



Kurdistan
Chronicle

Photo ▶ Mem Artemêt

Publishers' Preface

Kurdistan Chronicle is a newly launched endeavor that strives to reflect the spirit of Kurds and Kurdistan. The first issue of this monthly magazine chronicles stories that reveal the will of the Kurdistan Region to grow into a bastion of stability and progress in the region.

At crucial moments in recent decades, the Kurdistan Region has revealed itself to be a true partner for allies and international organizations tackling a variety of challenges. When ISIS emerged in Iraq in 2014, the *peshmerga* forces bravely fought on the front lines to protect Kurdistan and the world. During those difficult days, nearly two million Syrian refugees and Iraqi displaced citizens were welcomed and sheltered in Kurdistan. This exemplified how the autonomous region lives up to its principles of coexistence, human dignity, and freedom, and how a non-state entity can help build positive outcomes for the world.

This first issue of *Kurdistan Chronicle* conveys several remarkable stories that highlight the beauty of Kurdistan and its people. This land is the birthplace of humankind's progress and is often referred to as the cradle of civilization. We want to showcase the history, culture, and natural beauty of Kurdistan and Kurdistan people to the outside world while reporting on its social, economic, and political affairs.

This inaugural issue reflects the colorful nature of Kurdistan's rich history and culture and features several articles dedicated to the mountains of Kurdistan, including its burgeoning hiking culture. The story of Gazi Zebari demonstrates the sojourn of a Kurdish refugee from studying in classrooms in mountain caves to becoming one of the most prominent physicians in the United States. Similarly, the story of *Sidik and the Panther* captures the Kurds' timeless respect for nature through this world-class, award-winning documentary.

Finally, readers can find a detailed report about the Kurdistan Region's agricultural exports, most notably its pomegranates, the very fruit that symbolizes bliss and prosperity.

Contents

February 2023 Volume 1 | Issue 1

58

Gazi Zibari
Escaping from Tyranny to Saving Lives

70

When Churchill Talked
About Malaya Jaziri

92

The Switzerland of the
Middle East for Hiking

106

The Harmony Between
Modernity and Kurdish Traditions

- 24** Kurdistan's Digital Future
- 28** Anglo-Kurdistani Relations
- 32** Safeguarding Water for the Future
- 50** Kurdish Culture and Conflict in the Middle East
- 54** Aramaic Christians in the Kurdistan Region
- 72** Sharizor in the History of Kurdistan
- 80** Sidik and the Panther In the Middle of Time
- 88** Secrets of the Zagros Mountains in Kurdistan
- 96** A Homage to Kurdish Tea
- 112** The Kurdish Princess Who Captivated Western Theater

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The Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The Power of Unity

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) was severely tested this past decade with the greatest challenges any nation could face, yet it overcame these challenges with unwavering determination and resilience. After an immensely difficult period of combating ISIS, tackling economic upheaval, mitigating the covid pandemic, and managing one of Iraq's largest humanitarian crises to date, the KRI is back on track to meet the internal demands of its people and engage with the global market.

The KRI is in the best position it has been in its three-decade history in terms of resources. Our potential is rooted not only in considerable oil and gas reserves, but also in substantial renewable energy sources, a promising agricultural sector, favorable geographical position on trade routes between East and West, and a thriving young labor force with impressive entrepreneurial drive.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is building on these advantages by reforming various sectors of the government and modernizing its services to meet the demands of the 21st century. These include cutting red tape to reduce bureaucracy and support business owners, digitalizing government services to facilitate smoother license approvals and increase transparency, and international investment in large scale infrastructure projects. The KRI is not only open for business but once again ripe for investment.

When we look back on the KRI's development over the past three decades, we can see remarkable and rapid progress, as well as significant challenges that have been overcome.

Today, our oil and gas sector is not only meeting local demand but is also contributing to the international market at a time when the world is in the middle of a global energy crisis of unprecedented depth and complexity, according to the International Energy Agency. In addition to meeting local demands, our gas has the potential to contribute to the international demands within a few years.

Of critical importance to this process is our relationship with the Federal Government of Iraq. While we have had difficulties in the past, we are optimistic that we will be able to resolve the outstanding issues that remain between Baghdad and Erbil with Iraq's new Prime Minister, Mohammad Shia al-Sudani, and the new government. It is quite simple: a strong KRI means a secure and stable Iraq. The KRI's success is the success of Iraq. We are determined, together with the Federal Government of Iraq, to build a sustainable and equitable environment for all Iraqis.

Of paramount importance to the economic prosperity of any territory is regional security. The KRI has faced many security challenges, but it has always stood firm, thanks to the bravery of our Peshmerga, the determination of our people and the support of the Iraqi government and our coalition partners.

Our success also depends on our relations with our allies. As the Presidency of the KRI, we have worked diligently to nurture cooperation and collaboration with our international partners, to strengthen relations with our neighbors, and to actively welcome new alliances with burgeoning economies around the world.

In engaging the global community, the KRI endeavors to strengthen its capacities to contribute to global security, political stability, and economic prosperity while addressing environmental and social concerns. We seek that all progress be well rooted in our culture and communities. We look forward to building on this progress and applying our substantial potential to engage the global community.

We look toward active collaboration with the international community on the biggest challenges that we all face, which include climate change, unequal economic development, gender disparity and attacks on religious freedom. Together, we can progress towards a more just economic environment for all communities.

Nechirvan Barzani
President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq



The Pomegranate: Kurdistan's First Major Non-Oil Export

As part of its dedication to economic reform and diversification, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq has begun to widely export hanar, Kurdish for pomegranate, to regional and overseas markets,

making it the largest non-oil export in recent history.

Hanar, a prominent agricultural product produced across the region, continues to be

“My cabinet has been taking constructive steps to diversify our economy, in a way that gives us a buffer against the uncertainty of global energy prices. This diversification - focused principally on agriculture, manufacturing and services sectors will be in addition to our energy sector -- not an alternative,”

PM Masrour Barzani at the Global Energy Forum – Atlantic Council 28th March 2022



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Photo ▶ Sabr Dri



"The Prime Minister has listed agriculture as a strategic priority in this cabinet. The message is clear: we're determined to deliver domestic needs and transform Kurdistan into a regional food basket that meets the region's food security needs and helps stabilise global supplies." Aziz Ahmad, Deputy Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Masrour Barzani



Kurdistan Chronicle

among the most delectable fruits that garners increased demand.

In December, the first batch of Kurdish pomegranates was shipped to the GCC countries, including the UAE.

Following Prime Minister Masrour Barzani's visit to the UAE in early 2022, the Kurdistan Agriculture Export Initiative (KAEI) was launched in March to market domestically grown pomegranates.

The initiative was the first step of the KRG's progressive reform agenda, and centers on diversifying the economy and boosting the agriculture sector.

Pomegranate exports began after two firms were selected from Kurdistan's Zakho and Halabja areas and entrusted with procuring 2,000 tons from almost 100 farms scattered across the region.

To ensure that all exports met GCC and global standards, a quality-control provider was established, which also manages the logistics of door-to-door shipment from Kurdistan to the UAE and other GCC ports.

"The Prime Minister has listed agriculture a strategic priority in this cabinet. The message is clear: we're determined to deliver domestic needs and transform Kurdistan into a regional food basket that meets the region's food security needs and helps stabilise global supplies." Aziz Ahmad, Deputy Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Masrour Barzani.

Now that export markets are available to our farmers, and a food corridor to the Gulf has been established, focus will turn to investment in the value chain.

Given their proximity, market need, and purchasing power for Kurdistan's local agriculture products, the



Packaging pomegranates for export

Kurdistan Chronicle





Photo ▶ Nasih Ali Xayat

◀ Couple de-seeding and boiling pomegranates to make syrup

*Amad Abdulhamid Muhammad,
Consul-General of Iraq in Dubai
and the Northern Emirates*



"Iraq and the Kurdistan Region can play a vital role in safeguarding regional food security in close collaboration with regional partners."

"The pomegranate is being showcased in international exhibitions in Dubai, which are scheduled to continue for the upcoming months."

"The first batch of Kurdistan pomegranate is being sold in UAE market at an estimated price of USD 10-11 per kilogram."

six GCC countries were deemed the most viable export destinations.

Amad Abdulhamid Muhammad, Consul-General of Iraq in Dubai and the Northern Emirates, commended the initiative and expressed delight at the news after hearing about the KRG's efforts to promote domestically produced Kurdistan products to the UAE.

"There is strong cooperation between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the UAE in all fields and there is a great desire to expand bilateral exports,"

Muhammad stressed.

He noted that Iraq and the Kurdistan Region can play a vital role in safeguarding regional food security in close collaboration with regional partners.

The exports are also another positive sign of the nation's economic growth and a positive start for all of Iraq to thrive.

The consul-general also mentioned that the pomegranates are being showcased in international exhibitions in Dubai, which are scheduled to

continue for the upcoming months.

According to Muhammad, the first batch of Kurdistan pomegranate is being sold in UAE market at an estimated price of USD 10-11 per kilogram.

"We look forward to greater collaboration and coordination between Iraq, the Kurdistan Region, and the UAE," he continued. "Pomegranate exports are just the beginning of the export of other fruits, such as grapes and apples, as well as other products like honey."

The KRG has established the Export Promotion Bureau with the mission of promoting and eventually exporting the Kurdistan Region's diverse array of products, which serves as the backbone of the agriculture sector.

The region's geographic location is known for its strength in farming and agriculture. Despite its mountainous terrain, it has considerably more arable land - around 28% of its total surface area - than most Middle Eastern countries.



The Will to Fight

Ernie Audino

The Western world's most influential thinker on war, Carl von Clausewitz, observed that the value of the objective determines the magnitude and the duration of any war any nation will wage in its pursuit. Kurds know this especially well, as successive surrounding regimes, seeking to eliminate Kurdish power from the Middle East, have left them with few options and no objective more valuable than survival.

The more that enemies attempt to tighten the noose, the greater the Kurds will value their survival and freedom.



General Ernie Audino and Kurdish peshmerga veteran Mam Ezzat Dargalay

This well-explains the generational, bone-deep, Kurdish unwillingness to submit that the world has come to critically rely upon in the modern wars against Saddam Hussein, Ansar al Islam, al Qaeda, ISIS and other enemies of humanity. Victory against these evils was not possible without the peshmerga.

American soldiers saw this in early 2003 when politicians refused to allow the U.S. Army's 4th Infantry Division overland access into Iraq from the north. This presented a serious, operational problem for the Coalition, as without an avenue of approach threatening Baghdad from the north, the Iraqi Army would not be forced to fight in two directions simultaneously and instead could commit its combat power south to confront Coalition troops entering from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

The Kurds offered a solution. Peshmerga and other Kurdish elements covertly readied airstrips in and around Hawler to receive American special forces and task-organized mechanized units. Once on the ground, both were important, of course, but the presence of mechanized units appeared to Saddam as an immediate threat of

a combined Kurdish and American advance on Baghdad from the north, something even Saddam's most incompetent generals could not ignore.

Consequently, the Iraqi Army was forced to keep a significant portion of its combat power oriented north and unavailable to oppose Coalition troops in the south. The result - after barely three weeks of combat, the Iraqi Army was destroyed, and Baghdad was in Coalition hands.

American soldiers also saw this in March of the

In less than a week, Ansar al Islam and its nascent chemical weapons capability were destroyed, and the group's plans to inspire a jihadi insurgency across portions of Kurdistan were immediately ended.

The world saw this, too, starting in the summer of 2014 when ISIS erupted across Sunni Arab portions of Iraq, and the Iraqi Army ran away en masse. ISIS then raced to within 100 km of the Iranian border, nearly splitting the country in two, but they were stopped cold by the stubborn resistance of



Photo ▶ Farhad Ahmad

same year during Operation Viking Hammer, when a handful of U.S. Army special forces and CIA agents linked up with a brigade's worth of peshmerga and supported their offensive against al-Qaeda allies based in Beyara, Gulp, Sargat and Khormal.

peshmerga near Jawlawla.

Although the Iraqi Army chose to flee, the peshmerga chose to fight. They stepped forward to quickly establish a front of 1,000 kilometers and

then fought against ISIS, month after month, as the world's main effort in the War to Defend Humanity. Consequently, the black flag of ISIS never fluttered over even a centimeter of Kurdish-controlled soil, and ISIS is now destroyed in Iraq and beyond.

These are modern examples of the Kurds' tenacity in the face of grave threats to their survival and freedom, but they are nothing new.

On 16 May 1982 in the tiny village of Hemek, eleven men from the 4th Jebari kert of the 57th Segermar unit were surrounded by an entire Iraqi Army brigade reinforced with helicopters, artillery, a special forces battalion, and a *jaash* unit. The Kurds refused to surrender.

When the smoke cleared a day later, the Iraqis withdrew, and eight fearless peshmerga emerged from the rubble. Around their fighting positions they found the bodies of more than two hundred Iraqi soldiers left behind by their fleeing

Xenophon chronicled the Greek expedition into Persia in 401 BC and wrote that the Greeks lost more men in seven days fighting through the Kurds in the Zagros Mountains than they lost in two months fighting the Persians.

comrades.

In early May of 1966 at the foot of Handrin Mountain, Mam Izzet and a few hundred peshmerga stood against an entire Iraqi Army brigade reinforced with artillery and close air support. At 3pm that day, he thought he would never see his family again. A few hours later the Iraqi brigade was destroyed, Baghdad humiliated, and Mam Izzet honored forever after as the Lion of Handrin.

But this history goes much deeper. Xenophon chronicled the Greek expedition into Persia in 401 BC and wrote that the Greeks lost more men in seven days fighting against the Kurds in the Zagros Mountains than they lost in two months fighting the

Persians.

Nearly two thousand years before this, Sargon, King of Akkad, conquered the plains of Mesopotamia and ruled from the shores of the Persian Gulf and across the basins of modern Iraq, but he failed to establish enduring control over the highland tribes of the



Photo ▶ Safin Hamid

Peshmerga training



Photo ▶ Safin Hamid

President Barzani visiting peshmerga frontlines

Zagros Mountains. When Akkad fell two hundred years later, the King of Uruk, Utu-Hegal, struggled continuously against these same tribes, referring to them as "the stinging serpent of the mountains."

These historic events and countless more shaped the foundation for the very capable peshmerga of today. That's a very good thing, because the very capable peshmerga of today, who stand tall in the face of their age-old dilemma: enemies who surround them like wolves.

The Kurds' modern enemies, of course, augment

their military levers with economic and diplomatic levers in their effort to undermine Kurdish power, but one thing remains certain - the more those enemies attempt to tighten the noose, the greater the Kurds value their survival and freedom. Ask Clausewitz what that might mean.

Ernie Audino, Brigadier General, US Army (Retired), is a Senior Fellow at the Gold Institute of International Strategy. He is the only US general to have previously served a full year in Iraq as chief combat advisor embedded in a peshmerga brigade.



Pursuing Peace and Development

Prime Minister Barzani in Davos

Nahro Zagros



During four days at Davos from January 16-20, Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Masrour Barzani met with several world leaders and delegations, stressing the need for developing bilateral relations, especially in the fields of economy, agriculture and investment, between the Kurdistan Region and other partners in the Middle East, Europe and beyond.

Such relations dovetail with the agenda of the KRG's ninth cabinet, which is centered around diversifying the Kurdistan Region's revenue sources, digitalizing government functions and agricultural policies and assisting domestic and foreign investors in the region across all sectors.

Importance of Davos

Since 1988, the annual gathering of world leaders at the Swiss ski resort of Davos has served as an international platform to discuss significant issues that affect the global economy, politics, education, and social and environmental concerns.

For many years, the Kurdistan Region has leveraged Davos to articulate its growing contribution towards creating a more secure world through providing humanitarian aid and promoting peacebuilding in conflict-ridden areas.

Its presence at Davos was especially noteworthy given its turbulent recent history. Nevertheless,

the region continues to grow as a key player in international politics through diplomatic engagement and its robust regional ties.

In addition to the KRG's diplomatic outreach, which seeks to build new allies for Kurdistan abroad, several domestic reforms are being implemented that aim to improve healthcare services and increase access to education from primary school to university and vocational students.

Global challenges

The 2023 World Economic Forum (WEF) was therefore an opportunity for global leaders to convene to discuss how to tackle the world's many

pressing issues, including a prolonged Russia-Ukraine war that is causing food and energy insecurity around the globe. It also provided a platform for non-state actors such as the Kurdistan Region, who are often overlooked in international initiatives, to make their voices heard.

