

# The Assyrian Genocide: Survivor Interview Guide

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## **Section I: City/Village Life**

## **Section II: Massacre and Deportation**

## **Section III: Orphanage Life (if survivor lived in an orphanage)**

## **Section IV: Emigration and Marriage**

## **Section V: Attitudes and Interpretations**

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### ***Section I: City/Village Life***

1. City/Town/Village
  - Population: size, ethnic groups, ratio of Assyrians to Turks/Kurds?
  - Occupational structure: What occupations were specific to Assyrians/Turks/Kurds?
  - Physical Layout: types of buildings, location of marketplace? (What was available? Who did the shopping? Who sold what?)
2. Neighborhood
  - Specific name? Boundaries? Who lived where (ethnic, religious, class groups)?
  - Physical layout: types of buildings, transportation, vendors?
3. Home
  - Physical description: floor plan, number of rooms, function of each room, furnishings, yard, heating, lighting, water supply, animals, pets?
  - What furnishings do you remember in each room?
4. Family
  - For each family member (e.g., great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, siblings), what was his or her name, age, sex, relationship to you, occupation, educational level?
  - Who lived in your house? Did non-family members live with you?
  - Who made family decisions? What was the division of responsibilities in your family?
  - Where did your relatives live, and how often and in what contexts did you see them?
  - What was the relationship between your family and other relatives?
5. Childhood
  - Describe some of the happiest moments during your childhood.
  - Do you remember specific songs, rhymes, or stories from your childhood?
  - With whom did you play and where?
  - What games did you play? What toys did you have?
  - What responsibilities and expectations did your parents have for you, and at what ages?
  - Do you remember being punished? If so, for what offenses? And by whom?
6. School
  - Who attended school?



- Who ran the school?
  - Do you remember names of teachers?
  - What subjects did you study?
  - How many years did you attend school?
  - Do any incidents stand out in your mind?
  - Were there other schools in your town/village/city?
7. Occupational Preparation
- Were there apprenticeships for specific jobs?
  - What job or vocation did your parents want you to pursue?
8. Household Management
- How did you obtain, store, and prepare food?
  - How were children bathed? Clothes washed?
  - Describe a typical day in the life of an Assyrian housewife.
  - How was money used within the household? What were typical expenses?
  - Who made decisions on household matters?
9. Health Care
- Was there a hospital in your town? Were there doctors? Midwives? Nurses?
  - What happened when someone became sick in your house?
  - Were there home remedies? Medicines?
  - How did mothers give birth? What customs surrounded the birth of a child?
  - How were the elderly cared for? The mentally retarded? The physically handicapped?
10. Leisure Pastimes
- What did you do during the summer? After school?
  - What books and newspapers were read in your home? By whom?
  - Did you have a summer house? Describe it.
  - Did your family go on vacations? Trips?
  - Describe patterns of visitation with others in your household.
  - How was leisure time spent by Men? Women? Boys? Girls?
11. Church
- What churches were in your city? Names? Who went?
  - To what church did you belong? What activities do you remember?
  - Was there an Evangelical church in your city? What was the relationship between its members and those who belonged to the Apostolic Church?
  - Were there missionaries from abroad? Names; Denomination?
  - Did religious leaders play an active role in your community? Politics?
12. Religious Observances
- How did you celebrate Christmas, Lent, Easter, various saints' days?
  - How religious were people in your household? How often did you attend services? How often did most people in your community attend church? For what specific occasions?
  - Was religious commitment higher among Apostolics? Catholics? Protestants?

13. Folk Heritage

- Do you remember any proverbs? Songs? Legends? Tales? Turkish sayings?
- Do you remember any superstitions?

14. Manners and Customs

- What customs existed relating to birth? Death? Health? Illness? Engagement? Marriage?
- Rituals associated with entry into manhood/womanhood?
- At what age did marriage occur? Who could marry whom? How was marriage permission secured? Could the girl refuse?
- Was there divorce? Remarriage?
- How were girls treated? How were wives treated?

15. Assyrians and Turks/Kurds

- Were there Turks in your city? Kurds?
- How did Assyrians and Turks/Kurds get along with each other?
- Did you or your family have Turkish/Kurdish friends?
- Did Assyrians have any different rights from Turks?
- Did you know any Assyrians who became Muslims at the time of the deportations? Why did they convert? How were they treated by other Assyrians?

16. Clubs, Organizations, Political Groups

- Were there revolutionary parties in your area? How many members did they have? How active were they?
- Outside of church, what clubs and organizations were there? To which did you or your family belong? Who belonged to these groups?
- Were there charitable organizations in your community? What did they do?

17. Community Organization

- Who were the Assyrian leaders in your area? What were their responsibilities? How did they relate to the Turks in your area?
- Were Assyrians free to govern their community?
- Were Assyrians in complete control of their churches? Schools?

