



*Established 1964*

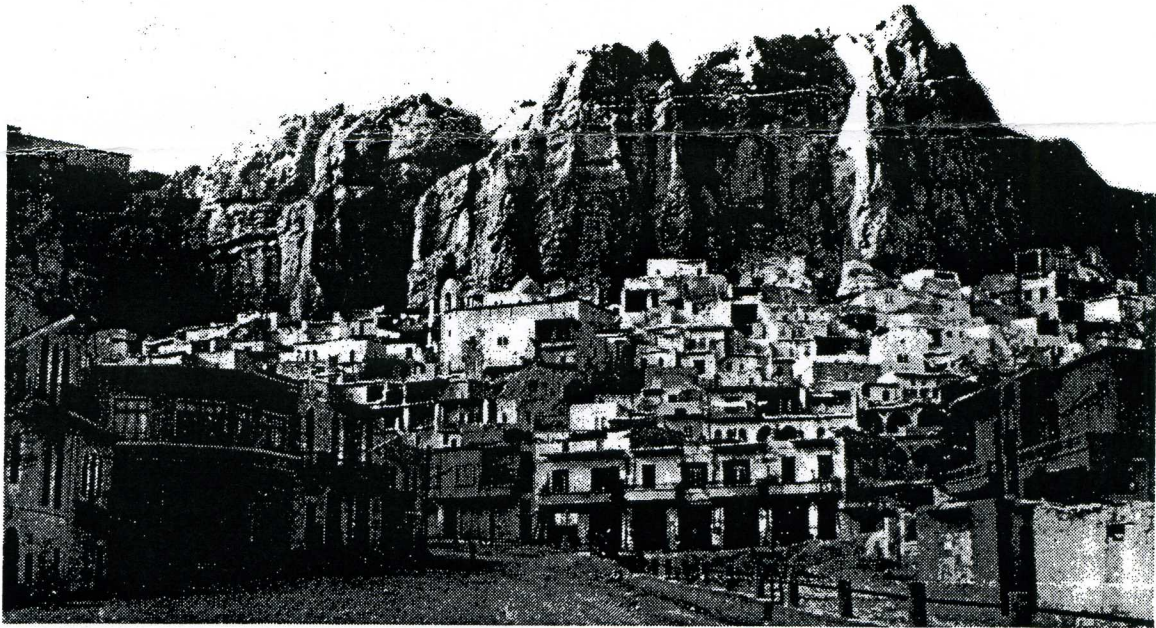
*Dedicated to the  
Advancement of Education  
of Assyrians*



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**The Picturesque Village of Ma'alula, Syria - built in a vast and superbly grandiose crevice in the rocks of the Galamun Mountains where the Christian inhabitants still speak Aramaic.**

**CULTURAL — EDUCATIONAL — SOCIAL**

# An Assyrian at Oxford

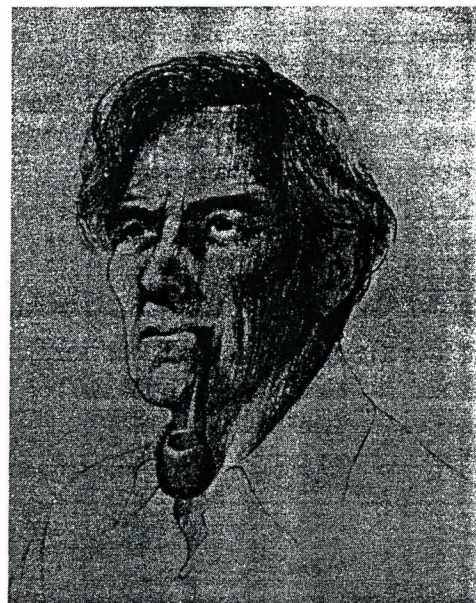
by: Lucrece De Matran

Oxford University enjoys an incomparable reputation and it attracts top-class students and teachers from all over the world. No small wonder that Dr. Eprime Eshag ('Aprim' to Assyrians) was drawn to this eminent centre of learning. He arrived to teach and conduct research in 1962 and has never left except for brief work assignments. Yet it may surprise readers to learn that Aprim is also a Cambridge man, where he graduated and completed his Ph.D research in Economics. Thus connected to the two premier universities in England, it is fair to say that he is not merely an "Oxonian", but an "Oxbridgean".