The WEF proposed several ways of increasing international cooperation, including creating more efficient trading systems that would reduce tariffs on cross border goods, which would give countries access to resources that were previously unavailable or too expensive due to high taxes imposed by governments. Furthermore, world leaders advocated for increased investment in renewable energy sources, such as solar power,

PM Masrour Barzani's meetings at the World Economic Forum 2023

Business leaders and private sector representatives



Hani Weiss, CEO, Retail,
Majid Al-Futtaim



David Livingstone,
Managing Director &
CEO, Citi



Yusuf Ali, Chairman &
managing director of LuLu
International



Khadim Al Darei, Managing
Director & Cofounder of Al
Dahra Holding



Mohamed H. Alsuwaidi,
Managing Director and CEO,
ADQ



Hussain Sajwani, Chairman
of DAMAC International
Limited



Tony Blair, UK's Former
Prime Minister and Chairman
of Tony Blair Institute for
Global Challenge



Mazen S. Darawezh,
Executive Vice-Chairman,
President MENA, Hikma
Pharmaceuticals

Government officials



Abdulatif Rashid,
President of Iraq



Darrell Issa, Congressman
from California, 48th District,
U.S. House Foreign Affairs
Committee



Mark Rutte,
Prime Minister of the
Netherlands



Mohammed Gwagwi,
Minister of Cabinet Affairs,
UAE



Alexander De Croo,
Prime Minister of Belgium



Khalid A. Al-Falih,
Minister of Investment of
Saudi Arabia



Kyriakos Mitsotakis,
Prime Minister of Greece



Abdulla Adel Fakhro,
Minister of Industry and
Commerce, Bahrain



**Bisher Hani
Al-Khasawaneh**,
Prime Minister of Jordan



**Said Mohammed Ahmed
Al-Saqri**, Minister of
National Economy, Oman



Mateusz Morawiecki,
Prime minister of Poland



Sebastian Kurz,
former Austrian Chancellor



Photo ▶ Fashrad Ahmad

PM Masrour Barzani taking part at a special session titled “Rmepowering Europe’s Industry” organized by Belgian PM Alexander De Croo at the World Economic Forum, 2023.

which could provide sustainable electricity without relying heavily on fossil fuels or nuclear power plants – both of which have caused significant environmental damage over recent years.

Ultimately it is clear that although there are still major challenges facing our planet, with organizations like WEF providing an inclusive platform where all stakeholders can be represented, real progress can be made in tackling these issues head-on – something the Kurdistan Region is keenly aware of given its own experiences dealing with conflict and economic hardship.

Kurdistan’s contribution

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq, known as one of the safest and most democratic places in the tough neighborhood of the Middle East, has played a remarkable role in addressing global concerns over the past two decades. One example was their spearheading the effort to defeat ISIS from 2014-2017. The Kurds displayed great resilience and courage during this period and eventually defeated ISIS.

The Kurdistan Region also stands out for its commitment to democracy despite facing

numerous challenges since 2003, when it gained autonomy within Iraq’s federal framework following Saddam Hussein’s downfall. Since then, the region has been a source of stability and economic prosperity in Iraq and across the Middle East.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 688 adopted on April 5, 1991 to establish an Iraqi no-fly zone to protect humanitarian operations in Kurdistan, laid the basis for Kurdish autonomy. The region has since held several successful democratic elections with high voter turnout that saw different political parties peacefully taking part in government – something rarely seen in other parts of the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the KRG has taken positive steps towards economic development by investing heavily in infrastructure projects including airports and roads, reforming the peshmerga, establishing world-class universities, and strengthening public institutions, all to improve living standards while attracting foreign investment.

Addressing food security

According to official press releases, the Kurdistan Region’s growing capacity in the agriculture



Photo ▶ Fashrad Ahmad

Kurdistan Region Prime Minister greeting UK’s former Prime Minister Tony Blair at the World Economic Forum, 2023.

sector topped Prime Minister Barzani’s agenda in every meeting. Since taking office in mid-2019, the premier has been working hard to develop agriculture at home and find markets abroad.

Following meetings with business leaders on the sidelines of the WEF, Barzani wrote: “In less than nine months, we helped put fresh Kurdistan produce into supermarkets across four Gulf states. I’m determined to consolidate our new trade routes ... We’ve forged strong ties with the Gulf. We’re addressing their food-security needs, creating opportunities in fintech and exploring synergies in banking.”

Another agenda in Barzani’s meetings was attracting foreign investments and inviting international agri-tech companies to join the flourishing market in Kurdistan. His goal is to expand the region’s export routes and transform Kurdistan into a secure food basket for Iraq, the Gulf countries, Europe, and beyond.

Prime Minister Barzani’s presence at Davos shows how far Kurdish international representation has evolved in recent years. Barzani’s ambitious plans combined with his bold actions make him an inspiring figure in Kurdistan, Iraq and the Middle

East, not least because his goal is to improve lives back home and make sure their voices are heard by global powers.

Bolstering regional and international diplomacy

In freezing temperatures and snow-covered grounds of Davos, warm receptions were organized for the Kurdish representatives. Prime Minister Barzani took part in several discussions with international interests and held dozens of meetings with political and business leaders from around the world during his four-day stay, provided an opportunity to build bilateral relations between Kurdistan Region officials, international politicians, entrepreneurs and investors alike.

His meetings centered on how to further develop economic ties between the Kurdistan Region with other countries across the Middle East, Europe and the world. Discussions also focused on how these countries could collaborate to promote stability within Iraq while supporting each other’s development goals through investments in infrastructure projects and joint ventures that would benefit all parties.



Photo ▶ Fashhad Ahmad

PM Masrour Barzani meeting with his Dutch counterpart PM Mark Rutte on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum, 2023.



Photo ▶ Fashhad Ahmad

PM Masrour Barzani meeting with Belgian counterpart PM Alexander De Croo on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum, 2023.



Photo ▶ Fashhad Ahmad

PM Masrour Barzani meeting with US congressman Darrell Issa. World Economic Forum, 2023.

In an interview with Reuters, Barzani revealed that arrangements between Erbil and Baghdad are underway to reach a concrete agreement on their remaining unsolved issues. Meanwhile, according to the prime minister, Baghdad has agreed to freeze Iraqi Supreme Federal Court's previous rulings that had deemed the legal foundations of the Kurdistan region's oil and gas sector unconstitutional.

"What we have agreed is that all those pressures on the KRG will be halted and stopped for the moment, and we will wait until we have the hydrocarbon law," Barzani was quoted, noting that until the agreement is reached, Erbil and Baghdad would cooperate in oilfield management, oil sales, and revenue-sharing.

Altogether, the WEF demonstrated Erbil's determination to secure a firm foothold in regional and international diplomacy.

Barzani left Davos feeling optimistic about the future after having established strong connections with many influential global figures, who expressed their willingness to invest in Kurdistan and nurture



a more prosperous region in the Middle East. Upon his departure, he tweeted: "Thank you for another productive forum #wef23. We'll report our progress next year."

Dr. Nahro Zagros is the Editor-in-Chief of Kurdistan Chronicle and a senior fellow at Gold Institute for International Strategy in Washington D.C.



Kurdistan's Digital Future

Hiwa Afandi

The digital revolution is perhaps the most important event of the 21st century, disrupting the status quo of every aspect of our lives as we know it.

Digital technologies can transform how governments interact with their citizens, the private sector, and their international partners.

In the modern world, citizens expect a seamless end-to-end experience and readily accessible services. To achieve these aims, core government digital systems, data-exchange layers, and a nationwide digital identity-management system are essential.

According to well-respected studies, the most important factor empowering such cross-governmental undertaking is the solid commitment of the political leadership to spearhead the necessary whole-of-government approach to public sector modernization.

Therefore, the most significant indicator of the KRG's seriousness regarding the government's digital transformation is the leadership demonstrated by Prime Minister Masrour Barzani. The announcement of the government's digital transformation strategy in October 2022 is clear evidence of leadership's support and commitment.

Strategy

Governments need to deliver hundreds of services to citizens. For modern service delivery, data from multiple entities needs to be aggregated and exchanged, which requires extremely well-coordinated government backend operations and business-processing optimization. Such undertakings are time- and resource-consuming. The modernization of all government services, in any country, requires multiple government cabinets moving according to a cohesive digital transformation strategy, which is why



Central Database

the strategy and prioritization of the digital systems to be implemented are of great importance for governments to establish its core systems.

2. Building digital architecture
3. Building human capital
4. Building capacity for user-centered design
5. Building security and data privacy
6. Strengthening procurement

KRG's digital transformation strategy focuses on improvements in three broad areas:

- **Citizens:** improvements in services to citizens
- **Government:** improvements in KRG capacity
- **Technology:** improvements in digital infrastructure

The KRG has prioritized the system's key criteria for implementation as follows: to be a strategic fit, to have socioeconomic impact, to be likely to succeed, and to enable the multiplier effect.

Systems Implemented by KRG

The Data Center

To host and serve core government services, the government has built a state-of-the-art data center where the latest T3 standards and technologies power its core systems, databases and networks. PM Masrour Barzani officially inaugurated the facility in September 2022.

The latest hardware and software virtualization technologies allow this T3-compliant data center to achieve high rack density and is thus capable of hosting hundreds of government services securely and efficiently.

In order to deliver and measure these improvements, six core strategic activities have been identified as areas for capability and capacity improvements:

1. Strengthening digital governance



Financial Information Management System (KFMS)

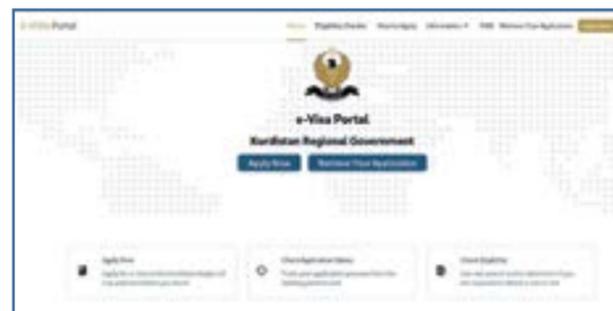
KFMS provides visibility and transparency about public expenditures and automates financial operations between the accounting units and line ministries. The Prime Minister's Office requested the development of the system in 2020, and the first version of the system went live in the same year.

KFMS has fully digitalized the operational expenditure of all government accounting units and purchase requisition operations and serves as a central repository for public contracts, enabling access to unprecedented levels of data and saving the public money. Thousands of trained and equipped officials use KFMS to request money for public goods and services. It is paperless and features traceability functions down to the employee.

Population Information System (PIS)

Requested directly by PM Masrour Barzani, PIS was developed to address the fundamental difficulties related to the lack of the population census data that is so critical in guiding decision making.

Powered by enterprise-grade database management and biometric identification systems,



this digital population registry is the only source of true identity for the new digital systems that the KRG deploys and it sits at the core of the data exchange layer of all other services consuming and updating data related to the residing population of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Digital Driver's License and Vehicle Registration System

In partnership with the Germany-based Mühlbauer Group, Kurdistan's new digital driver's license and vehicle registration was officially launched in August 2022. To accommodate citizens, this digital service will gradually be made available from 11 locations in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, offering driver's licenses and vehicle-registration documents according to international standards and quality.

The new system relies on PIS for identification purposes, and the new driver's license card is also the first official document to assign a digital identity number (UPN) to citizens.

Human Resources Management (HRMS) and Payroll System (PIMS)

HRMS is the centralized information system that manages the payroll information of the KRG's payees, including but not limited to governmental employees. The system manages a complex payroll management process that breaks down final pay slips for each beneficiary into base salary, allowances, deductions, and many other accounting criteria. HRMS maintains a profile for each beneficiary based on the person's digital identity number (UPN) retrieved from PIS-Identity. The profile also tracks down the number of benefits and payments a person receives from the KRG, which increases transparency and the identification of ghost employees.

PIMS has already been constructed but its launch is pending the training of thousands of government officials before it officially replaces the old paper-based procedures.

Entry Control System (ECS)

ECS is an umbrella project composed of several subsystems that provides for the KRG's sophisticated systems and tools to control the entry and exit of people to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. ECS includes the following four subsystems that continuously exchange data between each other: E-Visa System, Entrance/Exit Management System (EEMS), National Stop List (NSL), Guarantor Information Management System (GIMS), Visa

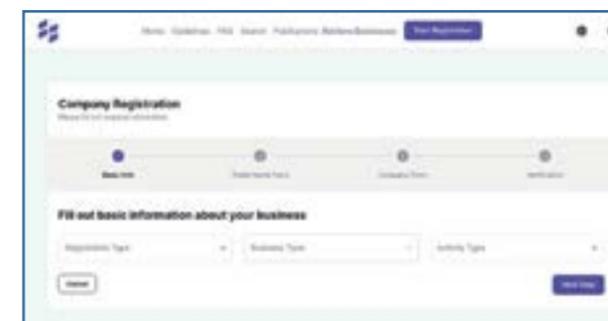
Information Management System (VIMS).

Citizen Complaint System (CCS)

CCS is a citizen-facing application that allows the people of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to submit their legal complaints to the government and quickly receive digital feedback. All ministries of the government are being onboarded to CCS to receive complaints digitally. It is an important system,



PM Masrour Barzani launching a new e-gov initiative



as it is listed as a key indicator in World Bank's Citizen Engagement Index (CEI) that helps the governments achieve vertical accountability and promote democracy.

Business Entities Administration System (BEAS)

BEAS is a central, online digital portal that enables entrepreneurs and businesspeople to seamlessly register their businesses with the government. It is a central registry for all businesses in Kurdistan, ranging from companies to small shops and startups.

The system generates a Unique Entity Number (UEN) at the end of the registration process that is the single unique identifier of the business across all systems of KRG.

This system sits at the heart of the digitalization of Kurdistan's economic sector as

it provides the foundation for interconnecting business data across multiple sectors and organizations.

It also highly increases efficiency in other related processes such as taxes, since a business' information can be retrieved from other systems with the UEN acting as a tax identification number (TIN), which saves a considerable amount of time and provides visibility and transparency for those processes.



Anglo-Kurdistani Relations Much Done, More to Do

Gary Kent

The modern Kurdistan Region has a large and growing place in the UK's affections and priorities.

This is thanks to, former UK Prime Minister John Major's brave and pioneering decision in 1991 to establish the no-fly zone and safe haven in the Kurdistan Region.

It is also driven by the vital role of the region in resisting extremism in its pivotal position at the heart of the Middle East and as one of the most dynamic parts of a key country, Iraq.

Saved from further genocide in 1991, the Kurdistan Region began to build its society in difficult conditions, including UN- and Baghdad-imposed sanctions as well as a bloody civil war. Despite these, various metrics of social development rose, some more than the rest of Iraq.

Somewhat ironically, Kurdistan found itself in a good position after the liberation of Iraq in 2003 to help stabilize the whole country. Its seasoned leadership was better equipped to navigate chaotic post-invasion Iraq, fill the Iraqi Presidency, and secure a federal constitution in the popular vote of 2005. Federalism rather than a more typically centralized Arab Republic was the condition of their cooperation with other components of the Iraq state from the start of the pre-invasion negotiations conducted through the Iraqi National Congress.

Sadly, a golden era of cooperation between

Erbil and Baghdad was ruined by Shia overreach in the wake of the premature withdrawal of most American forces. This cooperation was eventually rebuilt during the common struggle against ISIS, but then tainted again by opportunist, Iranian-influenced actions by Baghdad in the wake of the peaceful referendum of 2017.

Kurdistan's popular decision - 93% Yes - to seek independence in principle remains but is not imminent. Relations between Erbil and Baghdad are being rebuilt but have a long way to go. The

federal constitution should be the basis of that.

Meanwhile, the neighbors are squeezing Kurdistan as the war between the PKK and Turkey often visits its lands while Iran, keen to chase the United States out of the Middle East and divert attention from a home-grown revolution, throws its missiles around in the Kurdistan Region.

As Kurdistani leaders so often say, they cannot choose their neighbors and live in a tough neighborhood. But as they also say, they can



April 19, 2022, London
PM Boris Johnson receiving PM Masrour Barzani at 10 Downing Street

choose their friends. The UK is one of them.

The British Consulate-General in Erbil has become an increasingly important diplomatic post staffed by more and increasingly senior officials. It is more senior than the British embassies in some sovereign states and reflects the importance to our foreign policy of a strong Kurdistan within Iraq.



KRG Representatives in All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), Kurdistan, House of Commons

Likewise, KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani met a wider range of ministers than is usual for other leaders during his two recent official visits to the UK. This included Cabinet Minister Nadhim Zahawi, a champion of Anglo-Kurdistani relations par excellence.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the Kurdistan Region, which was once co-chaired by Nadhim Zahawi, is also one of the most active and oldest of such friendship groups, which covers many countries and regions around the world.

It has been too long since we sent a delegation to Erbil, which was due to the difficulty of traveling with the Covid-19 pandemic and political disruption

in Britain. The last visit took us unusually to Baghdad, where a Foreign Minister was keen to stress that relations with Erbil should be repaired. We are planning a fresh visit next year and to underline the need to settle the many disputes between Baghdad and Erbil.