18. Social Control by Turks

- In your community, what do you remember about courts? Prisons? Taxes? Drafting of Assyrian men/boys?
- Did Assyrians ever try to defend themselves against attacks by Turks/Kurds? How?
- How did Assyrian leaders maintain control in your community?

19. Military Service

- Did you or anyone else in your family serve in the military?
- Who was drafted? Were men able to avoid the draft? How?

## ***Section II: Massacre and Deportation***

1. Before 1915
  - Did anyone in your extended family die in the 1894-96 massacres? The 1909 massacres? Who? How?
  - What were relationships like between Turks and Assyrians immediately before the deportations of 1915? Were there any indications of growing political tensions?
2. Imprisonment and Torture
  - Were Assyrians arrested or tortured in your area before the deportations?
  - Were guns or other weapons gathered from Assyrians by Turkish officials in your area?
  - Did you observe any brutalities toward Assyrians before the deportations ?
3. Resistance
  - Was there any resistance by Assyrians against Turkish orders or brutalities?
  - Did any Turks/Kurds come to the rescue of Assyrians? Did any Turks/Kurds shelter families? Children?
4. Deportation
  - Were Assyrians deported from your area?
  - How were deportation orders given?
  - How many days did Assyrians have to prepare for deportation?
  - How did Assyrians prepare for deportation? What did you take with you?
  - Did you have transportation during the deportation?
  - Who was deported from your extended family?
  - Describe the first day or two of your deportation journey.
5. Deportation Marches
  - Where were you deported? Specific towns/villages?
  - Describe specific events that occurred during the deportation marches.
  - What role did gendarmes or soldiers play during the deportations?
  - Were you attacked at any point during the deportations?
  - Did you observe any incidents of rape? Abduction of children? Women?
  - Where did you sleep?
  - How did you secure food? Water?
  - How long were you deported? Days? Weeks? Months?
  - Did you observe people who died from attack? Dehydration? Starvation? Disease? Describe specific instances.
  - Did any of your family members die during the deportation marches? Were any abducted? Did any family members become separated?
6. Deportation Caravan
  - How many were deported from your area?
  - How many arrived at the destination point of your caravan?
  - Was there any resistance to being deported? Why or why not?
  - Did you observe other deportation caravans? What was their condition?

### ***Section III: Orphanage Life (if survivor lived in an orphanage)***

1. Admission
  - When did you first become aware that there were orphanages for survivors.
  - In what orphanage(s) did you live? Name? Place? How long did you live there? Who was in charge? Names of people?
  - How did you enter the orphanage? What procedures were followed in admitting you?
2. Orphanage Life
  - Describe a typical day in the orphanage.
  - Describe the facilities. How was the orphanage organized?
  - How was the food? Clothing?
  - Did you go to school? Or receive vocational training?
  - What did you do for recreation?
  - What are your favorite memories and worst memories of orphanage life?
3. Assyrian Identity
  - Did you have to relearn the Assyrian language?
  - Were there efforts to instill a nationalistic spirit in the orphans?
  - What was the role of religious education within your orphanage?
  - Do you remember specific songs or other things that you learned in the orphanage?
4. Leaving the Orphanage
  - When did your orphanage leave Turkey? Describe the process.
  - Where were you resettled after leaving Turkey? Describe the new setting.
  - At what age did children finally leave the orphanages? Were there engagements and marriages in the orphanages?
5. Reunions
  - How did you become reunited with family? Relatives? Friends?
  - After leaving the orphanage, did you return to Turkey? If so, describe the process of going home and what you found in your hometown.

## ***Section IV: Emigration and Marriage***

1. Marriage
  - Where did you meet your spouse? Describe courtship/marriage.
  - Where did you live? In how many different places/countries did you live? What years? Why did you move?
  - What job(s) did you and your spouse have? Describe your economic circumstances.
  - How many children do you have? Where were they born? When?
2. United States (Or present country of residence)
  - When did you immigrate to the United States? Why?
  - Did children, relatives, or friends immigrate before you?
  - Did you encounter any problems in entering the United States?
  - What were your first impressions of the United States?
  - How did you make a living after coming to the U.S.? Describe your job history.
  - Where in the United States have you lived?
3. Adjustment
  - Were there any Assyrian organizations, churches, or other groups that were particularly helpful to you?
  - How did your children adjust to the United States? Your spouse?
  - Have you experienced any discrimination in the United States?
  - What have been your hardest times since coming to the United States?
  - Did you ever regret moving to the United States?
4. Children/Grandchildren
  - Describe your children. Did they marry Assyrians? How many grandchildren do you have? Where are your grandchildren going to school?
  - What type of work do your children do? Where do they live?
  - Did you name any of your children after siblings or relatives who died in the genocide?
  - Do your grandchildren speak Assyrian? Can they write Assyrian? Do they know your story? Are they proud to be Assyrian?
  - What churches do your children/grandchildren attend?
  - Do your children/grandchildren belong to any Assyrian organizations?
  - Do they subscribe to any Assyrian newspapers?
5. Assyrian Identity
  - Do you have many non-Assyrian friends? What percentage of your closest friends are Assyrian?
  - To what Assyrian organizations do you currently belong? How active are you?
  - Do you speak Assyrian in your home? With your spouse? Children? Grandchildren?
  - Do you attend an Assyrian church? Name? How regularly?
  - Are you worried about the future of Assyrians in the U.S.A.? Why? In what ways?
  - What advice do you have for Assyrian young people?
  - What does it mean to be a good Assyrian?

