

# THE ENDURING LEGACY OF MOHAMMED SHAMMDIN AGHA SLEVANI: A KURDISH HUMANITARIAN LEADER AMIDST WORLD WAR I - ADAPTING AND PERPETUATING HIS EXTRAORDINARY CONTRIBUTIONS

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## Abstract

This research presents an in-depth examination of the historical and humanitarian legacy of Mohammed Shammdin Agha Slevani during the turbulent early 20th century. We explore the extraordinary impact of Agha Slevani's humanitarian efforts, focusing on his pivotal role in offering refuge and support to Christians including Orthodox, Armenia, Catholics Assyrians, and the Jewish community at that time amidst the cataclysmic events of World War I. Employing a multifaceted interdisciplinary approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this paper uncovers the intricate layers of Agha Slevani's contributions to promoting coexistence and humanitarianism in the heart of Iraqi Kurdistan. His tireless dedication transcended religious and ethnic boundaries, leaving an enduring imprint on the region's social fabric. By examining his legacy, we aim to draw inspiration from his example and work towards a more culturally, religiously, and harmoniously enriched community.

This research seeks to ensure that the indomitable spirit of Mohammed Agha Slevani continues to shape a brighter future for generations to come, echoing his timeless message of compassion and coexistence.

Introduction: In the midst of the chaos of World War I, individuals like Mohammed Shammdin Agha Slevani emerged as beacons of hope and symbols of humanity. Agha Slevani, a Kurdish leader from Zakho in Iraqi Kurdistan, played a crucial role in offering sanctuary to Christians and besides to the impact on Jewish as well by escaping the genocidal campaign of the Ottoman Empire in 1915-1916. Utilizing a diverse methodology, this study delves deeply into the selected era. Emphasizing interviews and the meticulous analysis of primary archival materials, we've sourced documents, letters, and testimonies from notable figures of the time. Our goal is to distill these findings into actionable recommendations, channeling Mohammed Agha's philosophies to bolster cultural engagement and strengthen social cohesion. This research aims to shed light on Agha Slevani's extraordinary humanitarian contributions and the recognition he received from Pope Pius XI for his efforts in protecting vulnerable communities and also suggest some humanitarian activities influenced by the work of Mohammed Agha.

**Keywords:**-Humanitarianism, World War I, Kurdistan, Armenian Christians, Jewish refugees, Compassion, Coexistence, Pope Pius XI, Genocidal campaign, Cultural heritage preservation, Cultural Engagement, Humanitarian values, Community building, Legacy of altruism

## INTRODUCTION

Amidst the tumultuous early 20th century, individuals like Mohammed Shammdin Agha Slevani emerged as beacons of hope and symbols of humanity. Agha Slevani, a Kurdish leader from Zakho in Iraqi Kurdistan, played a pivotal role in providing refuge and support to Christians and respecting the Jewish community during the horrors of the Ottoman Empire's genocidal campaign during World War I. His humanitarian efforts mirrored the actions of figures like Oskar Schindler, who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust (Keneally, 1982), and Paul Rusesabagina, who sheltered Tutsi refugees during the Rwandan Genocide (Dallaire, 2005). These individuals, like Agha Slevani, demonstrated the extraordinary impact that one person's compassion and altruism can have during times of crisis.

Moreover, the story of Anne Frank, as detailed in her diary (Frank, 1947), serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Agha Slevani's role in protecting vulnerable communities, as highlighted in the research paper, aligns with Anne Frank's enduring legacy of hope and courage. Both narratives underscore the importance of individuals willing to defy overwhelming odds to safeguard lives and preserve the dignity of those in dire circumstances.

In a similar vein, the documentary "The White Helmets" portrays the heroic efforts of volunteers in Syria who risk their lives to save others in war-torn areas (von Einsiedel, 2016). Agha Slevani's actions in providing refuge and sustenance to Armenians and safeguarding the Jewish as well during the genocide campaign resonate with the selflessness exhibited by these modern-day heroes. His commitment to humanity, acknowledged through the title "knight with the degree of Pius" conferred by Pope Pius XI (Zaken, 2015), echoes the recognition of those who dedicate themselves to humanitarian causes around the world.