The egregious decisions of the so-called Iraqi Federal Supreme Court – it has not been

constitutionally formed – on the Kurdistan energy sector and, more recently, on bigamy, are particularly shocking and clearly politically motivated. We have also engaged with the Sheik Mahmoud Foundation to drill into the history of the first and last King of Kurdistan as well as the ebbs and flows of Anglo-Kurdish relations a century ago when war and peace also rose and fell. We are hosting a reception with them in the Commons in the new year.

In the 15 delegations we have sent to Kurdistan since 2007, many Kurds have kindly thanked us for our work. In the beginning, the common mantra was that we owed Kurdistan a break given that we had helped forcibly incorporate Kurds into Iraq. A senior Iman recently told me that we were to blame and should sort it out as a superpower. Sadly, perhaps, we are not a superpower, and we cannot

sort it out.

However, most Kurdistan leaders have dumped that approach and now frame the case for supporting nation-building in Kurdistan through the lens of mutual interest.

I have been captivated by the magnetism of Kurdistan for nearly a quarter of my life. I don't feel I am doing favors to the Kurds. For me it is also about British interests. We are safer and the world is better off with a decent and reforming Kurdistan.

Successive APPG reports have analyzed the dysfunctional nature of the Kurdistan economy and commended further and faster reform.

We have helped advance small and major wins for Kurdistan. These include securing the first official

Thanks to UK Prime Minister John Major's brave and pioneering decision in 1991 to establish the no-fly zone and safe haven over the Kurdistan Region.

trade mission to Kurdistan, persuading the House of Commons to formally recognize the *Anfal* (Genocide), asking the popular Top Gear program to make a film in Kurdistan that was viewed by millions globally, and advocating firm practical support for Kurdistan in its fight against ISIS.

There is a strong case for British companies and bodies helping to build a film industry, using the

I have been captivated by the magnetism of Kurdistan for nearly a quarter of my life

landscape for films, and allowing Kurds to tell their stories to the world. Exporting pomegranates to western supermarkets and elsewhere could



A main street in Erbil named after former British PM Sir John Major

symbolize the renaissance of agriculture, a money-spinner to add to energy and other sectors.

External assistance to advance quality training and higher education to international standards is vital.

I have taught many KRG civil servants and leaders the art of devising and conveying political messages in the context of the rule of law. I have become fairly immersed in Kurdistan culture, which is often hospitable and outward facing, and was until last year a university director in Kurdistan. I know that reform is vital to releasing the energies of dynamic workers in the public and private sectors and that of young people too. I have seen at first hand some of this enthusiasm and have also seen how damaging selfish defense of vested interests by some can be. These things can happen anywhere, but bad practice needs to be tackled.

We want long-term relationships between our peoples and with the Kurdistan Regional ministers and leaders, without taking sides in its domestic politics. We can learn from Kurdistan and hope that our ideas and experience can help Iraqi Kurds to survive and thrive in complex and difficult conditions. Much done, more to do.

Gary Kent has worked in the UK Parliament since 1987 and the Secretary of the All-Party Parliamentary group since 2006 during which he has visited the KRI and Iraq nearly forty times. He is also a Director of the European Technology and Training Centre in Erbil and an honorary professor of international relations at Soran University. He participated in a State Department International Visitor Leadership Programme on the making of US Foreign Policy in 2002. He has written for many publications. He writes in a personal capacity.



Safeguarding Water for the Future

Sardar Sattar



Duhok Dam, Kurdistan Region

The world is facing serious environmental concerns as climate change accelerates, temperatures rise, and instances of drought caused by extreme-weather events multiple, all while international cooperation to address these challenges appears to wane. Facing these concerns, the Kurdistan Region steps up to build strategic dams and enhance water-management plans.

This harsh reality suggests that water might become more valuable than oil in the future. As a result, many countries around the globe are rolling up their sleeves to secure water for their people's

future.

In Iraq, drought has worsened in recent years due to record low levels of rainfall and rising temperatures. These conditions are compounded by the reduced flow of water from rivers originating in Iraq's neighbors, as well as the lack of a comprehensive water management plan.

In the Kurdistan Region, however, policymakers have acknowledged the pressing need for action. The regional government is now planning and building several strategic dams of different scales to secure water resources for its 6 million people, 1.7 million hectares of arable land, and 1 million hectares of forest.

Speaking to Kurdistan Chronicle, Dr. Bewar Khinisi, a geology expert and advisor to Prime Minister Masrour Barzani on energy, explained that there are 17 dams across the three provinces of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Duhok, with 15 more under construction. Moreover, the KRG's current cabinet approved nine strategic dams in 2020 whose reservoir capacity varies between 50 million to 1 billion cubic meters.

"Once they are completed, their maximum storage capacity can reach 3.5 billion cubic meters, and they can generate 950 MW of electricity," Dr. Khinisi said.

For the Kurdistan Region, a bold water-management roadmap can address both water scarcity and national security because of the political and economic implications of water.

Meanwhile, the cabinet led by Prime Minister Masrour Barzani is working hard to diversify the region's economy to gradually reduce its reliance on oil revenues. To that end, agriculture and tourism are targeted as viable alternatives.

These dam projects, together with the region's 97 existing reservoirs and 25 under construction, are hoped to help promote the agriculture sector. In fact, critical steps in this sector have already been taken. The KRG exported 400 tons of its famous pomegranates to several Gulf and European countries in late 2022, marking the region's largest non-oil export by volume in recent years. More shipments of agricultural products are in the works.

Every dam, moreover, has the potential to become a touristic attraction, especially now that the region is a primary destination for Iraqi tourists and seen

as a safest and attractive one for many others from around the region and beyond. In 2022 alone, over 6 million tourists visited Kurdistan, according to official statistics.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi Federal Government plans to construct 49 dams across the country, as its farms in central and southern provinces shrink with every passing year. Out of these 49 dams, 20 will be in the Kurdistan Region, according to Khinisi.

The senior Kurdish official insists that closer cooperation between Erbil and Baghdad is essential to address the water concerns, noting that the regional and federal governments are constitutionally required to jointly manage the water resources, including those originating from inside the country or from outside its borders.

Five major rivers pass through Kurdistan, whose total length is measured at 1,695 kilometers. Nearly 60% of these are within the borders of the Kurdistan Region, and they remain a vital source of water for not only agriculture but also for potable water for major cities like Erbil.

However, water security is not simply bound to strategic plans in Erbil and Baghdad or the cooperation between the two governments; it also has a foreign relations dimension. Neighboring Turkey and Iran have the upper hand because two major rivers - the Tigris and Euphrates - and several minor ones flow from them into Iraq.

Both Turkey and Iran have also launched massive dam-building projects that will affect the water flow in Iraq.

When asked about Baghdad's options to pressure Ankara and Tehran to consider Iraq's share from those rivers, Khinisi said that using a diplomatic approach and finding common ground is the only option. "It's true that Iran and Turkey are working to secure water resources for themselves, but it cannot justify limiting the flow of water downstream to their neighbors... This issue has been referred to the Iraqi Council of Ministers to be included in the agenda of diplomatic dialogues," Khinisi added.

Sardar Sattar is a translator and journalist based in the Kurdistan Region. He has an MA in English Studies from the University of Lodz, Poland. He has translated several books and political literature into Kurdish and English. He writes regularly for local and international newspapers and journals.

“The KRG’s current cabinet approved nine strategic dams in 2020 whose reservoir capacity varies between 50 million to 1 billion cubic meters.”

“Once the dam projects are completed, their maximum storage capacity can reach 3.5 billion cubic meters, and they can generate 950 MW of electricity.”

Bewar Khinisi



Dam Construction
Kurdistan Region

- 17** Constructed Dams
- 15** Dams Under Construction
- 9** Approved Strategic Dams

Individual Dam Capacity **50m → 1b** Cubic Meters

Total Storage Capacity **3.5b** Cubic Meters

Overflow in bell-mouth spillway of Dukan Dam in spring

Connecting Kurdistan

120-meter Ring Road

- The 120-meter ring road, which encircles Erbil, is one of the Kurdistan Regional Government's key strategic projects.
- The 37-kilometer-long ring road project cost USD 440 million.
- The project was built in phases, with the last part completed in December 2019.
- With no traffic lights and a speed restriction of 110 kilometres per hour, cars can complete a loop of the 37-kilometre ring road in about 20 minutes.

150-meter Ring Road

- The 150-meter ring road project is a 70-kilometre-long highway that encircles Erbil.
- The project seeks to assist commuters from Erbil's suburbs and surrounding towns to avoid traffic congestion in the city center.
- Erbil is already circled by five ring roads -the 30-meter, 40-meter, 60-meter, 100-meter, and 120-meter ring roads - with this project being the last.
- The 150-meter ring road is being built by Hemn Group, a major local construction company, with about 2,000 employees.
- The total cost is USD 700 million, and construction will take place in stages.
- The project includes eight overpasses, seven underpasses, and five car lanes on either side, which will be connected to a service road.
- With its addition to Erbil's concentric circle road network, the city would continue to live up to its spider city nickname, as seen from above.

A bird-eye view of the 150-Meter Ring Road in Erbil



In the Throes of New Federalism Kurdistan’s and Puerto Rico’s Constitutional Designs

Sebastián J. Delgado

James Madison, the American statesman known as the “Father of the Constitution,” wrote that “the first and most natural attachment of the people will be to the government of their respective states.”

Madison’s maxim resonates deeply with the experience of Kurdistan and Puerto Rico, two polities separated by thousands of miles but joined by their relationships with their federal governments.

They are not states as we tend to think of them: they do not have the powerful sovereignty wielded by a state like California, nor are they severed from their central governments.

Yet they enjoy – at least in theory – a degree of sovereignty unlike anything in history. For example, they both have their regional governments, composed of legislatures, chief executives, and judiciaries. Likewise, they both have undertaken constitution-making processes that have allowed them – again, at least in theory – to stake their claim to sovereignty and to define what their relationship with their central governments will look like.

They have been able to turn themselves into “laboratories of democracy,” an experience traditionally reserved for states within the archetypal federal systems, such as the United States and its fifty sovereign states.

To understand and empower these new relationships in democratic theory, we must look both east and west and determine the advantages and disadvantages of the current arrangements.

The Kurds have long sought to define their

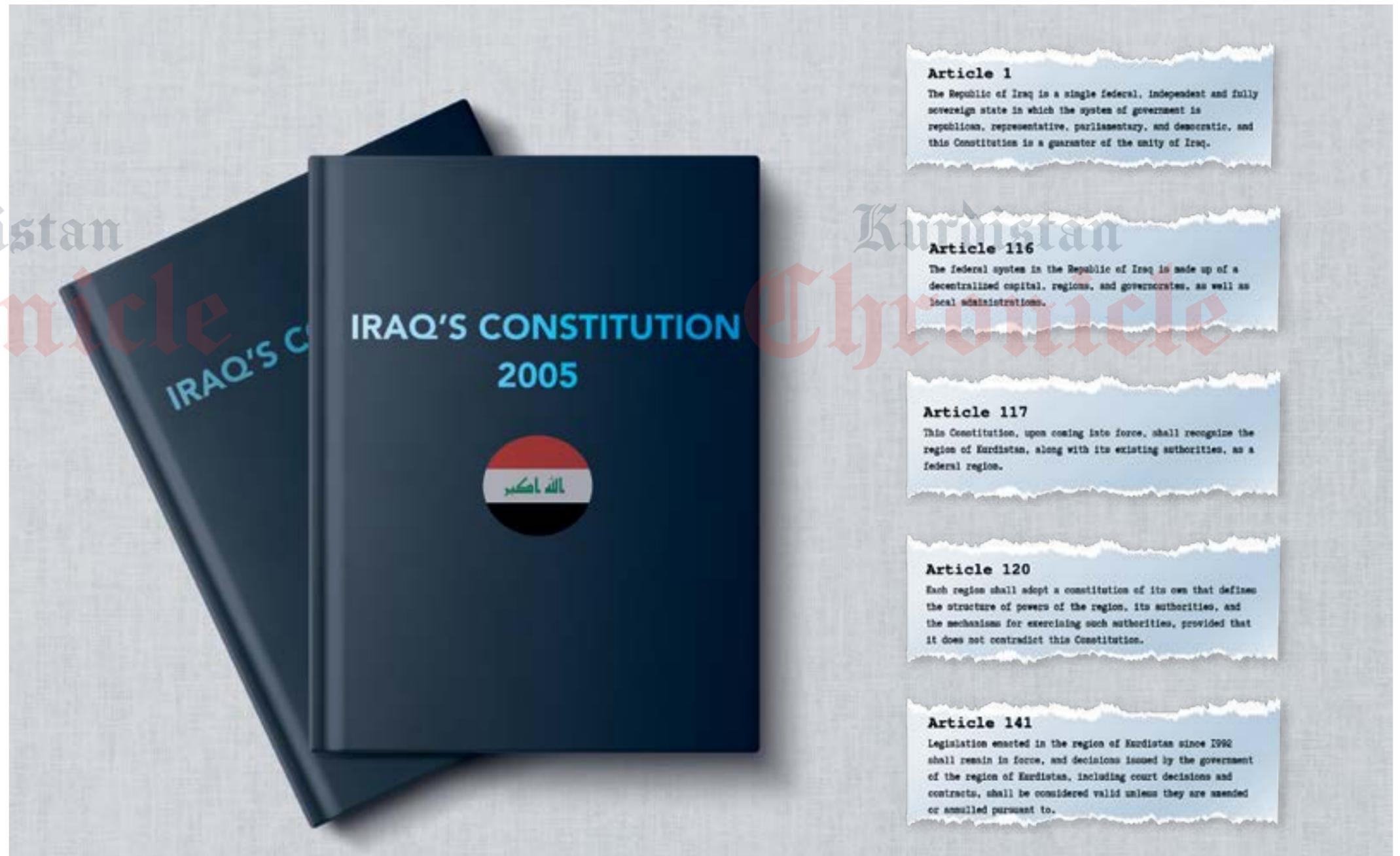
relationship with Iraq, a task that became more urgent upon the official recognition of the Kurdistan Regional Government as the Iraq War wound down.

Both Kurdistan and Iraq, with US support, undertook a constitution-making process that allowed each not only to leave behind the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein, but also let both embark on a federalist system based loosely on that of the United States.

The federalism between Kurdistan and Iraq, however, is ostensibly more robust than that

present in the United States. Consider Article 13 of the Iraq Constitution. The first section holds that the constitution serves as “the preeminent and supreme law in Iraq and shall be binding in all parts of Iraq without exception.”

But the second section centralizes the concept of federalism in robust terms: “no law that contradicts this Constitution shall be enacted. Any text in any regional constitutions or any other legal text that contradicts this Constitution shall be considered void.”





Freedom Monument in Tahrir Square, Baghdad

Here is where regional constitutions like Kurdistan's can achieve greater degrees of sovereignty because "to the extent that the Iraqi constitution is silent on a matter, regional constitutions adopted under it may control a given issue or area of authority," according to professor of law Michael J. Kelly. Powers not reserved to the federal government are left to Kurdistan to exercise. This is something that President Barzani and the new constitution-writing convention should capitalize on as they embark on a renewed constitution-making process.

What is most unique about this arrangement is that decisions made by the federal government in Iraq need not always trump regional laws. In this scheme, priority is assigned to regional laws.

Compare this arrangement with that between the US federal government and the states. Because of the US Constitution's Supremacy Clause, when state

out in the Kurdish courts. When Iraqi and Kurdish laws clash, Kurdish courts must follow the latter.

A notable departure from the US model is evinced by the Kurdish government's ability to make treaties with foreign nations. In the United States, no state may enter treaties with foreign nations, a practice put in place after the failure of pre-Constitution times under the Articles of Confederation. (Under this arrangement, states acted as uber-sovereigns; the central government had little power). This does not mean that Kurdistan's design is destined to fail. There, unlike in the United States, regional-government foreign policy is practical, especially in view of Kurdistan's oil resources, and workable.

Yet Baghdad has overridden these expressions of sovereignty, which is why the current system



Photo ▶ Mahmoud Rauf

laws conflict with federal laws, federal laws — except in certain areas — come out on top.

In the current arrangement between the Kurdistan Region and the Iraqi federal government, however, there is a new phenomenon in legal theory: a "reverse supremacy clause" that is meant to play

reflects a "coming-together" rather than a "holding-together" model of federalism. The former more reflects something like what the United States has; the latter involves individualizing levels of self-government, with a polity like Kurdistan receiving heightened self-rule.

Contrary to what some have asserted, that the Kurdish Constitution was from the outset a "coming-together" arrangement, it reflects the "holding-together" model. Recall the above examples, which show a regional constitution that goes far beyond what any state — or any territory — of the United States could ever implement.

And though the Kurdish and Iraqi Constitutions at first came together under the "holding-together" model (say, through Article 13 and the reverse Supremacy Clause), granting Kurdistan great latitude in governing its affairs, Baghdad reneged on those promises by failing to put them into practice. Thus, the current arrangement slants sharply toward the "coming-together" model.

