazani and Nineveh Governor Atheel Nujafi, must be held responsible for the fall of the city. The fall of Mosul was a conspiracy, which led to the evacuation of the entire Christian population that were left with no protection. Furthermore, two weeks before the attack of ISIS on Nineveh Plains, the peshmerga disarmed the Assyrian force stating that they will defend the population in case of an attack. However, when ISIS approached the Nineveh Plain Assyrian towns and villages, the peshmerga withdraw from the region. The peshmerga did not protect the Christians, as the author claims. Many analysts suggest that the scheme has been to force the Christians out, allow ISIS to rule and cause chaos for some time. Later, the Kurds will attack (aided and supported by the U.S. army of course), force ISIS out, present Kurds as heroes and fill the vacuum left by ISIS. Here the Kurds will refuse to leave and claim Mosul officially as part of the Kurdish region or use it as a bargaining chip to annex other regions to the KRG. I just want to remind Prof Romano about the exact similar scenario that occurred in Sinjar and how after taking control of it from ISIS, Barazani declared that the peshmerga were not leaving and that it was now part of the Kurdish region despite worldwide displays of anger and objection from the Yezidi community.

Let me conclude that no one should deny the Kurds their national aspirations, but that should and must not be at the expense of the indigenous Assyrians, Yezidis or the other lesser helpless groups. The Assyrians have the right granted by the declarations of the United Nations to live free, in peace and dignity on the lands of their ancestors in historic Assyria.