Furthermore, literature such as "The Good Samaritan Parable" from the Bible (Luke 10:25-37) offer timeless examples of compassion and altruism during challenging times. Agha Slevani's deeds align with the essence of this parable, where an individual transcends cultural and religious differences to help a stranger in need. His role as a protector of vulnerable communities, regardless of their background, epitomizes the ideals of the Good Samaritan.

Moreover, the experiences and stories of individuals like Oskar Schindler, Paul Rusesabagina, Anne Frank, and the White Helmets, and the lessons from biblical parables collectively emphasize the enduring impact of humanistic figures during difficult times. Mohammed Shammadin Agha Slevani's extraordinary humanitarian contributions, as outlined in the research paper, stand as a testament to the power of one person's compassion and dedication in fostering coexistence and humanitarianism in Iraqi Kurdistan. Like the individuals and stories mentioned, Agha Slevani's legacy inspires us to recognize the profound influence that individuals can wield in promoting peace, preserving cultural heritage, and building lasting legacies of compassion and altruism in times of crisis.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

To comprehensively fathom the depths of Agha Slevani's profound altruism and remarkable leadership, this research embarks on an exhilarating journey through a treasure trove of primary and secondary sources. These sources, akin to vibrant brushstrokes on the canvas of history, include letters, archival gems, and stirring historical accounts that breathe life into the past (Bell, 1896; Bell, 1927; Howell, 2015; Bar-Asher, 1997; Zaken, 2007; Sadeeq, 2022; Shekho, 2020; Hussain, 2023; Mango, 1989; Goldenberg & Zaken, 1990; Mizrahi & Ben-David, 2001; Mustafa, 2023). Within the Kurdish region, Mohammed Agha, affectionately known as Haji Agha, occupied a prominent position, celebrated for his progressive vision that transcended boundaries. His cosmopolitan perspective, fueled by a profound commitment to the betterment of his community, solidified his reputation as an influential statesman.

However, it was during the tempestuous era of World War I that Mohammed Agha's brilliance truly shone. In a narrative reminiscent of an epic saga, he emerged as a guardian angel, shielding the Christian community in Zakho from the relentless storms of adversity. His unwavering commitment to humanity, akin to a beacon in the darkest of nights, did not go unnoticed. In a momentous gesture, Pope Pius XI bestowed upon him the rare title of "knight with the degree of Pius" (Zaken, 2015), a distinction that elevated him to a position of unparalleled honor and symbolized his steadfast dedication to the betterment of mankind. The regalia and insignia of the knights that graced his person served as a tangible testament to his extraordinary valor and commitment to the cause of humanity.

Dr. Adnan Sami Al-Zurri's 2020 work titled "The Book of the Iraqi Parliament during the Royal Era 1925-1958: The Experience of Mosul Representatives" discusses the political dynamics of the period. The book highlights that the opposition was so weak that it garnered a minimal number of votes against the treaty. Specifically, it is mentioned that among the representatives from Mosul, a

significant majority backed the treaty. Notably, Mohammed Shammdin Agha was among those who voiced their support for it.

As this research navigates the annals of history, it unveils a compelling narrative of selflessness, leadership, and unwavering dedication. Mohammed Agha's legacy, rooted in compassion and altruism, continues to inspire generations and serves as a testament to the enduring impact of individuals who, like Agha Slevani, illuminate the path to a more harmonious and compassionate world.

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In Saeed, Agha, and Jiziri's song, a poignant tribute is paid to the departed leader of Mohammad Agha, reflecting upon his unwavering dedication and invaluable contributions to his community.

Furthermore, in Alsaid Abdulrazaq AlHasani's scholarly work titled "History of the Iraqi Ministries 1988," a comprehensive account is presented, offering intricate insights into the workings, cultivation, and characterization of the Iraqi ministry members.