At this point, we need to look at the dynamic arrangement between Puerto Rico (a territory) and the US central government. From 1898, the US Congress governed Puerto Rico unilaterally, though the US President could make certain appointments.

Beginning in 1950, however, that all changed when Congress gave Puerto Rico's political leaders the ability to define their relationship with the central government. For two years, island politicians engaged in a constitution-making process which resulted in a "compact" with the United States.

This constitution was a novelty in governance because its compromises balanced the urge for full independence with the circumstances of a dependent partnership. In this way, it resembles the Kurdistan Region's.

Unlike the Kurdish Constitution, however, Puerto Rico's fits more with the United States' fifty-states model ("coming-together"). Puerto Rico may not, for instance, conduct its own foreign policy, nor can its laws supersede US federal laws.

Based on this arrangement, someone unfamiliar with the matter may glean from it that Kurdistan's

current constitutional design outpaces Puerto Rico's in sovereignty. On paper, they would be right: Congress holds plenary powers over Puerto Rico, meaning it can decide or undecide what it does with the territory.

But on-the-ground conditions, notwithstanding the fiscal control board overseeing the island's finances, alter the dynamics. Recently, for example, Puerto Rico triumphed at the Supreme Court when seeking to enforce licensing requirements for gun ownership (Puerto Rico v. Rodriguez López).

This decision came after the US Supreme Court's decision in *New York State Rifle & Pistol Assn., Inc. v. Bruen* this past term, where a majority found that New York's similar regulations violated the Second Amendment to the US Constitution. Illustrative of the territories' dependent status, the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico's decision is subject to the US Supreme Court's review. On top of that, in 2016, the US Supreme Court held that Puerto Rico's prosecutorial powers derive not from its people but from the federal government (Puerto Rico v. Sanchez Valle).

As Kurdistan undertakes a new constitution-making process, it can look to other stateless constitutions for viable recipes for federalism. Puerto Rico struck a compromise: it created a "partnership" between the island and the United States.

As Kurdistan and Puerto Rico seek to articulate greater degrees of sovereignty, Kurdistan can look to Puerto Rico as a model to follow for asserting legislative sovereignty and budgetary self-rule. Puerto Rico, on the other hand, can look to Kurdistan to assert greater jurisprudential sovereignty and an elevated level of federalism.

Sebastián J. Delgado works with litigation regarding the United States Territories, including litigation currently being considered by the United States Supreme Court.



Kurdistan Innovation Institute (KII) Investing in Ideas

Sarbaz N. Othman

At certain points throughout the history, stories from Kurdistan have made global headlines, but these have mostly been about tragedies the Kurds faced or braveries they demonstrated. This nation, however, has other stories to tell now – stories of brilliant, innovative minds coming together to make our world a better place.

Having regularly met with young women and men from around Kurdistan and learning about their ideas, passions, and dreams, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani wanted to unlock the remarkable potential of his people and initiated the establishment of Kurdistan's first innovation institute in 2021. A year later, the Kurdistan Innovation Institute (KII) is a center where, as the prime minister once said, creativity is enhanced, knowledge is distilled, and innovation is rewarded.

During the institute's official launch ceremony in November 2022, PM Barzani, who is also the Chairman of the Board of Directors of KII, underscored that the institute will be tailored specifically to the youth of Kurdistan, providing them with the tools and environment to help them pursue their ideas.

At the same event, examples of several past Kurdish innovators were introduced – a man who developed his German-made Opel sedan into an electric car in his own yard only a few years after Tesla introduced its first product, a young developer who introduced the first Kurdish keyboard for IOS operating systems years before Apple Company added the keyboard to its system, and a group of students who built the first face-recognition system compatible with the facial features of the Kurdish people.

"Anyone who dares to innovate, who wants to devote their time to research and entrepreneurship and the development of technology, will be welcome here," PM Barzani said during his speech. "Our people have earned the right to think big. I say to you here today that we will support ideas that introduce new technologies to make sure that we - in the KRG - can respond to the needs of the public quickly."

KII's primary goal is to support people who have innovative ideas, helping them connect and create together, and ultimately contribute to a more developed society and more sustainable economy. At KII, experienced business developers, internationally recognized inventors, prominent investors, and skillful engineers work hand in hand to accomplish this mission.

While the idea of the institute originates from PM Barzani's aspirations for developing Kurdistan, several tough challenges also contributed to pressing for the creation of such a facility. First, the region enjoys a large young population with 62.9% under the age of 30. It has remarkable natural resources, fertile arable lands, a well-educated young generation, and an open attitude towards the outside world.

Yet some key developmental factors are missing that require an institute like KII to act. For instance, locally manufactured goods are very limited both in volume and variety, which has left the region

heavily dependent on imported materials to supply local markets. For example, according to a recent study, nearly 80% of the materials in the region's construction market alone are imported from neighboring countries and beyond. The remaining 20% of local products, however, struggle to compete with imported materials.

This issue is not unique to Kurdistan, as Iraq struggles with the same challenge. According to the Iraqi Federation of Industries, outdated methods

We at KII work not only to develop innovative ideas into business models but to foster the culture of innovation. We encourage our educational system to dream beyond theoretical methods and adopt a rather practical approach in order to contribute to a more sustainable development of Kurdistan.

and old technologies, a lack of innovation, and a lack of expertise are the key factors contributing to the limited capacity of the manufacturing sector. However, infrastructural challenges were not the sole reason for KII's establishment. Many innovators have long struggled to actualize their ideas due to the lack of an organizational support that could connect them with key players, an essential aspect of innovation. KII is now filling this gap with an innovation model that connects innovators



with these players and ultimately helps the Kurdistan Region realize a more forward-looking and sustainable economy that embraces new technologies and harnesses contemporary business trends.

KII Innovation Model and Its Key Players

KII's organizational structure and mission have been designed to lead, manage, and carefully craft the context for successful innovation. It guides an innovator from the idea to a well-functioning prototype, a business model, investment, and finally mass production. KII's innovation model is backed by a robust network of academics, public officials, bankers, product development experts, engineers, regulatory experts, and more.

There are three integral players in KII's innovation model:

Government: Prime Minister Masrour Barzani seized the initiative to establish KII so that the government will drive the innovation model and determine the development areas that the institute will prioritize. The government will even build production facilities if innovator's idea proves to be a game changer.

Academia: Universities and academic research centers are the second most important player in KII's innovation model as they gather, disseminate, and push the boundaries of knowledge. KII will

actively share knowledge with universities in Kurdistan and connect them with the other key players to create an environment where innovators can develop their ideas scientifically.

Industries: Manufacturing is central to the innovation model. KII has opened its own workshop replete with electrical and mechanical labs in which innovators can build prototypes after their applications are accepted. Additionally, KII cooperates with national and international manufacturing partners for the provision of services unavailable within the capacity of the facility.

Development Areas

At KII, any innovative, future-oriented, and potentially promising idea is welcome. Outfitted with a user-friendly portal in three languages (Kurdish, English, and Arabic), innovators can submit their ideas under a relevant category, such as human welfare, smart cities, housewares, sustainable energy, health, transportation, IT, fashion, automation, and others. Each application will be then reviewed by a specialized evaluation committee to proceed to the next stage, if it is deemed promising.

KII Science Park

The Kurdistan Innovation Institute will also build a state-of-the-art science park to create a purpose-



built cluster of office spaces, labs, workrooms, meeting areas, and sports and accommodation facilities designed to support research and development in science and technology. The park's primary goal, which is also reflected in its modern architectural design, is to create an environment for innovators, researchers, academics, investors, and government institutions to easily interact without bureaucratic procedures.

The facility will be built on a 200,000 square-meter piece of land in one of the most strategic areas of the capital Erbil. Renowned international architects

have introduced the most advanced technologies, so the gigantic project will rely on clean energy to operate and demonstrate the will for the development of the Kurdistan Region. Once the physical facility is ready, Kurdistan will take another step towards becoming one of the most attractive locations for researchers, innovators, and investors not only from the region, but also from around the world.

Dr. Sarbaz N. Othman is the CEO of Kurdistan Innovation Institute.



Kurdistan Holds a Piece of My Heart

Muli Amaye

I was driven from the airport in Erbil to the Pank Resort (Shingelbana) in Soran in the middle of the night. I awoke the next morning to mountains covered in clouds and a thick gray rain that looked just like what I'd left back in Manchester, except that the air smelled so fresh and clean. I was hooked already.

It was winter 2012 when I arrived in the Kurdistan Region. I had been invited to be a lecturer in English at Soran University, a newly established, state-funded university.

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Nothing could have prepared me for living and working in Soran – it was completely different

to anything I had experienced before. Settling down in the city I never got bored of looking at the mountains. Wherever I wandered there was a mountain ahead of me, each one unique in its formation. Walking up Zozk on a Sunday afternoon, taking the cable car up to Korek, wading through the snow, exploring the caves in Bradost, there was wonder in each landscape.

There were also countless precious moments from the classroom. The students were so willing and eager to learn. Even when I introduced new ways of thinking and understanding that gave them tools to think independently and find their creativity, they

rose to the occasion, seizing the opportunity to use critical and analytical thinking.

As I introduced creative writing, poetry, and short stories, the students wrote as though they'd been long waiting for the opportunity to express their lives in color and metaphor. They took the realities of their worlds and turned them into something beautiful on the page. They explored the pain and trauma that had shaped their young lives and made sense of what they had seen and lived through. I was humbled by their honesty and creativity. They taught me as much as I taught them.

Kurdistan is full and overflowing with stories. From the atrocities that have been faced over the generations to the triumphs and resilience of a people who have been let down time and time again.

Taking part in a project where we collected women's stories brought into focus the lives of the women and children and indeed the men in their families. The stories of heartbreak and loss, fleeing and staying, farming and selling, marriage and family stay with me. Even the students who were interviewing women in their families discovered a new way of seeing their mothers and grandmothers,

of understanding more deeply the sacrifices made and the obstacles overcome, rather than glossing over these stories and dismissing because they had become so familiar. They truly listened to the details that they may have previously disregarded, grasping the profound strength of their mothers. (To read more, please visit Many Women, Many Words www.kurdishwomenswords.world).

In 2013, as the world stood by and watched ISIS (Daesh) attempt to take this area, I bought a car in Manchester and decided to drive back to Kurdistan. Nine days through France, Italy, Greece, and Turkey, eight days of stress and anxiety, and then one day of relief, as I reached the Kurdish areas and was greeted with the familiar words: چۆنی؟ باشی؟ (Choni/Bashi?). I had arrived home.

Crossing the border, I drove past Duhok, unfamiliar with the new road system that had yet to put

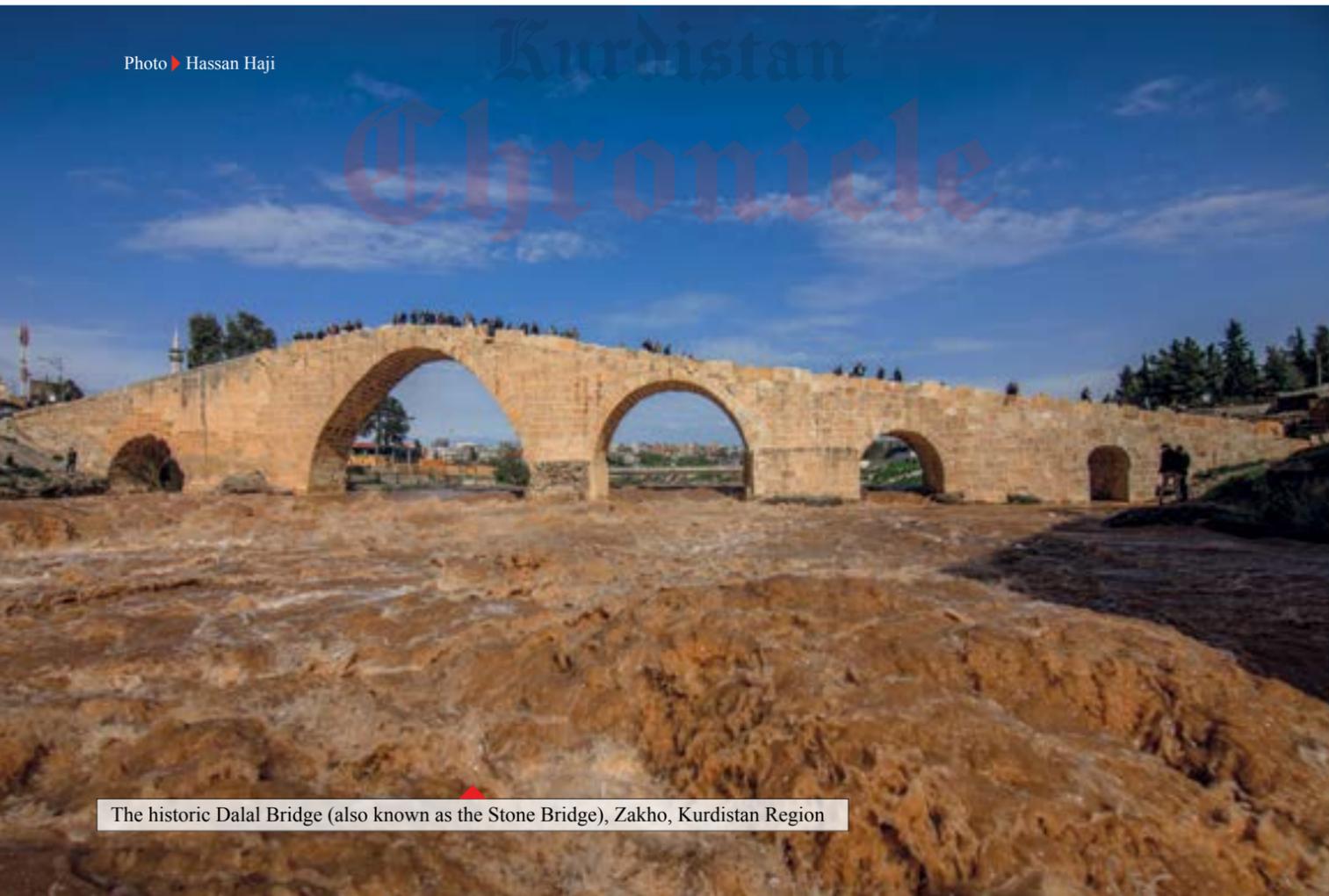
up signs to guide drivers. Still, I made it through and felt lighter as each mile passed. The roads were quiet. The British government had issued warnings not to go near Akre, to avoid the area entirely. I stopped and took pictures of the peaceful surroundings to share with friends back home.

Driving into Soran I couldn't help but smile with relief. I'd made it back to my adopted home. It's hard to explain to anyone outside how protected and safe I felt during the upheaval wrought by ISIS. I was with a people who had withstood far more and worse, who understood what it meant to flee for your life and who fought valiantly for all the ethnic groups within its semi-autonomous borders. Without the Kurds and the Peshmerga, there could have been a very different outcome, and the world needs to acknowledge that.

Recently, a colleague asked me about Kurdistan and

Photo ▶ Hassan Haji

Kurdistan Chronicle



The historic Dalal Bridge (also known as the Stone Bridge), Zakho, Kurdistan Region



Photos ▶ Mohamad Dargalayi



as I answered he said my whole face lit up and he could tell I loved it there. When I think of Kurdistan now, it's the lifelong friends I made; the waterfalls and picnics; the shopping in the bazaar; buying cloth for clothes; the fresh vegetables, juices, and colorful flavors of ice cream. Going to the nut man's stall and coming out with bags of pistachios and walnuts. Women sashaying across roads, holding up traffic without a care in the world as the Kurdish proverb نه بای دئی، نه باران goes. It is vibrant and full of life. It is safety and security.

I also think of the time that we transformed the bazaar into our festival of arts and the students performed poetry in the streets. Music, drama, and

dancing rang out as schools, as the university and local community came together to celebrate life and creativity. These are the memories of Kurdistan that stay with me. And why a piece of my heart will always remain with the Kurds and their beautiful land.

Muli Amaye is a writer who teaches creative writing at The University of the West Indies, Trinidad and is coordinator of the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. She has taught in Kurdistan, Iraq, and Lancaster UK. Her debut novel, A House With No Angels is published by Crocus Press (2019).



Kurdish Culture and Conflict in the Middle East

Paul Davis

The causes of geopolitical conflict have been studied for centuries, but the interconnected world in which we live after the Cold War requires us to revisit our assumptions.

In his famous 1993 article “The Clash of Civilizations” in *Foreign Affairs*, political scientist Samuel P. Huntington put forth what he believed to be the root cause of conflict: culture.