I first met Aprim when I took a group of young Assyrians on a tour of Oxford. We looked around the city and some of the university colleges before going to Wadham College, where we met Aprim according to a previous arrangement. This college is like home to him, and he personally guided us through it speaking perfect Assyrian (Urmia dialect). Meanwhile, I was translating all that to an English friend who had accompanied us. Amused and indulged, we sauntered from the group, leading Aprim to call out to me: "Khanum aat eeka brikhshaivat?", in a certain intonation that meant: "Madam, where do you think you are going?". Was it his smile, or was it the ring in his voice, suggesting a typical Assyrian sense of humour, that made me feel a warmth towards the man? We all had a good laugh.

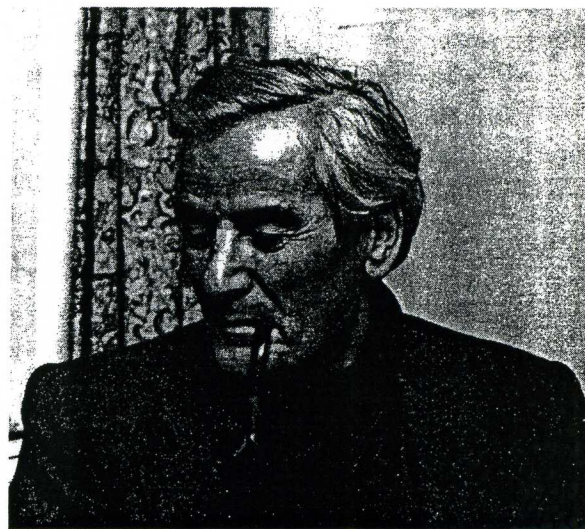
When our tour took place in 1986 Aprim was a Fellow and Tutor in Economics at Wadham College as well as a Senior Research Officer at the Oxford University Institute of Economics and Statistics. Because it turned out that we have mutual friends, I have come to know Aprim better during the ten intervening years. It was with one of those friends that I paid a more recent visit to Oxford, for the purpose of the interview which forms the basis of this article.

Aprim, Yaqu Eshag was born in the city of Urmia, Iran, in 1918; his parents (Yaqu and Shakar) came from the village of Qaradjalu. He was but a few months old when his family, along with thousands of other Assyrian families, abandoned their homes and villages and fled to Russia and to Iraq, escaping the horrendous atrocities committed against them following the



This portrait hangs in the Wadham College Library, and is captioned:  
Eprime Eshag  
Fellow and Tutor in Economics  
1962-1986  
who arranged the major benefaction for the building of this library.

The drawing is by Odile Crick, the artist, wife of Francis Crick, the world-famous Nobel winner in genetics who was Eprime's contemporary at Cambridge, after the war-1950/53.



assassination of the Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun, head of the Assyrian Church of the East and the nation. The Eshags went to Russia.

Having lost their mother early on in Russia, Aprim and his older brother Vania, who passed away recently, were raised in that foreign country by their stepmother Anna, also an

Assyrian. It was here that Aprim learned Russian. In 1926 the family was able to return to Urmia where Aprim acquired a half-sister, Nellie, and a half-brother, David, both now living in San Jose, California.

Aprim received his elementary education at the American Mission School in the city of Urmia, and his subsequent education at the State secondary schools (modelled on the French baccalaureate) in Urmia and Tehran, maintaining throughout an exceptional performance, especially in Mathematics and Sciences. In the final baccalaureate examinations, he came first in the whole of Tehran. The leading Tehran newspaper *Ettela-at* published an account of his school career under the heading 'The Successful School Career of an Assyrian Student' accompanied by his picture.