In yet another remarkable opus penned by Herish, one that artfully weaves the intricate tapestry of Badinan's history from the tumultuous years spanning 1514 to 1919, we encounter a treasure of scholarship. This insightful work, published in 2017 under the auspices of the esteemed Bishikchi Center at the University of Duhok, serves as a beacon illuminating a pivotal epoch in the region's history.

Amidst the carefully crafted narratives within its pages, the spotlight falls undeniably upon the enigmatic figure of Mohammed Agha, who bears the distinguished mantle of leadership within the Slevani tribe. However, this book transcends the mere acknowledgment of his role; it meticulously unveils the multifaceted persona that was Mohammed Agha. His remarkable linguistic dexterity shines through as he effortlessly traversed the linguistic landscapes of Arabic, Turkish, and English, in addition to his mother tongue, Kurdish. This linguistic versatility is a testament to his indispensable role in safeguarding the lives of Christians, most notably the vulnerable Armenian population, from the harrowing specter of anticipated atrocities orchestrated by the Ottoman Empire during the turbulent era of the First World War.

Yet, the legacy of Mohammed Agha extends far beyond language alone. It is etched into the annals of history as a testament to unwavering humanity in the face of adversity. His benevolent and compassionate treatment of these communities, especially within the confines of Zakho town, serves as a timeless reminder of his indomitable spirit during an era fraught with challenges. In celebrating his life and contributions, this book casts a luminous light upon a chapter of Badinan's history that resonates with courage, compassion, and resilience.

"The volume titled 'Insights into the Modern History of the Central Kurdistan Region: A Report Compiled by the British Ministry of Transport for the Year 1924,' authored by Muayyad Al-Hindawi and published by Ishtar Publishing House in 2021, provides a comprehensive examination of

historical events in the Central Kurdistan Region during the early 20th century.

In addition to documenting the British Ministry of Transport's report from 1924, the book delves into the intricate dynamics of tribal cohesion within the region. It sheds light on the socio-political landscape and highlights the challenges faced by tribal communities during this period, offering valuable insights into the region's history.

Furthermore, the narrative within the book introduces readers to the prominent figure of Mohammed Agha, the former president of the municipality of Zakho. Mohammed Agha enjoyed widespread esteem and recognition among the local population. However, his life took a dramatic turn when he became embroiled in a plane crash in the fateful year of 1924. This incident is explored in-depth within the book, providing a compelling account of the impact it had on both Mohammed Agha and the broader historical context of the Central Kurdistan Region during that era. The author's meticulous research and analysis contribute to a nuanced understanding of this critical period in the region's history."

Turning to a historical context, despite a robust opposition campaign against the treaty, the British administration successfully persuaded both the King and hesitant politicians and deputies to endorse the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. This pivotal moment, which occurred on June 10, 1924, witnessed 69 deputies convening to cast their votes, resulting in the assembly's approval of the treaty by a margin of 37-24. (Bar-Asher, 1997) and (Bell, 1927).

It is noteworthy to mention that Mohammed Agha played a significant role in the context of this treaty (Bar-Asher, 1997).

Mohammed Shammdin Agha Slevani: A Comprehensive Analysis Humanistic individuals

such as Mohammed Shammdin Agha Slevani, play a pivotal role in shaping societies and leaving a lasting legacy of compassion and altruism. This analysis explores the significance of humanistic figures like Agha Slevani, highlighting their manifold benefits to communities and drawing parallels to the research paper on his humanitarian contributions during World War I.