Culture can be defined as the sum of human endeavor as experienced by a group over time. This experience is shaped by the actions and attitudes of its members as well as the impact of other cultures with which it comes into contact

Yet, if we say that culture is the main driver of geopolitics, what does this mean about the conflict in the Middle East?

First, let’s say we divide the region into cultural

entities – Arab, Turkish, Kurdish and Persian – with Islam a common factor among all and Christian and other minorities living among them.

Then, we layer over the cultural impact of European colonialism. The British mandates of Iraq, Jordan and Palestine all became monarchies except for Palestine, which later became Israel, while the French mandates of Syria and Lebanon produced republics.

Turkey has gone through its own cultural and political upheavals since 1920, while the Kurdish people have remained a part of the whole but with a different culture. The outlier is Iran (Persia), which maintained cultural continuity outside of the Ottoman Empire.

While the Kurdish people have always maintained a separate identity and culture, they were not always in conflict. The Ottoman Empire allowed for its non-Muslim and non-Turkish populations to be self-governing as long as taxes

After the overthrow of Saddam and the establishment of a new Iraqi government, the victorious U.S.-led coalition forces attempted to enshrine in Iraq a modern pluralistic democracy.

were paid, and the borders protected. The Sultan accepted the Kurds, at least tacitly, as a separate entity and allowed them to continue to grow within their own culture.

However, this changed in the early 19th century when Sultan-Caliph Mahmud II bowed to Western pressure by initiating democratizing reforms known as the Tanzimat and was less capable of protecting the economic interests of Muslim merchants in the empire.

Similar developments took place elsewhere. Iraq and Syria evolved into Arab nationalist entities after the First World War, while Iran maintained its own Persian and Shia identity, neither of which complemented Kurdish culture.

Iraq is a test of culture. After the overthrow of Saddam and establishment of a new Iraqi government, the victorious US-led coalition forces attempted to enshrine in Iraq a modern pluralistic democracy.



Photos ▶ Roza Gardi

Establishing Kurdistan in Iraq and Syria would prove difficult but is doable with international support and protection.



The "One Iraq" policy would transform Iraq into a model of federalism in the Middle East, and it was, for a short while. Yet as the KRG developed, Erbil and Baghdad drifted apart, which was catastrophic for this policy.

The appearance of ISIS then began to both bring Erbil and Baghdad closer and drive a wedge between them. From the beginning, Kurdish forces backed by US air and Iranian ground support were the only group capable of holding the line. The war spread to Syria causing the Syrian forces to abandon large areas that the Syrian Kurds then filled while fighting ISIS. In a similar vein, the Iraqi Kurds took control of the Kirkuk province after Iraqi troops abandoned it.

Following ISIS' defeat, Baghdad launched an attack on the Kurds to regain Kirkuk and other disputed territories, which returns us to the clash between Kurdish culture and the Iraqi State. To date the Kurds have requested autonomy, federalism, or independence in their historic homelands, but received negative responses to every request.

Culture clashes across the region are changing the political map, and may provide policymakers with a roadmap to peace, at least in the Kurdish areas:

Photo ▶ Roza Gardi

Following ISIS' defeat, Baghdad launched an attack on the Kurds to regain Kirkuk and other disputed territories.

accepting the Kurds as a separate people with a distinctive cultural identity and allowing them to establish some form of homeland would allow all to find their own way.

Establishing Kurdistan in Iraq and Syria would prove difficult but is doable with international support and protection. The first step is to understand that culture is what makes a people a nation and that enforcing artificial borders will only continue to fuel violence.

Paul Davis is a retired US Army military intelligence officer. He has been a consultant to the American intelligence community specializing in the Middle East with a concentration on Kurdish affairs. Currently, he is an adjunct professor at the Institute of World Politics in Washington DC and the President of the consulting firm JANUS Think.

Photos ▶ Roza Gardi





Aramaic Christians in the Kurdistan Region A Sharing of History and Values

Kamal Kolo

The Background

The Aramaic Christians have shared the land and history of the Muslim Kurds, Yazidi Kurds, and Jews for millennia. The bonds of land, values, language and folklore have merged these ethnicities and religions into one common socio-cultural society where differentiation only occurs in details.

This image of Kurdistan society sharply manifested itself in the early decades of the twentieth century to the 1960s. Kurdish villages next to Aramaic Christian villages were undistinguishable in ways of life, language, dress and folklore: both communities danced to the same music and sang the same songs, in Kurdish. This tradition is very much preserved now in social events, even after so many Christians have emigrated to Western countries.

This socio-cultural, ethnic, and religious mosaic was fragmented many times by the central government of Baghdad. Most notably, the government of Tawfiq al-Suwaidi in the mid 1950s expelled the Jewish communities in Kurdistan and Iraq through law No. 1 of 1950, revoking the nationality and citizenship of those who had lived in Iraq for 2,500 years and who constituted more than 50% of Baghdad's population at the time. The Semele killings of the Assyrian Christians by the Iraqi army in 1936 was another example.

The central government army attacked the fabric of Kurdistan's society from the

early 1960s to 2003, which saw the degradation and destruction of Kurdish and Christian villages and brought major demographic changes, with local populations emigrating both internally and externally from their native homelands. By late 1989, hundreds of villages and orchards from Zakho city to the west down to Dera Luk in the east were destroyed and their inhabitants forced to flee.

The Duhok area and governorate in addition to the Nineveh plain are the de facto ancestral homelands for the Aramaic Christians (Chaldeans and Assyrians). During these stressful times, those

who did not emigrate abroad ended up in Mosul, Basra, and (mostly) Baghdad, where neither the Aramaic language nor Kurdish was spoken and so they had to learn Arabic. The resettlement was gradual and painful. Subsequently, Kurdistan lost most of its Aramaic Christians after losing its Jewish communities.

The new phase of the displacement of Christians started after 2003 and peaked in 2005-2007 in Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul. Christians in these cities mostly of Aramaic origin were systematically and viciously attacked by religious fanatics, repeating



March 7, 2021
Kurdistan children from different ethnic and religious backgrounds greeting His Holiness Pope Francis at Erbil International Airport

Photos ▶ Safin Hamid



A peshmerga re-installing the cross on a church in Bashiq after liberating the town from ISIS

what happened to the Jewish community in the mid-twentieth century. The Christians in these cities declined to a level that former Christian-majority quarters such as Dora in Baghdad had no more Christian residents, and a reverse internal migration occurred to their ancestral havens and homelands in Kurdistan. Many were the second and third generation of those who had emigrated under duress from Kurdistan to the south. Looking for a haven, Kurdistan always welcomed its returning sons and daughters and helped Christians rebuild their lives, providing them with sanctuary and accommodations and building new churches.

In 2014, ISIS attacked Kurdistan, and a third wave of Christian migration began. ISIS also attacked Nineveh plains and Mosul, home to ancient Aramaic Christian villages. Tens of thousands of Christians and Yezidis fled to Erbil and Dohuk.

Who are the Aramaic Christians (Chaldeans and Assyrians)?

In ancient Mesopotamia, two known major kingdoms co-existed: Chaldea with its capital Babylon to the south and Assyria with its capital Nineveh to the north. The Chaldeans and Assyrians consider themselves descendants of those two ancient kingdoms. The Jews who were exiled from Judea and Israel roughly 2,500 years ago settled in Mesopotamia in both Chaldea and Assyria. The shared Aramaic language continued from antiquity to today. Morris Jastrow (1914) shows a cuneiform text from Chaldea and Assyria that reads: “*um nukh libbi shabattum*,” which translates into “the day of

rest of the heart” in reference to Saturday “*shabattum*.” In modern Aramaic (Syriac, neo-Aramaic, suruth or vernacular), it reads: “*yoma d’niakha d’libbi*.” The Chaldo-Assyrian people from Iraq would recognize the first cuneiform text as such.

Christians formed major schools of thought, namely the school of Jundiaspoor (southern Persia), Harran, and Nisibis in ancient Syria-Byzantium, producing a

literature of science and philosophy in both Aramaic and Greek that persisted up to the

Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates. That literature was translated into Arabic by Christian philosophers such as Ibn Hunein. The Abbasid Caliphate during the reign of Al-Mammon was the golden age of Aramaic philosophers, translators, writers and physicians.

Today, the Christians of Kurdistan live peacefully side-by-side with Muslim and Yezidi Kurds and do not face discrimination and racism. Kurdistan has been a haven for Christians and other religious and ethnic groups who face persecution in Iraq.

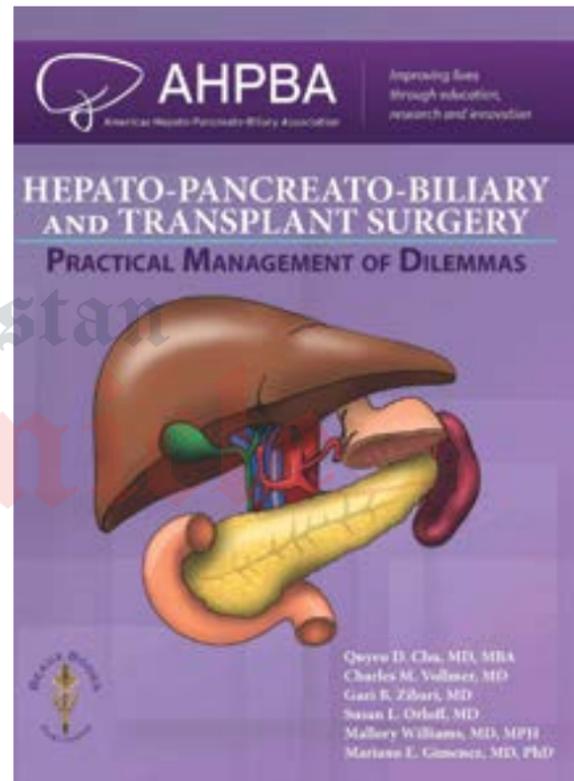
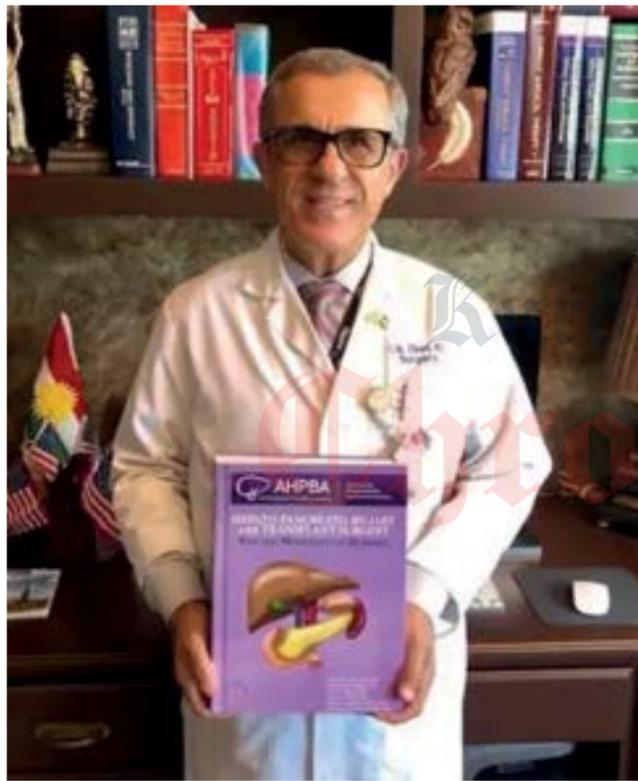
In contemporary Kurdistan, the KRG leadership consistently engages in acts of public solidarity with its Christian populations. Moreover, especially in the aftermath of ISIS, continued vigilance and leadership must be shown at all levels of government to ensure that hateful ideologies are not allowed any space to take root.

Dr. Kamal Kolo is a professor at Soran University, Erbil. He is a native of Kurdistan of Chaldean Heritage. He worked on minorities heritage and history with Belgian Royal Academy of Sciences and Arts and Vrije Universiteit Brussels. He was a guest lecturer at the European Parliament, the University of Antwerp, and the University of Central Florida. His authored and co-authored books include: “Es War Einmal in Aradin”; “Das Ende Des Babylonischen Exiles”; “Inside Out: Textorientierte Erkundungen des Werks von Annemarie Schwarzenbach; and “Iraqi Kurdistan Region A Path Forward”.



Gazi Zibari Escaping from Tyranny to Saving Lives

Rahim Rashidi



Bombs, tyranny, fleeing his homeland of Kurdistan, and studying in caves – these are just snippets of the heroic story of Professor Gazi B. Zibari, who describes his journey to becoming a transplant and hepato-pancreato-biliary (HPB) surgeon as “very rocky at best.”

He persevered through a vicious war in Kurdistan, family separation and loss, and cultural, educational, and language barriers to earn the utmost respect for relieving human pain and suffering in the United

States. During his entire journey, he never forgot his motherland Kurdistan and the brave peshmerga fighters.

Zibari was born in the village of Birakpra outside Akre, Kurdistan. His childhood village was destroyed by the Ba'ath regime like several thousands of other Kurdish villages before and during the Anfal Campaign, which resulted in the tragic death of 182,000 civilians.

Zibari was very lucky to have survived, but sadly, he lost his father at a very young age due to leukemia,

and his siblings and he were raised by his mother. His oldest brother General Babakir B. Zibari stepped up to the plate and became a father figure at a very young age. Both mother and older brother made sure Zibari received the best education possible, despite some of it occurring in a cave.

He received elementary and some middle school education in Akra and then completed his middle school education in Mangesh, a predominately Christian village in Duhok governorate. Subsequently, he attended Kawa High School in Duhok. He was studying hard and dreaming about applying to medical school in Baghdad.

Since Saddam was planning to attack Duhok, it was not safe for his family to stay. In February 1974, he moved to Mangesh village hoping to complete eleventh grade. He remembers April 24, 1974, like it was yesterday. He was about to walk out of the house to go to school in the early morning when Iraqi airplanes bombed his high school.

From that day on, Zibari had to escape to the mountains and study in caves, which of course made his dream of going to the medical school appear impossible. After many ups and downs, surviving multiple attacks, and going through horrific journeys, Zibari and his family sought refuge in Iran and settled in Kerman. There they were punished for the same crime – being a Kurd.

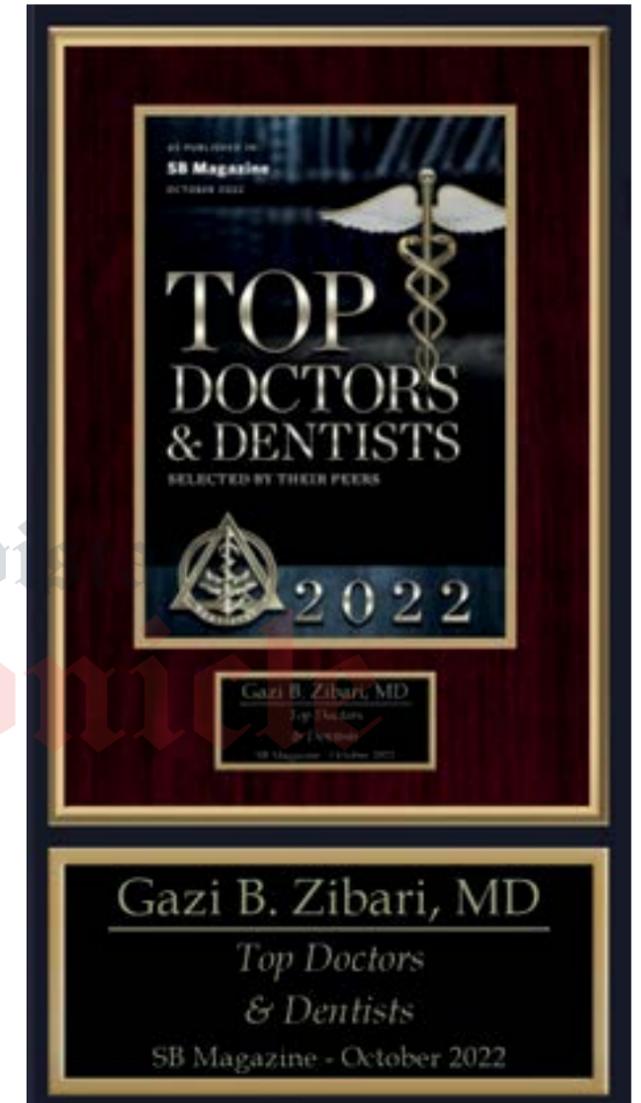
During that time, the Shah of Iran would not permit Kurdish refugee students to study at Iranian universities, and Zibari's older brother felt passionately that they needed to pursue education in another country. With the support of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, he applied to the United Nations to go abroad as a refugee.

Incredibly, he was granted a refugee visa for the United States, but the Shah's secret agents (Savak) did not give him permission to travel to Tehran to claim it – they had ordered bus stations not to sell tickets to Kurdish refugees. Zibari and his friend took the risk of traveling to Tehran without Savak's permission because they did not want to lose this dream. On April 24, 1976, he set off for America via Germany.