Soon after, the Bank Melli of Iran announced that it was holding a competitive examination, i.e., 'concourse', for the award of scholarships to exceptional students, to study accountancy in England. Several hundred students, including Aprim, participated in the examination. He was one of the twelve, and the only Christian, chosen by the bank.

Aprim arrived in London at the end of 1936. Having passed the University of London Matriculation examinations, he started his five-year training course in Accountancy in 1938. But, owing to his keen interest in political economy, he enrolled at the same time with the University of London as an external student for a degree in Economics. He received his B.Sc. Honours degree in Economics in June 1942, and six months later passed the Final Examinations of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, becoming the first person from Iran to qualify as a Chartered Accountant. The Institute awarded him its Walter Knox Scholarship, as well as the Second Certificate of Merit among some 600 candidates who sat for the Final Examinations in December 1943.

The absence of travel facilities to Iran during the Second World War meant that Aprim's Bank Melli scholarship had to continue. Since he had been studying for some time at the London School of Economics at Cambridge, he took the opportunity to enroll and research for a Ph.D degree in Economics. (London School of Economics had, at that time, been evacuated to Cambridge and integrated into the Economics Faculty of the University).

But, Aprim had to return to Tehran in May 1945, a few days after the end of World War I in Europe. He went back to the Bank Melli where he was appointed to a responsible position. He then worked for the Ministry of Commerce and for private firms, eventually opening his own office as a Business Consultant and Chartered Accountant.

In 1950 Aprim returned to Cambridge. By the end of 1952 he completed his research for the Ph.D. degree on the Monetary Theory of the "Cambridge School of Economics." This was the subject he had partly covered in his wartime research at the London School of Economics. Almost immediately he was offered a position as Economic Affairs Officer at the United Nations' Secretariat in New York. For the next nine years he was primarily involved in applied economics research preparing reports for publication.

In 1960 his worldwide travels began. During the Congo crisis, he was sent to Leopoldville (now Kinshasa), to serve with the U.N. Civilian Mission. He later spent three months with the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. During this time he wrote two articles on the Congo (Zaire) situation, which were published in the U.N. Economic Bulletin for Africa -1961.

Having got disillusioned with the U.N. performance in the Congo, Aprim decided to leave the U.N. Secretariat and return to England to resume his academic career. In 1962 he applied and was elected to a vacant position at Oxford. Later that year, he started his work as Fellow and Tutor in Economics at Wadham College and as Senior Research Officer at the Oxford University's Institute of Economics and Statistics. But this did not end his travels and his work for the U.N.

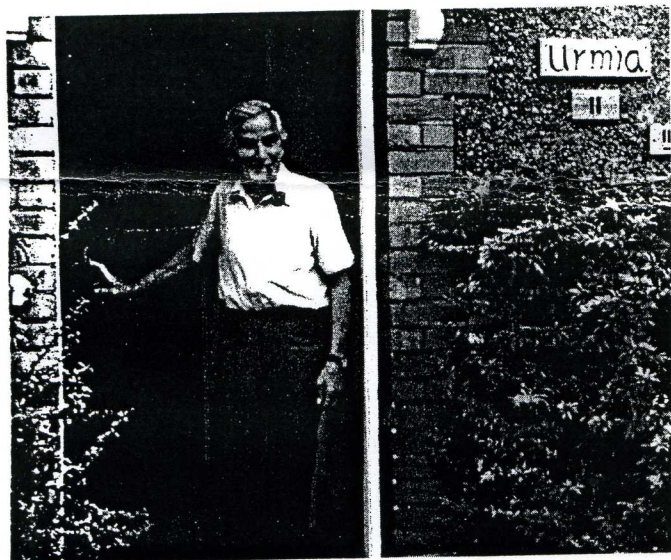
In 1964, with Ford Foundation sponsorship, he went to Buenos Aires as a University visiting Professor. Two years later he was invited to Canberra, Australia, as a visiting Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies of the Australian National University. During this trip he also managed to do three months of field work in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Phillipines.