1. Promoting Peace and Coexistence: Humanistic figures serve as ambassadors of peace and coexistence. Agha Slevani's efforts in protecting Armenian Christians and Jewish refugees (Zaken, 2007) exemplify how individuals can bridge cultural and religious divides during times of conflict. This promotes harmony and tolerance within society, as showcased in the paper's focus on Agha Slevani's role in fostering coexistence.
2. Inspiring Acts of Compassion: Humanistic figures inspire others to emulate their acts of compassion. Mohammed Agha's recognition by Pope Pius XI (Zaken, 2015) serves as a testament to the impact of his actions. When people witness such recognition, it motivates them to engage in humanitarian work, as discussed in the research paper's recommendations for establishing humanitarian centers (Recommendation 1).
3. Preserving Cultural Heritage: Humanistic individuals often contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage. Agha Slevani's protection of vulnerable communities contributes to the preservation of diverse cultures and traditions (Zaken, 2007). This preservation enhances the richness of a society's cultural mosaic, as advocated in Recommendation 4, promoting cultural engagement.
4. Strengthening Communities: Humanistic figures strengthen the fabric of their communities. Agha Slevani's role in protecting the Christian community in Zakho (Hussain, 2023) illustrates how individuals can provide a sense of security and belonging. Such acts of support lead to stronger, more cohesive communities, aligning with Recommendation 2 regarding community engagement.
5. Fostering Humanitarian Values: Humanistic figures embody and propagate humanitarian values. Agha Slevani's elevation to "knight with the degree of Pius" (Zaken, 2015) symbolizes his unwavering commitment to humanity. This sets an example for others to uphold similar values, as underscored in Recommendation 5, which advocates collaboration with international humanitarian organizations.
6. Building a Legacy of Altruism: Humanistic individuals leave behind a legacy of altruism that continues to impact future generations. The research paper itself is an effort to immortalize

Agha Slevani's legacy and inspire others to follow in his footsteps. This aligns with the overall theme of the paper, which aims to honor individuals like Agha Slevani.

### METHODOLOGY

This comprehensive research embraces a multi-faceted and interdisciplinary approach, weaving together both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to cast a wider net and gain deeper insights into the life and humanitarian contributions of Mohammed Shammdin Agha Slevani. Our data collection methods encompass an array of comprehensive techniques, with a particular focus on interviews, meticulous archival material analysis, and extensive examination of primary sources. These primary sources include an extensive array of documents, letters, and testimonies from a diverse spectrum of witnesses and influential figures from the era under investigation.

We also rely on a robust framework of secondary sources, which have provided invaluable context and historical depth to our exploration of Agha Slevani's life and times. These sources encompass a range of scholarly works, including but not limited to the writings of Gertrude Bell (1896; 1927), Florence Bell's edited compilation of "The Letters of Gertrude Bell," and Georgina Howell's anthology of "A Woman in Arabia: The Writings of the Queen of the Desert" (2015). Additionally, we have consulted works such as "Inventors' Fate," a Neo-Aramaic folk tale from Zakho, as well as scholarly publications like "Jewish Subjects and their Tribal Chieftains in Kurdistan: A Study in Survival" (Bar-Asher, 1997), and "Jews of Kurdistan & Their Tribal Chieftains: A Study in Survival" (Zaken, 2015). This wide-ranging utilization of sources forms a comprehensive tapestry of knowledge, allowing us to draw connections and parallels between Agha Slevani's humanitarianism and similar efforts throughout history.

### RESULTS

The culmination of our research endeavors promises to unearth the profound impact of Agha Slevani's altruistic endeavors during the tumultuous period of World War I. Through our exhaustive investigation, we aim to illuminate the courageous acts of Agha Slevani in providing sanctuary and sustenance not only to Armenian Christians but also to Jewish refugees who endured the harrowing genocide campaign orchestrated by the Ottoman Empire. These findings, drawn from a rich repository of primary and secondary sources, will bring to light the extent of his humanitarian work, firmly establishing his place as a paragon of compassion and altruism in the annals of history. Furthermore, our study extends beyond mere historical documentation. It endeavors to underscore Agha Slevani's catalytic role in nurturing coexistence and propagating humanitarian values within the intricate tapestry of Kurdish society. This emphasis on his influence and leadership in shaping a more harmonious and compassionate community aligns with the broader objectives of our research. The results of this comprehensive research endeavor shed light on the extraordinary humanitarian contributions of Mohammed Shammdin Agha Slevani during the tumultuous era of World War I. Through a meticulous analysis of primary and secondary sources, a multifaceted understanding of Agha Slevani's impact on society emerges.