On May 1, 1976, Zibari arrived on the shores of New York, barely speaking a word of English. He

was transferred to the Catholic Charities sponsor in Nashville, Tennessee and later this new home became known as “Little Kurdistan.”

Upon arriving in Nashville, he was ready to accept any available job and was employed within one



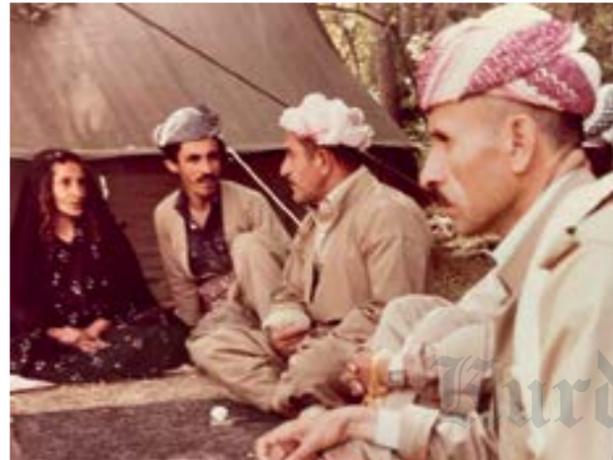
week by the Mid-South Printing Company. He worked during the day and studied English at night at the public library. By the fall, his sponsors Professors Franklin Jones and Willis Owens got him special student status to attend the Nashville State Technical Institute because he did not have an official government high school graduation diploma.

While in training, Zibari never lost sight of the unwavering support of his mother, brothers, extended family, Dr. Najmaddin Karim, and many

close friends who always encouraged him to pursue higher education.

It was during his fellowship at Johns Hopkins that the State Department awarded him as one of the five "Best Refugees" from different regions of the globe in October 1992.

Thirty-one years after Zibari arrived in the United States, his hard work, devotion, strength, and contribution to his host community started to pay



Dr. Zebari's mother and some peshmerga comrades



October 26, 1978, Dr. Zebari at a demonstration held during President Jimmy Carter's visit to Nashville

off. He emerged as a prominent doctor whose name echoed beyond his home state.

After many significant achievements as an academic clinician, he was awarded the prestigious Ellis Island Medal. Five years later, the Americas

Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association awarded him its highest honor of excellence in the field of HPB surgery. Also, an Honorary Fellowship was bestowed upon him by International Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association.

Among the many turns of events in his life, Zibari recalls one of his proudest moments where he led teams to establish the first renal transplant units in Kurdistan as well as HPB units in Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Philippines. He identifies one of his greatest passions as helping foreign countries build their medical capacities to treat HPB diseases within the constraints of their limited resources. Every year, he spends his vacation visiting countries to lend his expert hands and compassionate heart.

Reflecting on his life, Zibari said, "All my life I have not forgotten my homeland and our peshmerga who have been fighting for democracy, equality, peace, tolerance, and justice. With the support of NATO, they fought and defeated ISIS with bravery on behalf of the world."

Additionally, Zibari has done his best to support his family, provide the best care for his patients, and teach his students everything he knows. "If I can succeed, anyone should be able to succeed as well," he often says.

Academic Achievements

Zibari was what is called in his profession a "triple threat," excelling in patient care and clinical work, educational instruction, and academic research. Within a decade he was promoted from Instructor of Surgery to Assistant Professor then to Associate Professor with tenure and finally to Professor of Surgery and Transplantation with tenure. He was also appointed as Division Chief of Transplantation and Academic Vice Chairman of the Department of Surgery as well as the Malcolm Feist Chair in Transplantation at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center-Shreveport (LSUHSC-S).

Presently, he is Academic Chairman of the Department of Surgery and Director of Surgery Residency program at the Willis-Knighton Health System (WKHS). Additionally, he is director of the John C. McDonald Regional Transplant Center and the Advanced Surgery Center at WKHS.

Medical Outreach and Capacity Building

As a child, Zibari witnessed the poor state of the health care system in Iraq and particularly in Kurdistan. Infant, children's, and maternal mortality rate were extremely high, while wounded peshmerga died from tension pneumothorax and wound infections. This combined with losing his father at a very young age motivated him to pursue a career in medicine with the hope of helping those in need.

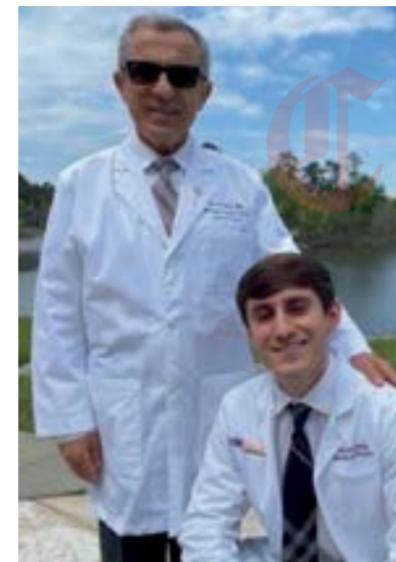
In fact, this was a major driving force for Zibari to work hard to obtain his medical degree. He has been going to Kurdistan since 1992 at least every year, but after the Erbil International Airport was opened in 2005, he visited two to three times every year because he no longer had to travel through hostile neighbors. He supported the Kurdistan medical community, who were already hard at

helped Persians, Turks, Arabs, Christians from the Middle East, Africans, Central Americans, Pakistanis, Indians, Southeast Asians, and Latin Americans.

Dr. Zibari and his team have helped nearly 40 surgeons from Kurdistan win ACS Fellowships. These are but a few examples of how a Kurd reciprocated kindness in place of war crimes and genocides.

Zibari believes that "the sky is the only limit in this country," and his story of bravery inspires our community to never lose sight of what the power of hard work, integrity, honesty, and desire to help others can achieve.

As a former Kurdish refugee who was given a chance to live a better life, he has in return made our world better. He is indebted to the men and women in uniform and to the peshmerga of Kurdistan who saved him from Saddam's army and who, with the support of NATO, defeated ISIS on behalf of the world.



work but were unfortunately isolated by a double embargo, one by the UN on Iraq and the other by Saddam and the neighboring states on the Kurds. Like most Kurds, Zibari has a heart bigger than this world. He believes in tolerance, harmony, peace, equality, democracy, and justice. At a time when occupiers of Kurdistan were committing war crimes, building mass graves, using internationally forbidden chemical weapons, and committing genocide against the people of Kurdistan, Zibari

Rahim Rashidi (also known as Mr. Kurd) is the Chief Correspondent for Kurdistan24 and Kurdistan TV in Washington, DC. Mr. Kurd also oversees the operations of Zagros TV's Arabic section. Rashidi is also a member of the Gold Institute for International Strategy, and a consulting advisor to several companies and establishments in Washington, DC.



Can Women in the KRI Break the Glass Ceiling?

Ofra Bengio

The famous 14th century Islamic theologian and philosopher Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya wrote: “women are the half of society who gives birth to the other half and so they are seemingly the entire society.”

Six hundred years later, the Egyptian-Kurdish thinker Qasim Amin endorsed Jawziyya’s observation regarding the vital role of women in society, leading the vanguard in calling for gender equality. Yet to what extent have these far-sighted

challenge working from the laws of the Iraqi Federal Government as well as some common traditional social structures that impede gender equality and reinforce old norms, including polygamy, honor killing, female genital mutilation, and child marriage.

These structural problems are, however, balanced by two parallel Kurdish traditions of women intermingling with men in the public sphere and of strong women leaders, fighters, and politicians, from Khanzadeh in the 17th century and Kara Fatma



Margaret George Shello and her peshmerga comrades

individuals shaped Muslim societies in general and the Kurds in particular?

Examining the contemporary state of women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), it seems at first glance that the answer is a resounding YES, but it is still a work in progress. Much has been achieved since the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government in 1992 that one cannot turn a blind eye to. At the moment, the region faces a major



Leyla Qasim

in the 19th to Adela Khanum in the early 20th, to mention a few.

Kurdish women in Iraq began small-scale activities to advance the Kurdish women’s movement in Istanbul following the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Thereafter, these activists worked in Iraqi Kurdistan, notching notable achievements such as opening a school for girls in Sulemani. Since then, Kurdish women have risen to leading roles,



Photo ▶ Mohamad Dargalayi

while some neighboring societies uphold traditional and patriarchal norms.

Among the most famous Kurdish women in contemporary Kurdistan was Margaret George

Much has been achieved since the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government in 1992.

Shello, an Assyrian Kurd who in 1960 at the age of twenty became the first woman fighter in the Peshmerga, the Kurdish guerrilla forces, and assumed leading positions in important battles against the Iraqi Army until her death nine years later.

Another was Leyla Qasim, a Kurdish student activist executed by the Ba’ath regime in 1974 because of her nationalist activities. On her way to the gallows, Qasim is said to have sung Ey Reqib, the Kurdish national anthem, and declared: “Kill me! But you must also know that after my death thousands of

Kurds will wake up. I feel proud to sacrifice my life for the freedom of Kurdistan.”

A turning point for Kurdish women came after the 1991 Gulf War and the establishment of the autonomous Kurdistan Region. Since then, women have driven the state-building project of Iraqi Kurdistan, partly through their participation in a plethora of women’s organizations, which have worked to push the parliament to repudiate numerous discriminatory laws from 1992 to 2004, some of which had been enacted by the Ba’ath regime from 1968 to 2003. For example, new laws forbade husbands from “disciplining” their wives and imposed stricter punishments against polygamy and honor killing, while a 2008 law

Kurdish women have risen to leading roles while some neighboring societies still uphold traditional and patriarchal norms.

repudiated an earlier one that equated two woman witnesses with one male witness in court.

In the political sphere, Kurdish women participate as voters and candidates and occupy administrative, governmental, and political posts. In 2018, 30% of the Kurdistan Parliament were woman members of parliament,

In 2018, women made up 30% of the parliament members in Kurdistan.

with the two important posts of speaker and secretary held by women. Women also serve as ministers – the first being in 1996 – judges, director generals, prosecutors, and police officers. With the outbreak of fighting between the Peshmerga and ISIS in August 2014, Iraqi Kurdish women embraced the military effort. The 2nd Battalion of 550 woman Peshmergas took part in training and fighting, with one woman, Kocher Saleh, selected as the first regiment commander.

In comparison to neighboring countries, including Sunni and Shia communities in Iraq, and to the Saddam era, Kurdish women have made progress, and there is a growing awareness among the political elite of the need to redress the situation. In sum, growing numbers of individual Kurdish women have managed to break the glass ceiling in the KRI, and Kurdish woman activists make me hopeful for the future of Kurdistan and the Middle East.

Prof. Ofra Bengio is senior research associate at the Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University and author of four books and scores of essays and articles on the Kurds.



Photo ▶ Safin Hamid

▲ A Kurdish peshmerga woman guarding the Kurdistan border

HOMELESS IN EDEN THE IMPORTANCE OF MALAYE JAZIRI'S POETRY



Literature



Tyler Fisher



Haidar Khezri

Sheikh Ahmad (c. 1570-1640 CE), better known by his pen name Malaye Jaziri, was the most important Kurdish poet of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His poetic oeuvre, or *diwan*, is one of the most significant works in all Kurdish literature, representing the fundamental genesis of modern Kurdish poetry.

Malaye Jaziri was the first to deploy Classical Perso-Arabic forms in Kurdish verse, adopting and adapting the *ruba'i*, *qasida* and, most notably, the *ghazal* as verse forms for poetry in the Kurdish language. In doing so, he established a written medium for the Kurdish poetic tradition, which, prior to his pioneering work, had been almost exclusively oral.

... each of his units of paired lines constitute discrete poetic expressions in their own right yet remain interdependent in relation to the poem as a whole.

As a language of literacy, in Malaye Jaziri's handling, Kurdish emerged as a viable vehicle for poetic expression in the schools, royal courts, and written records of the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, and his work left an indelible influence on Kurdish poetry that endures to this day. It was in those courtly and scholarly contexts that Malaye Jaziri found a fleeting oasis for his creativity.

As the Kurdish homeland was carved up by imperial adversaries, and the Kurdish people



themselves were scattered across a diaspora that still characterizes their existence today, the poet found himself homeless in a contested Eden, penning poetry that underscored the dignity of a people and their language in the face of genocidal campaigns.

Malaye Jaziri's full diwan comprises 142 poems. Seventeen of these are *ruba'i*, short poems of four lines, while the longest poem, reflecting the poet's fondness for symmetries, is a *qasida* that runs to a total of 142 lines.

In terms of matter and manner, his adaptations of the Classical Perso-Arabic forms emphasize the sustained correspondence of sounds. Consistent end-rhymes are a hallmark of this tradition, along with frequent use of internal rhymes and alliterations.

Each poem also maintains lines of uniform length — that is, lines consistent in duration within a particular poem but open to variation across poems within the same genre. His poems in the *ghazal* and *ruba'i* forms address a Beloved of unspecified,

indeterminate gender, and often close with a parting signature by his poetic persona (“Mala” or “Nishani”), signaling the poem’s end and reflecting upon the nature of the poem and its addressee.

More than a mere couplet (*bayt*), each of his units of paired lines constitute discrete poetic expressions in their own right yet remain interdependent in relation to the poem as a whole. Every couplet sets up images in tension, emotions straining toward an articulation that seem always to elude reductive treatment.

Our English translations approximate the Kurdish rhymes with English assonance and half-rhymes, which, in English-language poetry, achieve a less heavy-handed, more palatable effect. We also endeavor to balance the feminine and masculine traits of the addressee, never explicitly indicating whether the Beloved is male or female, to preserve the poet’s deliberate ambiguity on this point. In keeping with this indeterminacy, the poems invite supple interpretations, capable of adapting each poem’s sequence of surprising imagery to apply to a human lover, a deity, or a homeland.

The *qasida*, as the longest and most discursive among the forms that Malaye Jaziri employed, gave freer rein to his range of themes beyond love. With its roots in pre-Islamic poetry, the *qasida* can feature satire, panegyric, lament, or philosophical musings.

Like other Persian, Indo-Persian, Arab, and Turkish poets, Malaye Jaziri worked within a highly regulated set of poetic conventions, but the poetic strictures did not constrain the range of his vast sources of inspiration. He drew on voices

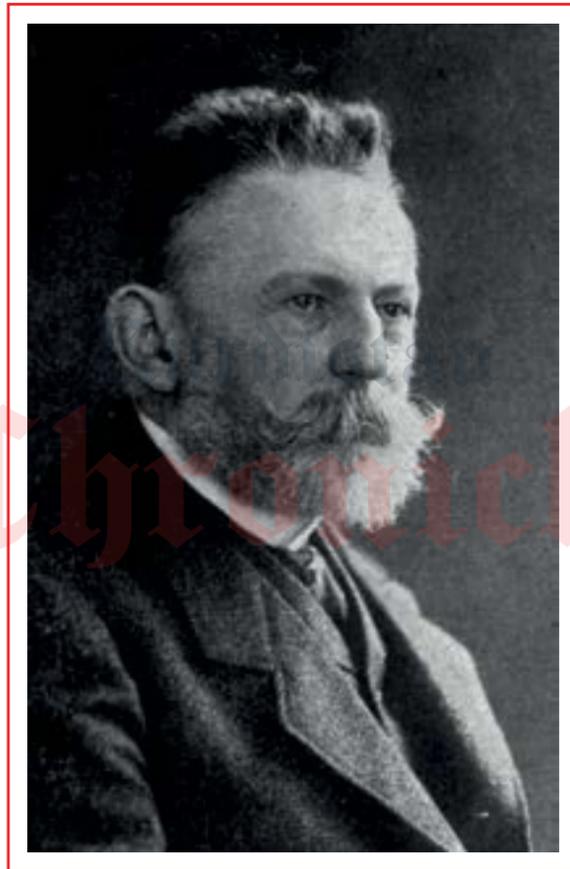
from regions stretching from the Iranian plateau to the Turkish steppe, from the back alleys of Konya to the bazaars of Delhi, casting into sharp relief the interpenetration of apparent contrasts: metaphysical and material, transcendent and quotidian, death and desire, sacred and profane, the ephemeral and the eternal.

Within his poems’ formal parameters, he assayed thematic innovations, crafting a poetics that blended Sufi Islam with non-Muslim traditions of Kurdistan more widely (Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Yezidi, among others). The *diwan* showcases the geographical and thematic range on which Malaye Jaziri drew and introduces a Kurdish voice that stands comparison with leading Sufi poets across the ages.

The Kurdish diaspora in North America, with its main concentrations in Toronto, New York City, San Diego, and Nashville (“Little Kurdistan”), celebrates the traditional Kurdish Newruz by reciting Malaye Jaziri’s *ghazals* and dancing in a circle to welcome spring. His poetic expression stands as a salutary reminder of the complex, human experience behind the headlines and beyond

national borders: ecstasy, laughter, dread, and love.

