

## **Platform of Anatolian Religions and Beliefs Platform / Those who are backing our cultural heritage Vanguards of Our Cultural Heritage / Part 10**

"Assyrian Chaldeans from History tountil Today" with Buğra Poyraz

**TOPICS:** Origin of Assyrian Chaldeans and the Catholicisation Process, Chaldeans and Ancient Babylonian Connection, Assyrian Chaldeans in the Republican Period, Chaldean Population and Distribution in TurkeyTürkiye, Status of Chaldean Villages, Evacuation of Villages and Resettlement, Migration Process from Turkey Türkiye to France and Belgium, Difficulties in the Migration Process, Chaldean Population in France and Belgium, Cultural Identity and Integation Efforts, the Future of Chaldean Community, the Young Generation and Education, Protection of Cultural Heritage

**Nükhet Everi: We will talk about Assyrian Chaldeans. My guest is the academic Buğra Poyraz, who has worked as a translator and editor for many years. Firstly, could you introduce yourself?**

Buğra Poyraz: I am from Izmir. For 12 years I have been living in Istanbul for 12 years. The multicultural structure of Istanbul led me to study history. I didn't have such an idea before, but my love forof Istanbul pushed me towards history and I started to do my master's degree at the age of 30. I worked on papal and Ottoman diplomatic relations at Istanbul University and then I started my PhD studies. I am currently working with Professor Nora Cheney, a native of Istanbul, at the French Geopolitical Institute at Paris 8 University. My research topic is the Assyrian Chaldeans of Turkey Türkiye and migrations from Turkey Türkiye to France.

**Nükhet Everi: As far as I know, Assyrian Chaldeans are actually a church structure that emerged from the Nestorians. Can you tell us about how the Assyrian Chaldeans were born and how this church started?**

Buğra Poyraz: There is a debate about this nomenclature, and it which continues. However, we can say with certainty that Chaldeans is the name of a community of Aramaic origin that became Catholic in the 16th century. If we look at the community sources and the nomenclature in the Paris Peace Treaty, "Assyrian Chaldean" is the most accurate term to express these people. In the 16th century they became Catholic and were given this name by the Pope in 1553. We read about "Chaldeans" in the Torah and in the book of Genesis it is written that Prophet Abraham lived among the "Chaldeans". Over time, the Chaldeans were assimilated among the other communities of Mesopotamia. In 1553, the Pope said to the first patriarch Sulaka, "You come from the Chaldean region and the ancient Chaldeans of the Torah no longer exist. I will call your church the Church of the Chaldeans". Some historians trace the Chaldeans back to ancient Babylon.

**Nükhet Everi: You are studying their migration during the Republican period. What is their population? Where do they have churches? Have you studied these, do we know them done research on these topics, are they known?**

Buğra Poyraz: In March 2018, a census was conducted in the Chaldean community. According to Father Remzi Diril, the number of Chaldeans in TurkeyTürkiye was 816 at that time. These 816 people usually live in Istanbul. Most of them came from Mardin and Diyarbakir in the 1960s, and they are mostly jewellery makersjewelers. There are also refugees from Iraq. Their number increased to tens of thousands in the years following 2014. Their final destination is not Turkey Türkiye. They use Turkey Türkiye as a bridge to go to third countries. The Catholic Church and Caritas are helping these refugees, the Assyrian Chaldeans refugees from Iraq. My focus is on those who emigrated to France. Today, there are 20,000 thousand Chaldeans from Turkey Türkiye in France and 10,000 thousand in Belgium, especially in Brussels. There are about 30,000 thousand Chaldeans from Turkey Türkiye that

I have traced. Between 1978-1995, 8 villages in Şırnak and 1 village in Siirt were evacuated. Approximately 4,500-5,000 people left Turkey Türkiye. All of them received asylum in France and Belgium. Today their number has reached 30,000 thousand. The first generation is still alive. There are many Chaldeans from Turkey Türkiye who are deputy mayors, especially in small towns north of Paris and who are now involved in local politics. And they still speak Turkish. I took it upon myself that to write a doctoral thesis about these 30,000 people who are not recognised in Turkey Türkiye and started this PhD study.