The life and endeavors of Mohammed Shammdin Agha Slevani serve as a shining beacon in a time darkened by war and conflict. Amidst the storm of World War I, Agha Slevani stood as a steadfast protector of the vulnerable, weaving together the diverse threads of culture, religion, and ethnicity into a tapestry of unity and solidarity. His unparalleled humanitarian efforts resonated far beyond the borders of Iraqi Kurdistan, garnering recognition from global figures such as Pope Pius XI. This acknowledgment not only attests to the magnitude of his contributions but also highlights the universal appeal of his message of compassion and coexistence.

Through this research, we have unearthed the multifaceted dimensions of Agha Slevani's impact, drawing from a vast repository of primary and secondary sources. His commitment to cultural heritage preservation, promotion of coexistence, and unwavering spirit of humanitarianism have cemented his legacy as one of the paramount figures in Kurdish history.

However, the resonance of Agha Slevani's life extends far beyond historical documentation. His legacy serves as a clarion call to all, urging us to transcend our differences and come together in



the spirit of mutual understanding and respect. By championing the principles of tolerance, empathy, and unity, we can ensure that the indomitable spirit of Mohammed Shammdin Agha Slevani continues to shine brightly, guiding future generations towards a world enriched by cultural exchange, compassion, and harmonious coexistence.

#### **1. Humanitarian Hero of Kurdistan:**

- Agha Slevani's role as a humanitarian hero of Kurdistan becomes evident through historical accounts and archival materials. His actions in providing refuge and sustenance to Armenian Christians and Jewish refugees fleeing the Ottoman Empire's genocidal campaign are documented in primary sources (Bar-Asher, 1997; Zaken, 2007).

#### **2. Promotion of Coexistence:**

- Agha Slevani's efforts to bridge cultural and religious divides during a time of conflict are highlighted. He played a pivotal role in promoting coexistence and tolerance, as demonstrated in letters and testimonies from witnesses (Saddeeq, 2022; Shekho, 2020).

#### **3. Recognition by Pope Pius XI:**

- A significant result of Agha Slevani's humanitarian work was his recognition by Pope Pius XI, who bestowed upon him the rare title of "knight with the degree of Pius" (Zaken, 2015). This acknowledgment underscores the profound impact of his actions and serves as a testament to his commitment to humanity.

#### **4. Cultural Heritage Preservation:**

- Agha Slevani's protection of vulnerable communities, including the Christian community in Zakho, contributed to the preservation of diverse cultures and traditions (Mango, 1989). His actions enhanced the richness of the cultural mosaic of the region.

#### **5. Strengthening Communities:**

- Through interviews and historical accounts, it is evident that Agha Slevani's actions provided a sense of security and belonging to the communities he protected (Hussain, 2023). His support led to stronger and more cohesive communities.

#### **6. Fostering Humanitarian Values:**

- Agha Slevani's elevation to "knight with the degree of Pius" symbolizes his unwavering commitment to humanitarian values (Zaken, 2015). This recognition sets an example for others to uphold similar values.

#### **7. Building a Lasting Legacy:**

- The research paper itself serves as an effort to immortalize Agha Slevani's legacy and inspire others to follow in his footsteps. His story inspires us to recognize the profound influence that individuals can wield in fostering peace and preserving cultural heritage during challenging times.

In summary, the results of this research illuminate the life and impact of Mohammed Shammdin Agha Slevani as a humanitarian hero of Kurdistan. His contributions to promoting coexistence, his recognition by Pope Pius XI, and his role in preserving cultural heritage stand as enduring testaments to the power of compassion and altruism during times of adversity. Agha Slevani's legacy continues to inspire future generations to engage in acts of kindness and humanitarian work.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, humanistic figures like Mohammed Shammdin Agha Slevani wield a profound and far-reaching influence on societies. Agha Slevani's role in providing refuge to Armenian Christians and Jewish people fleeing the horrors of World War I showcased the transformative power of compassion during times of adversity. His actions not only preserved lives but also promoted peace and coexistence in the region.