Although he wrote four centuries ago, his imagery remains strikingly innovative today and, for its transcendent treatment of human worth and beauty, wields a compelling relevance at a time when international attention is again trained upon the Kurdish regions.



Archery

یەك گرتیبه زولفی و به کی خال نومی
تایینه ب ئەسکه ندهری و جام ب جه م د

You stretched your eyebrow’s bow, full taut and slow, and launched a hundred arrows hewn of yew, arrows of a hundred varied hues. You wagged your fingertip, a rosebud storm-tossed to and fro and menacing my life with your intoxicating wounds.

Calligraphy

خالا نه به مشكين كو بوويه نوقطه ي نونان
وهك نسم و طلسمان بوويه ته عويدي عويونان
چه شمپن د سيه رادكرن فتنه ئوخوونان
لهو خوون ژ دو چه هفتن مه دزيت شوبهي عويونان

Your beauty mark is like a jot to grace the letter i. A sacred name, a talisman, it wards off evil eyes. Your own dark eyes cause turbid strife and blood to rise, by which my eyes are wellsprings of the blood I cry.

Songs of Worlds to Come

ئسمي ته به مه كتوب د ديواني قديم دا
چه رفهك قه له مي علمي ب ته قومي ره قهم دا

Your name is pristine writing in the everlasting book, inscribed in letters that the Sage’s pen ordained before the maps of time.

ئه شكال و خه تين دائره ي نوقته ي علمن
ئه ف نه قش و مسالن د خه يالاتن عه دم دا

These shapes and shadows orbiting the central point of wisdom’s Sun foreshadow all the stories, images, and songs of worlds to come.

ميم مه تله عي شه مسا نه حد تايينه سفهت كر
لامع ژ عه رهب به رقي ل فه خاري عه جه م دا

M made the morning rays of monotheist faith a mirror clear, an Arab thunderbolt that breached the pagan arch when M appeared.

دا شاهدي ئه سما ب هه مي وه جه ي بنا سين
يهك مه ستي سه مه دكر، ب يه كي نه قيتي سه نه م دا

Now let us fully understand the facets of the names of God, who made one drunk on the divine, while others turned to idols’ fraud.

يهك گرتیبه زولفی و به کی خال نومی
تایینه ب ئەسکه ندهری و جام ب جه م د

One tears his hair, while others contemplate a beauty mark for hours. He granted Jamshid’s Cup and Alexander’s Mirror all-seeing powers.

The Night of Power, Laylat al-Qadr, pure souls call you to pray. Around the Kaaba, lanterns gleam: your radiance reflects their rays.

ئه رواحي موقه ددهس شه ي قه دران ته دخوازن
نوورا ته به مسباحي د قه نديلي حه رهم دا

To live forever in the moment of our meeting, take my all, full payment in advance: I fully give my body, life, and soul.

دا وه قتي لقابي ب ته حه ي بين د به قايي
من نه قدي دل و جان د فه نايي ب سه له م دا

The jewelers crushed their diamonds in their fingers when the Painter traced that diamantine script and living portrait on the page’s face.

يا قووت فرؤشان د كهف ئه لاماسي شكه ستن
ئه ف سه فحه ي ئه لاماسي كو نه ققاشي قه له م دا

O Lord, my feeble lips, my failing breath, can scarcely form a phrase. All praise to You! Of all my words, not one suffices for Your praise.

يا رهب ژ چ روو له ب ب ئه ناي ته گوشايم
سبحانك لن احصي في شانك حمدا

Praise God who gave His servant Mala little in the way of wealth, but lavished him with the elixir of love’s sorrow for his health.

مننه ت ژ خودايي كو ب عه ديي خوه مه لايي
ئكسيري غه مي عشق - نه دينار و دره م - دا

Dr. Tyler Fisher (DPhil University of Oxford) is Associate Professor of Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of Central Florida. He has published English translations of poetry from Spanish, Catalan, Aramaic, and Kurdish.

Dr. Haidar Khezri (PhD University of Damascus) is the University of Central Florida’s first Assistant Professor of Arabic. He teaches Kurdish, Arabic, and comparative literature at UCF, and has published translations out of and into Kurdish, Persian, Arabic, and English. He is the author of Central/Sorani Kurdish: An Elementary Textbook (forthcoming from Georgetown University Press, 2023), and is currently co-editing The Oxford Handbook of Kurdish Linguistics.



When Churchill Talked About Malaye Jaziri

Baker Schwani

In his autobiography *My Memories*, assassinated Kurdish writer Musa Anter (1920-1992) relates a story from 1956 when he owned and ran a restaurant in Istanbul frequented by prominent figures, including former Turkish Foreign Minister Numan Menemencioglu.¹

After the two men had built trust, Menemencioglu told Anter about a meeting between former Turkish President Ismet Inonu, his U.S. counterpart Franklin Roosevelt, and UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill, during which the Western leaders were hoping to persuade Turkey to enter their alliance in the Second World War.

After seeing Turkey's reluctance, Churchill resorted to a well-prepared tactic: the Kurdish question. "Pasha, do you speak Kurdish?" asked Churchill. Inonu grew dismayed, and Menemencioglu jumped in to reply, "Your Excellency, there is no such language and nation."

Churchill's accompanying delegates, however, were experts in oriental languages. "Sir, is that so?" Churchill asked one of them, "There is no such language called Kurdish?" The man stood up and said, "There is indeed such a language, and it has a rich literature. I can read a piece of Malaye Jaziri's poems if you like."

Before that moment, the Turkish delegation had not heard that name. "Read it," said Churchill, and the delegate read poetry that we did not understand, but we could discern a language resembling Persian with an interesting melody.

"This is a Kurdish poem," said the delegate. Churchill then asked him to write it down and translate it into English, French, and Turkish. "Let's compare the translations," he suggested.

The group discovered no foreign words in the

French translation, while the English version one had a few Latin-origin words. But the only Turkish words in the Turkish translation were 'dir' and 'ile' – the rest were Persian and Arabic with a few others borrowed from European languages.



Winston Churchill and Ismet Inonu

Trying to embarrass the Turkish delegation, Churchill put the translations in front of us. "See gentlemen," he began. "This is the richness of the Kurdish language, the native language of a large number of people who you deny that they live in your country."

"During my whole career as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I cannot recall any other day to be cornered like that day," Menemencioglu recalled.

Baker Schwani is a Kurdish writer and translator based in Germany. He has published several acclaimed novels into Kurdish. Schwani was born in Kirkuk and studied geology in Baghdad before moving to Germany and obtaining a degree in oriental studies at the University of Bonn.

¹The dialogue quoted here comes from FULL CITATION and was reviewed by Baker Schwani.

Send an Ember, One Night, to See in My Dreams

How can this heart of mine
not turn into a dictionary of flame
with the glittering of a single letter of your name?
- not turn into the ashes of the alphabet
and the roiled sea of language?

I gaze with a fearful eye, imploring,
into the emptiness of this Universe,
a forest of secrets from end to end:
I seek a leaf that can reveal the green history of the heart.
I look around and see no glimmer
that could show me the frontiers between darkness and light,
and could spark a flame in this extinguished lamp.

I see you in an ember,
where you are heat and redness, flame.
In the winter blizzard, you are a white word,
and in the woods, in the jungle and the forest,
a green melody.

I hang my soul on a rusty nail
like a soiled, worn-out rag
and abandon it.
Maybe with the aid of a storm, hail and gale,
with the aid of hot wind and the peak summer heat,
it will return to the road of the good old days.

Send an ember, one night, to see in my dreams,
so that my days catch fire!

Farhad Shakely



Sharizor in the History of Kurdistan

Amed Demirhan

Historians have different opinions about the origins of the city of Sharizor (Alternative spellings: Sahr-i Zor, Şahr-i Zul, Sharahzur, Shari Zor), as is often the case with important historical cities. Several historical figures are associated with the city and region. Some claim that it was founded by the son of Dahhak Zour.

Others say that Alexander the Great died on his return from India on the road to Sharizor. The name Sharizor in Kurdish simply means strong city or city of strength. For a long time, this city and region have been one of Kurdistan's cultural, political, and intellectual capitals.

One of the greatest medieval historians Tabari (839-923) states that Alexander (356 BC-323 BC) "died on the road to Sharahzur" and another well-respected historian Qazwini (1281-1349) says that he died in Sharizor.

A hill with a shrine roughly one day's walking distance from the ruins of the historic city is referred to by local people as the hill of Alexander.

The presumed place of Alexander's death, local people still consider it a shrine.

Sharizor is the name both of a historical city in southern Kurdistan and of a region home to several Kurdish dynasties. At the same time, the name of Sharizor region is synonymous with Kurdistan. Abu al-Kasim Ibn Hawkal al-Nasibi (Nesebini) traveled there in the 960s AD and called Sharizor a walled Kurdish town. The surrounding land, from Iraq to the north, is notably productive, fertile, pleasant, and Kurdish. It is important to underline that Iraq refers here to historical Arab Iraq, which is in the southern section of Mesopotamia and south of

Baghdad today. The following map is based on Arab geographer Al-Muqaddasi in 985, AD. (Red highlight of Sharizor and the Dinawar Kingdom and Iraq added by the author).

Suwar-al-Aqdim writes, "it is said that this place is named Shahr-zur (city of strength) because its governors are always the Kurds, ..." (as quoted by Qazwini in 740 (1340)).

Yaqut ibn 'Abd Allah al-Hamawi, (1179?-1229), a Muslim Greek geographer, says that this country produced so many scholars that even the person with the sharpest memory cannot recall all of them. The tradition of scholarship in this region still inspires the Muslim world from Algeria to the Caucasus. For example, Mawlana Khalid Shahrizori (1779-1827) studied theological studies, grammar, logic, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and astrolabe at a number of colleges in Kurdistan.

He also then studied in many other international schools and became the founder of the Naqshbandi Khalidi Sufi order. The majority of Sunni-Muslim Kurds still follow these teachings, which have many branches in other countries. For instance, Shaykh Ahmad Kuftaro, the former Grand Mufti [Chief Justice of Islam] of Syria (1963-2004), was a follower.

Şeref (Sharaf) Han (king), the author of the Kurdish Dynasties, writes in 1597 about the Hasanveyh Kingdom of Şehrizor and Dinawar (970-1107 A.D.) during the reign of Bedir ben Hasanveyh, saying that the Kingdom "expanded its territory to Ahvaz, Khuzestan, Berucerd, Esedabad, and Nihavend."

Unfortunately the city of Sharizor was destroyed by the Mongol ruler Hulagu (1215-1265). After

Sheikh Hussamalddin Al-Naqishbendi - Sharezur - Bakhakon





Kerkuk's Map prepared for Sultan Sulaiyman Alqanuni

Kurds and Mongols made peace, the Mongols, in compensation for the historic city of Sharizor, helped the Kurds to build the Citadel of Kirkuk as the new Sharizor. Therefore, sometimes Kirkuk is called Sharizor, and old and new get mixed up, and Kirkuk becomes the capital of Sharizor region and state after that.

In the 16th century, a large part of Kurdistan/ Sharizor became affiliated with or part of the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Kanuni Sultan Suleyman or Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566) after the war of "two Iraqs" [Iraqi Ajam and Iraqi

Arab] 1534. After defeating the Safavids [Persians], the Ottomans faced extreme danger from the winter. Ottoman historians describe these events in 1632:

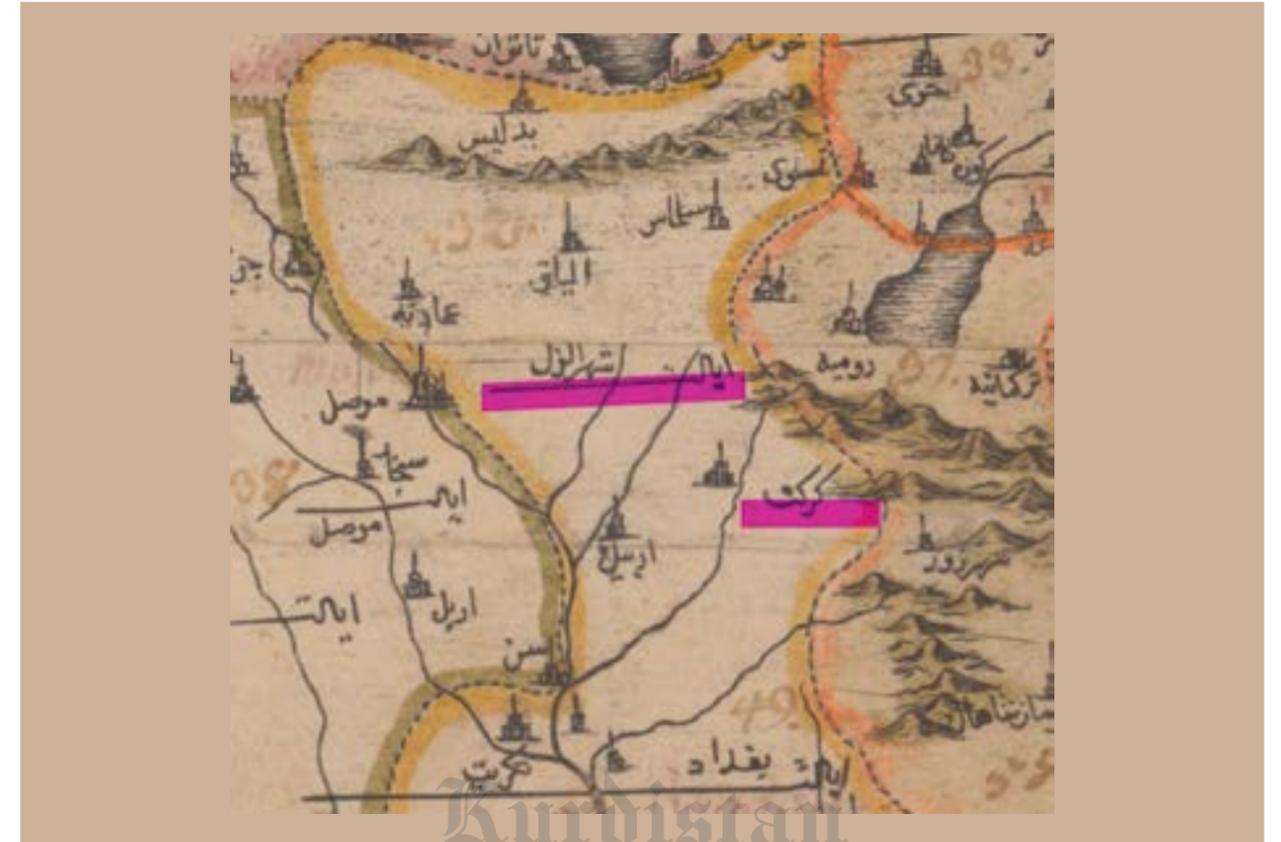
While, on account of the inability and incapacity of the army of Islam [Ottoman] to move forward at all, and the blockade on their retreat by the abundance of snow and sleet, the late Sultan Suleyman was dazed and concerned over the fate of the army of Islam. The Kurdish commanders [Kings] opened paths leading from the pasture of Sultaniye [a city in Eastern Kurdistan] in the direction of Baghdad, guiding the troops of victory...

This relationship becomes the basis of the second treaty of military alliance between Kurdistan and the Ottoman Dynasty in 1534. It is stated that after victory, the Sultan expressed his gratitude by recognizing Kurdish Kings and Princes with many gifts and granting them land ownership. The Sultan expressed his feeling about Kurdistan by saying, "God made Kurdistan act in the protection of my

imperial kingdoms like a strong barrier and an iron fortress against the sedition of the demon Gog of Ajam [Iran]. A thousand thanks and praises to the presence of Almighty, creators of everything."

According to the Ottoman historian and traveler Evliya Çelebi (1611-1682) Sharizor voluntarily joined the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Sultan Suleyman, and by law, become a state (eyalet) of the empire. It had 86 strongly built citadels, which were impossible to conquer by war. The city of Kirkuk became the capital.

Another Ottoman historian and geographer, Katip Çelebi (1609-1657) says the state of Sharizor in



The State of Sharizor and capital Kirkuk (1826)
Underlined red by the author

Kurdistan consists of 32 counties, [sanjak], and Kirkuk was the capital.

Map by Katip Çelebi about 1648-1656 obtained from Austria National Library Map Section in Vienna (1732 print edition).

Women's legal rights to become rulers

Two Kurdish Kingdoms were in this state: the Kingdom of Gâziyân and the Kingdom of Mehrevân. The rulers' title was King of the King and is not subject to appointment or dismissal by the Sultan.

Their rule was hereditary. Only in these two Kingdoms could women legally become rulers; nowhere else it is allowed, according to Evliya.