## ***Section V: Attitudes and Interpretations***

1. Causes of the Genocide
  - In your view, why did the genocide occur?
  - Were the Assyrians in any way to blame for the genocide?
  - What role did the revolutionary groups play?
2. Attitude Toward Turks
  - What was your attitude toward Turks before the genocide?
  - Did you observe Turks who were helpful to Assyrians both during the deportations and afterward?
  - Do you think the average Turk approved of the actions of the government against the Assyrians?
  - After you left Turkey, did you have any contact with Turks? What was your experience with these individuals?
  - How would you describe Turkish character?
3. Childhood Feelings
  - What specific events from your childhood stand out most clearly in your mind? What were your most painful experiences? Joyful moments? Do you think most often of the good or bad times from your childhood?
  - As a child, were you able to understand why the deportations were occurring? Or why there was hostility toward the Assyrians?
  - As a child, particularly in the orphanage, did you talk with others about the genocide (i.e., sharing stories of what you had experienced and witnessed)?
  - If orphaned during the genocide, how sad, depressed, or lonely do you remember being? How did you cope with these feelings as a child? What sources of comfort did you have?
4. Adult Feelings
  - How much did you think about the genocide as an adult, and how did your feelings change over time?
  - In the last few years, how preoccupied have you been with the genocide? Is it something that you think about every day?
  - Have you ever had, or do you currently have, dreams about events you experienced during the genocide?
  - Do you attend special events on April 24 to commemorate the Assyrians who died in 1915? How do you feel on that day?
  - Do you feel that your "wound" from the genocide has healed, or does it still occupy a lot of your thinking?
5. Guilt
  - Have you ever felt guilty that you survived when so many Assyrians perished?
  - Are there any specific events from the deportations about which you feel bad--where you failed, or perhaps your mother or father failed or compromised?
  - Did you observe Assyrian women abandoning children or infants? How do you feel about such decisions?

6. Shame and Humiliation
  - In what ways were Assyrians shamed and humiliated during the deportations?
  - Did you ever feel that you had become less than human during the deportations?
7. Talking About the Genocide
  - Do you talk with fellow survivors about the genocide? Is this a regular or infrequent topic of conversation?
  - Do you frequently talk with non-Assyrians about the genocide?
  - Have you told your story to your children? To your grandchildren? In how much detail? What have been their reactions? How interested have they been in your story?
  - What attitudes about the genocide do you think you have communicated to your children and grandchildren?
8. Effects of the Genocide
  - How do you think the genocide has affected you? Physically? Emotionally? Educationally and vocationally?
  - Has anything positive resulted from the genocide for Assyrians? For you personally?
9. Religious Practice and Attitudes
  - What was your religious background as a child?
  - How would you describe your religious commitment and beliefs as an adult?
  - As a child, did you wonder why God was allowing the Assyrians to be deported?
  - As an adult, have you wondered about God's "silence" during the genocide?
  - Has it troubled you how a God who is good and all-powerful could have allowed the destruction of the Assyrians?
  - Do you think God had anything to do with your own survival?
  - Do you think God will punish the Turks for what they did to the Assyrians?
10. Responses to the Genocide
  - To what extent do you try *not* to think about the genocide?
  - Do you feel that you have a satisfactory explanation for why the genocide occurred?
  - Do you think any good resulted from the genocide?
  - Should the Assyrians seek reparations or return of their lands from the Turks?
  - Do you think Assyrians would be better off if they abandoned any hope of regaining their homeland?
  - What do you think about the assassination of Turkish officials as a way of pursuing recognition of Assyrian claims?
  - How reconciled are you toward the genocide?
  - How angry are you toward the Turks? What would have to happen in order to reduce your anger? Would acknowledgement of the genocide by Turkey be sufficient?
  - When someone asks you why Assyrians continue to talk about an event that happened so many years ago, what is your answer?





*"In our every deliberation,  
a nation must study the  
implications of its decisions  
on its future generations."*

— Assyrian Information Management  
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**Reference:**

This exact guideline, with minor modifications to personalize the questions for Assyrians, was used by prominent authors, Donald and Lorna Miller, during videotaping of the Armenian genocide survivors. We recommend using this format since the Armenians, Assyrians and Hellenes shared the same genocides.

For more information, please visit:

Armenian, Assyrian and Hellenic Genocide News  
<http://www.atour.com/~aahgn>

The Armenian Genocide: Survivor Interview Guide  
<http://www.atour.com/~aahgn/news/20040601a.html>