Moreover, Agha Slevani's commitment to humanitarian values and cultural preservation serves as a timeless reminder of the importance of embracing diversity and safeguarding cultural heritage. His legacy of protecting vulnerable communities in Iraqi Kurdistan contributes to the tapestry of a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Agha Slevani's recognition as a "knight with the degree of Pius" by Pope Pius XI underscores the profound impact that individuals can have in inspiring compassion and altruism in others. This acknowledgment serves as a testament to the enduring influence of humanistic figures like Agha Slevani and motivates future generations to engage in acts of kindness and humanitarian work.

Furthermore, the recommendations outlined in this research paper, inspired by Agha Slevani's principles, provide a blueprint for promoting peace and coexistence in Iraq. By establishing Talion and Humanistic Centers, engaging community leaders and government officials, setting timelines for activities, promoting cultural engagement, and collaborating with international humanitarian organizations, Iraq can continue to build a strong, peaceful, and inclusive community that celebrates its diverse cultural and ethnic mosaic.

In essence, Mohammed Shammadin Agha Slevani's remarkable humanitarian contributions and his enduring legacy echo the sentiments of humanistic figures throughout history who have striven to make the world a better place, even in the face of adversity. His story inspires us to recognize the profound influence that individuals can wield in fostering peace, preserving cultural heritage, and building lasting legacies of compassion and altruism during challenging times.

### **Recommendations for Expanding Humanitarian Initiatives**

1. **Launch Talion and Humanistic Centers:** Drawing inspiration from Agha Slevani's humanitarian ethos, there is a dire need to inaugurate Talion and Humanistic centers within educational institutions. Envision these centers as vibrant hubs within universities where students immerse themselves in workshops, seminars, and projects all centered around coexistence, tolerance, and peace. For instance, at the heart of such a center, a yearly event could celebrate the diverse tapestry of Iraqi culture, with students narrating tales of unity from different ethnic backgrounds.
2. **Empower Community Stakeholders:** Amplify the reach of Agha Slevani's principles of unity by forging robust collaborations with community leaders, government bodies, and grassroots organizations. Envision initiatives where local artists collaborate to craft murals symbolizing unity, or where interfaith dialogues become regular community events, bridging cultural and religious divides.
3. **Adopt a Structured Activity Timeline:** To perpetuate the essence of Agha Slevani's humanitarian pursuits, there's a need for a well-defined roadmap. This timeline, apart from detailing activities, should pinpoint measurable outcomes—like hosting a biannual peace symposium or initiating inter-school cultural programs—that ensure the pervasive ambiance of peace in Iraq.
4. **Elevate Cultural Engagement:** Champion cultural dialogues and exchanges as mainstay activities. Picture community theaters where stories of unity are showcased or monthly cultural fairs where diverse Iraqi communities exhibit their traditions, arts, and crafts. This not only fosters an appreciation of varied cultural nuances but also seeds the spirit of togetherness.
5. **Forge Global Alliances:** Broaden the humanitarian horizon by partnering with globally acclaimed humanitarian bodies. Such alliances can amplify the efforts on the ground. Imagine collaborating with organizations like UNICEF to curate peace-oriented curricula for schools or partnering with UNESCO to organize global peace conferences in Iraq, spotlighting Iraq's rich history and commitment to peace. Opening some channels with related countries such as the UK, Italy, and the Vatican for reinforcement for the humanities activities and build historical and up-to-date ideas for a better life and a peaceful and prosperous Iraq with its different mixture of the community.

Embracing these recommendations can transform Agha Slevani's legacy from historical reverence into a tangible, actionable framework for sustained harmony and unity.

By implementing these recommendations and drawing inspiration from the legacy of Mohammed Shammadin Agha Slevani, Iraq can continue to build a strong, peaceful, and inclusive community that embraces its diverse cultural and ethnic mosaic.



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