

The Visit of Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimon to Timar

by Solomon (Sawa) Solomon

On occasion the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East would visit the Turkish governor of Van Vilayet in the city of Van. And, since the Timar Assyrians lived in the vicinity, the Patriarch would pay them a visit, and in his capacity as the head of the church, he would inspect the churches and if necessary, ordain clergy. On April 12, 1903, Mar Benyamin Shimon was ordained Patriarch by Metropolitan Mar Ishak Khanisho shortly after the death of his uncle, Patriarch Mar Rowil Shimon. A month later, he paid a visit to the governor of Van picking up on his way Malik Sapar of Sara and Malik Youkhanna of Timar, and as was the custom, Mar Benyamin decided to pay the Assyrian villages of Timar a visit. On May 14, 1903, Rayes Malham Rasho of Hawshesur received the news that the Patriarch with a large party was on his way. There was near panic in the village. Rayes Malham was angry that he was not given enough time to prepare for such a great occasion. The village was about four hours walking distance from Van, sitting on the edge of a mountain, and had about 19 houses. Hawshesur was established by a man by the name of Murad some two centuries earlier. He had left his ancestral village of Zerineh in Jeelu. Zerineh was the largest village in Jeelu with over 100 households. Murad had moved to Soowa in Diz, a small village with less than 20 households before descending to Timar and establishing Hawshesur. The village had two churches, Mar Tooma and Mar Sliwa. The latter was not an active church. Mar Tooma was prepared for services. It was an average size church with a low gate in order to force parishioners to bow their heads when entering. Rayes Malham decided that the Patriarch should not sleep where another man had slept, so the store room was emptied, cleaned and furnished.

In the afternoon of May 14, 1903, the Patriarchal party arrived. The governor had sent an officer and two soldiers to accompany the Patriarch, and also in the party were Maliks Sapar and Youkhanna. Rayes Malham welcomed them all. Dinner was served, a diwan was held, then Mar Benyamin retired

for the night. The soldiers slept at his door step. In the morning of May 15, the entire village attended mass at Mar Tooma during which time the Patriarch ordained Younathan Khamo and Goriel Suleiman as deacons. Goriel was only eleven years old, and after having breakfast the Patriarch left the village never to return.

The Patriarch was to be murdered by the Kurdish Chief Simco in Persia in 1918. Deacon Younathan Khamo was to marry the daughter of Malik Youkhanna Badawi and raise a large family. His only surviving son lives today in Modesto. He was to die in Hawshesur in 1915. Deacon Goriel was to marry the niece of Malik Sapar. In 1950 he was to be ordained a priest for the church of Mar Kardagh in Baghdad. He died in 1966. Malik Youkhanna Badawi was to die during the flight from Urmia to Hamadan in 1918, and his son Marawgil became the Malik of the Timaris. Rayes Malham was murdered by local Kurds near the village. An eyewitness later revealed that he had refused to renounce the Christian faith as a price for his life. May they all rest in peace. The village was finally abandoned in March 1918. One final note to this story, it is reported that the crop of apricots for that season, for which the village was famous, was so great that they had to give most of it away to other villages lest it be spoiled. This abundance was attributed to the visit of the Patriarch.



Mar Benyamin Shimon - Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East (1903-1918)