**Nükhet Everi: Can we learn you inform us about the details of your doctoral study from you?**

Buğra Poyraz: Since the early 1960s, many citizens from the Southeast left as expatriates. But of course, the labour rush to Germany also had a great impact on this. I am talking about the demography after the First World War. My topic actually starts in the seventies. Today, Assyrian Chaldean families in Mardin and Diyarbakır are either abroad or in Istanbul. The vast majority of the Assyrian Chaldeans in Istanbul and in Turkey other parts of Türkiye today are from Mardin and Diyarbakır. As a matter of fact, there are 9 villages from which they emigrated. Now there are only 2-3 families from these villages left in Turkey Türkiye. Father Remzi Diler's family is one of them. These families stayed in the village because of their attachment to the village and sometimes for economic reasons. However, most of them emigrated. In other words, if there are maybe ten 10 children in the family that stayed here, two siblings stayed here, eight of them are either in France or Belgium. These villages were the ones that survived after the First World War. They were related attached to big cities, but these villages were a bit closed to themselves. For example, Hartil Village is a village in Siirt. There are Kurdish families in that area and we know that some Kurdish families still speak the modern Eastern Aramaic spoken by the Chaldeans today. However, when Şırnak became a province in 1990, these villages were included within the borders of Şırnak. Almost all of these villages are in ruins today. Houses and a church were built in Geznah Village. It was not officially opened due to the pandemic, but there are people who come and go in the summer in Geznah Village. There are three households living there permanently.

**Nükhet Everi: What difficulties did they face during this migration process?**

Buğra Poyraz: Feudal conflicts and girl abductions of girls in the region accelerated the migration. In 1978, an incident involving the abduction of a girl abduction incident led the Chaldeans to negotiate with church officials in big cities and Ankara. However, they did not get any results and had to emigrate. They came to Istanbul, where they saved money by working for short periods of time and then obtained passports and travelled to France or Belgium. Most of them went to France, but later, on there were also some who emigrated to Belgium. Today, 20,000 thousand Assyrian Chaldeans from Turkey Türkiye live in the Val-d'Oise region in the north of France. 8,000 thousand of them live in Sarcelles and about 10,000 thousand in Brussels. The first generation is alive. The first generation are those who took their children with them when they emigrated. The second generation is the children who were taken away emigrated with their parents, and the third generation is those who were born there. The first generation is alive, and they have members who speak Turkish perfectly. For example, Father Aziz Yalap studied at Saint-Louis Seminary in Istanbul and became a priest. His book is published by İletişim Publications and was prepared by Antony Yalap, Deputy Mayor of Sarcelles.

During this migration process, the Chaldeans experienced great difficulties. They had to leave their villages due to the problems caused by the feudal structure and the abduction of girls. After working in Istanbul for a short time, they emigrated to France and Belgium. Today, the Chaldeans, who still preserve their cultural ties and speak Turkish, also take an active role in local politics.

**Nükhet Everi: How do you evaluate the situation of the Chaldean community today?**

Buğra Poyraz: The Chaldean community has overcome the difficulties of living as immigrants, especially in countries like France and Belgium. The new generation, the second and third generations, have integrated with into the societies they live in where they live and have achieved significant success. The majority of Most Chaldeans have become economically empowered and socially accepted. However, they still face some difficulties in preserving their cultural identity. The Chaldean language and culture are at risk of being lost over time in the countries to which they have immigrated. However, with the efforts of the community, this cultural heritage is being kept alive. Especially Churches and associations in particular play an important role in this regard. Through education and cultural activities, great efforts are made to ensure that the younger generation does not forget their identity.

**Nükhet Everi: What can you say about the future of the Chaldean community?**

Buğra Poyraz: The Chaldean community has faced many difficulties in history and has always managed to survive. Today, the young generation consists of educated and conscious individuals. This increases my hopes for the future. Their efforts to preserve their cultural and religious identity will ensure that the Chaldean community remains strong. I believe that this community will continue to exist and grow stronger in the future.

**Nükhet Everi Thank you for your valuable information and participation.**

Buğra Poyraz: Thank you, it is a great pleasure for me to take part in this platform ADİP interview.