Aprim's connections with Tehran never ceased. From 1973 until 1978 he spent his annual Easter vacations there, working as consultant to the Industrial and Mining Development Bank of Iran. This gave him an opportunity to see his

ily, friends and his ex-colleagues.

Aprim, being a workaholic, spent most of his University vacations fulfilling assignments for the United Nations with which he never ceased to be associated. His longest service for the U.N. was during the 1980/81 academic year, for which he obtained a sabbatical leave. He became the Senior Consultant to the Director General of the U.N. in the preparation of the agenda and the background documents on the North South Dialogue - negotiations between developed countries and the Third World countries.

After living at Wadham College for 24 years, Aprim retired in September 1986, and now lives in a house, north of Oxford, which he has named "Urmia". In 1992 he also succumbed to marriage, tying the knot with the lovely Linda Lewis, a friend of long standing whom he had met some twenty years earlier in Cambridge.



While visiting him at "Urmia", Aprim gave me and my friend a tour of the house, pointing out items of interest, among them a mosaic relief of an Assyrian Winged Bull. But, most cherished of all, a portrait of his mother done by an Assyrian artist Daryawosh Ayubkhani in Iran. It was evident from the look in his eyes that Aprim still yearned for the mother who died all too young. (The portrait was published on the cover of *Ayee/SHE* Assyrian women's magazine, London, Issue No. 5 June 1996).

Aprim has never lost touch with his roots. He is enthusiastic about his mother tongue and the traditions that go with it. He speaks, reads and writes excellent Assyrian. Good host that he is, he offers his Assyrian and other guests the traditional Assyrian dishes, *Kiptee* and

*Yakhnee*, which he cooks himself. During the years 1945-48 Aprim had written four Assyrian songs lamenting the atrocities suffered by Assyrians at the hands of Turks, Kurds and Iraqis. He has put these songs on a tape. Two of them are sung by Olga Arsanis, a family friend. The other two, added later, are sung by Aprim himself with an apology saying, "I could not find anyone else in Oxford to sing them." Aprim is not a church goer, yet when I asked about his religious affiliations he answered without hesitation, "Nestorian", by which he meant The Assyrian Church of the East.

In assessing the measure of the man, we cannot overemphasize the stellar achievements of this "Assyrian at Oxford", and his continuous love of our *Umta* (nation).

To the world Aprim is known as an economist and an author. He is listed in *The Writers' Directory* 1974/76, and in three *Who is Who* directories: *The Academic*, second edition 1975; *Authors and Writers* 6th edition, 1971; and *Who is Who in Education*, 1975/76.

Aprim has published extensively in the course of his work. In addition to the books and pamphlets listed below, his publications include several contributions to learned economic journals on such topical macroeconomic subjects as: development and growth policies; agrarian reforms; employment, balance of payments and inflation; criticism of the Chicago School, i.e. Monetarism, in general and the policies of the I.M.F. in particular; and conditions for a successful manipulation of market forces.

#### BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS:

- 1963 *From Marshall to Keynes: An Essay on the Monetary Theory of the Cambridge School*. B. Blackwell, Oxford. (This book was a revised version of the Cambridge Ph.D. thesis and has been translated into Japanese).
- 1966 *Present System of Trade and Payments Versus Full Employment and Welfare State*. B. Blackwell, Oxford.
- 1983 *Fiscal and Monetary Policies and Problems in Developing Countries*. Cambridge University Press. (This book is under translation into Chinese).
- 1946-1947 Two political pamphlets were published in Persian while Aprim was still in Tehran: *What is to be Done?*, 1946. *Tudeh Party at the Crossroads*, 1947. Both pamphlets which were highly critical of the Tudeh Party leadership, had rendered him persona non grata with that party.