Sharizor in 1698

In 1864-1871, the Ottoman government instituted an administrative reorganization by moving from

the traditional eyalet/state system to the vilayet/ province system. The state of Sharizor was divided into the provinces of Mosul and Baghdad, but Kirkuk retained its status as the new administrative capital for several districts of the province of Mosul, still called Sharizor as shown in the following map from 1884.

Mosul province was one of the six in Kurdistan, according to the Ottoman military textbook. Part of Sharizor became a province of Mosul, and Kirkuk remained the capital.

Needless to say, Sharizor has always played an important role in Kurdistan's history, politics, and culture.

Amed Demirhan is the General Manager and Director of Barzani National Memorial. He is a multilingual librarian and researcher internationally recognized with multiple awards in librarianship.

The Ottoman Archives Kurdistan's Oil and Today's Borders

Sardar Sattar

The phenomenon of politico-economic dysfunction known as the “oil curse” began to emerge in 1950s and 1960s to describe the challenges faced by the governments of oil-producing countries. However, the Kurds suffered from the “curse of oil” much earlier. After Western states discovered that natural resources were in abundance under Kurdish lands, a ruthless race began between some of the great powers to win access to these underground oceans of wealth.

The documentary book entitled *Kurdistan Oil in the Ottoman Era* is an effort to dig deep into the piles of archives that reveal the untold stories about the birth of the oil industries and their role in drawing the current political borders in the Middle East. It presents a considerable number of unique maps, photographs, and handwritten documents about oil and other mineral resources in the Kurdish areas within the borders of the Ottoman Empire before its dissolution in 1923.

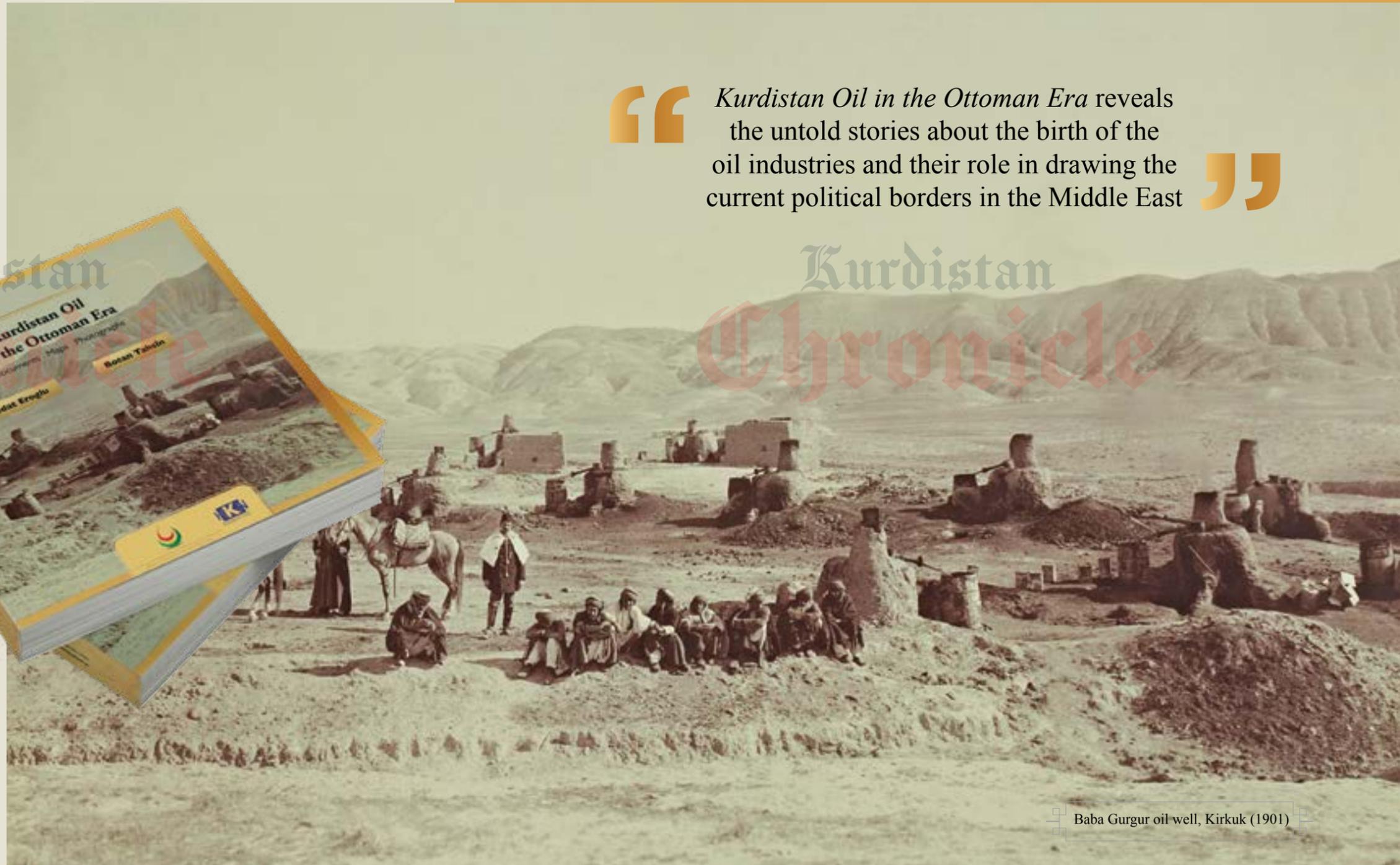
The book resulted from more than two years of extensive research by Botan Tahseen and Sedat Eroglu, who studied mountains of documents from both the Ottoman Archive and Gertrude Bell Archive. Sponsored by Kurdistan Region's Ministry of Natural Resources and HKN Energy, the book was published in 2022 in both Kurdish dialects — Sorani and Kurmanji, English, and Arabic. In 1905, then British Ambassador to Istanbul Nicholas O'Connor wrote a brief telegram to inform policymakers in London that extracting and transporting oil from the Baghdad and Mosul vilayets was possible by sea. The message marked

a turning point in the competition between Britain and Germany, as the latter was already working to transport oil by rail. Sent nine years before the outbreak of World War I, it revealed the greed of the great powers, including Britain, Germany, and France, for the oil of Kurdistan.

At that time, the Ottoman Empire was sagging under the weight of large international loans, and a major portion of its fertile lands was held under the custody of the Duyun-u Umumiye, an institution that oversaw the payment of international loans issued to

the Ottoman Empire. These financial challenges opened the arena for a fierce competition in which diplomats, major oil companies, and undercover spies were main players. One of the key actors on the ground was a German engineer identified in the documents as Grosskopf. In early

“ *Kurdistan Oil in the Ottoman Era* reveals the untold stories about the birth of the oil industries and their role in drawing the current political borders in the Middle East ”



Baba Gurgur oil well, Kirkuk (1901)

Oil refinery in Shargat (1901)



1900, the Civil List of the Ottoman administration hired Grosskopf to survey the oil reserves and prepare a map of the oil fields across the vast areas of Kurdistan. In October 1901, Grosskopf submitted his first report to Abdulhamid II's office, which consisted of only three pages.

valuable source of statistics. The population of each Kurdish town, their religious and ethnic diversity, number of households, mosques, churches, synagogues, public baths, shops, police stations, and army headquarters are all accounted for based on official archival documents.

Less than five months later, on 5 March 1902, Grosskopf asked for permission to leave his duties, citing familial issues that required him to return to Germany. In fact, the real reason for his sudden trip was to deliver the large cache of maps and documents that he had prepared about the oil reserves of the Ottoman Empire. He shared the most minute details of his research with the company that was then planning to construct the Berlin-Baghdad Railway. This was a perfect heads-up for the company which soon after studying the documents asked Abdulhamid II for permission to explore oil for one year.

Finally, the book details the process of archive building in the Ottoman era. Since the empire's beginning, the documents and correspondence in the Ottoman Archive were quite significant; every detail about Ottoman territorial expansion is preserved in them.

The Ottomans, we know, would immediately register every new land that they controlled, keeping the documents to testify to the state's ownership.

This, together with several other turns of events in early 20th century, profoundly shaped the long-term strategies that Britain, Germany, and France later prosecuted in the Middle East. In other words, the oil-rich lands of Kurdistan and Western power's interest in these massive resources were one of the key factors that drove decisions in different European capitals.

The archive also includes imperial decrees, administrative rulings, court verdicts, official correspondence, treaties with other states, relationships and obligations of the state and citizens towards one another, and more. There are nearly 150 million official documents from the "Paper Treasury" of the Ottoman Empire, and this book was the first step to bring some of them to the light for historians, policymakers, and anyone interested in authentic documents that once determined the fate of millions of people.

To prove this point, the book's co-authors underline another key player, who is rather a familiar name for the Kurds: Mark Sykes, best known as the architect of the Sykes-Picot Agreement that demarcated the Middle East region between France and Britain. Before becoming British Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Sykes used various identities to travel for 15 years between Mosul, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah, and Aleppo. These lands later became central in the long negotiations between Britain and Turkey that led to the Treaty of Lausanne.



The documents presented in the book prove that certain territories that are currently disputed between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Federal Government of Iraq are indeed the ancestral lands of the Kurds. Those areas mainly lie in today's Nineveh, Kirkuk, Salahaddin, and Diyala provinces, which back then fell within the administrative borders of the Mosul and Baghdad vilayets. Kurdistan Oil in the Ottoman Era is also a



Baba Gurgur oil wells (1901)



Sidik and the Panther In the Middle of Time

Firat Yucel



If Reber Dosky's *Sidik and the Panther* (2019) is a documentary about nature, we shall start to tell the story from the middle. Not the beginning or end, but the midway or in the midst of. For that nature, these mountains, these trees, these animals have no beginning or an end. Or rather let's say, the idea of beginning and end is unknown to them.

Sidik and the Panther, in all its visual representations of the mountains of Kurdistan in northern Iraq, makes the viewer keenly aware of this insight. Dosky along with his companions on this journey - the talented cinematographer Roy van Egmond, the sound recorders, and the film's star Mohammed Sidik Barzani, who has been searching for a leopard for 25 years in these mountains - are all in a way passers-by. They are not the beholders of this story for that the leopard was here before them, has seen many of the things they haven't seen.

So, let's start somewhere from the middle of the film, where something unexpected happens. We hear the voice of the director, one of the eyes behind the camera. It's unexpected because until this point, the film carries an observational style: we don't feel the existence of the film crew or the camera until this moment, when the film reflects its craft.

Dosky asks Mohammed Sidik for a favor: "could you write something for me?" He then tells him about his grandfather, and Mohammed Sidik writes in his small notebook: "On the White Mountain, near Zakho and the village, near the spring..."



This is the place where the Ba'athists, Saddam Hussein's troops, killed Mehemo Rasho, the director's grandfather, and the other peshmerga who were fighting alongside him on January 24, 1975.

Perhaps not the exact spot, but there's no need for an exact spot: the mountains are broad, absolute, and timeless. And in these infinite hills, Dosky's story is not the first one we hear. Many people that Mohammed Sidik and the film crew encounter on the way share similar stories of longings, aspirations, and expectations from future.

We also see people mourning, next to real or symbolic gravestones. Each have their own rituals of commemoration. A teacher visits the spring that his late father used to visit. An elderly man talks about his father and two brothers who disappeared in 1975. He talks about Kurdish people who were killed by Ba'athists, who have no graves, not even memorials.

Through these encounters, Mohammed Sidik becomes more like an intermediary between these

stories and the viewer, rather than a protagonist in a pursuit. Just like Mohammed Sidik, who records wild animals with "trap cameras" carefully installed on trees, the film positions itself as a medium for sharing the stories of the people encountered on the way.

The patient editing of the film (by Stefan Kamp) confirms this by investing time in the gestures of salutation and farewell. Every time the conversation comes to an end between Mohammed Sidik and his interlocutor, what would have been most probably cut from another documentary fills the screen and the filmic time, namely the point of departure between two men saying goodbye to each other after a satisfying conversation.

All the people who Mohammed Sidik meets on the mountain are men, yet there's also a beautiful

scene, in which women sing an elegy and tens of women lament for the dead and dance on the hills. Just after this scene, we hear lines from Mohammed Sidik's notebook: "Water flows from our springs... Nightingales sing to the flowers... And the bees will make honey... The leopard with its black spots will surely soon return..."

Sidik and the Panther is surely a film about the beauty of nature. But not just the beauty of course. It's also about interdependency between humans, animals, and nature and how this is torn apart not just by industrial capitalism but also by the war technologies that go hand in hand with it.

The leopard does not signify the unspoiled nature, it is not a cry out to a form of primitive fantasy or a dream of a preindustrial time filled with nostalgia. It is rather a symbol of utopic imagination, a future with no wars on Kurdish mountains and no nation-states benefiting from it.

This at times paints the film's depiction of nature with a tone of romantic holism. Concepts like revival, rejuvenation, and spring are utterly

attached to the possible appearance of the leopard, as if it is a kind of 'animal messiah' for Kurdish people.

Yet amidst this utopianism, *Sidik and the Panther* never cuts its ties with irony - in one scene, a young man wags his finger at the landscape and asks Mohammed Sidik, "can this beauty find me a job?" - and materiality. As Mohammed Sidik points out regularly, his search has a useful goal: if it is proved that his homeland has leopards, it can be declared as a national park, and in that case, Mohammed Sidik hopes, "nobody would dare bomb it."

That is also perhaps why the film has, so to say, a "scientific" ending in contrast to its lyrical tonalities. Near the end, we see two men arguing: Mohammed Sidik and a hunter chasing goats. He asks the hunter, "do you want to destroy all this again? This

All the people who Mohammed Sidik meets on the mountain are men, yet there's also a beautiful scene, in which women sing an elegy and tens of women lament for the dead and dance on the hills.





place our ancestors protected and our enemies destroyed?" and confiscates his gun by force.

At this point, Dosky masterfully shifts the narrative. We suddenly see a woman on her own, standing on the same rocks on which Mohammed Sidik had stood, installing trap cameras just like him. All of a sudden, we find ourselves out of the mountains, watching an academic presentation by the same woman, Hana Raza, an expert on wild animals researching the Persian leopard in the Zagros mountains.

Though it is not a just change in scenery. With Raza's words, the rhetoric shifts from finding the leopard to the return of the leopards. "When I was sure the leopard was back, I felt a period of peace and stability was coming back," Raza says. In her words the human is no longer at the center, the searching is no longer the precursor of things to come.

In line with Dosky's previous documentary *Radio Kobani*, which focuses on the reconstruction of life in Kobane after the defeat of ISIS, *Sidik and the Panther* also engages with the idea of a new beginning.

Yet all in all, it is the sudden but elegant semantic shift between destruction and revival, ideal and material, return and search, man and woman, human and post-human, and values attached to these concepts that challenge our presumptions. This makes the film not just a poetical but also a political tale about nature and hope.

When the film ends, one feels that we are not approaching the apocalypse, but rather somewhere in the middle of time, and the wish for peace in the Kurdistan Region and the Middle East is just a step, not forward, not backward, just a small step.

Firat Yucel is a film critic and a filmmaker. He co-founded Altyazı Monthly Cinema Magazine in 2001, and worked as the magazine's editor in chief since then. He co-directed Kapalı Gişe (Only Blockbusters Left Alive, 2016), worked as the co-editor of the documentaries Welcome Lenin and Audience Emancipated: The Struggle for the Emek Movie Theater in 2016. In 2019, he co-directed Heads and Tails with Aylin Kuryel.



Kurdistan
Chronicle

Wildlife of Kurdistan

The Kurdish Bezoar ibex or “wild goat” or “Zagros ibex” (*Capra aegagrus*) is a widespread species of goat, with a distribution ranging from Europe and Asia Minor to central Asia and the Middle East. The ancestor of the domestic goat, in the wild, these goats live in herds of up to 500, but males are solitary.

Female goats go through a period called estrus when they are ready to reproduce. During this time, both genders enter a period of the breeding cycle in the fall called the rut, when they are ready to mate, and old males drive younger males away from the maternal herds.

The gestation period averages 170 days with females usually giving birth to one kid. Kids can follow the mother almost immediately after birth and are weaned after six months. Female goats reach sexual maturity at 12-22 years, males at 3 -4 years. They weigh 30-120 kg and are 65-90 cm tall and 120-150 cm long. Their lifespan can be 12-22 years.

Dore, Barzan Area, Kurdistan

Photos ▸ Sabr Dri



Kurdistan
Chronicle



Geological Secrets of the Zagros Mountains in the Kurdistan Region

Renas Ismael Koshnaw

Geoscience deals with the processes that control the development of Earth and distribution of specific rock types at selected locations. It is the key to locating new resources and identifying new reserves, and exploiting them in an optimal way.

At the same time, investment in research boosts innovation, advancement in science, and economic growth. As a leading example, U.S. expenditure on science was \$656 billion in 2019, much of which came from the private sector. Such investment also yields a highly skilled technical labor force, the engine for growth in today's economy.

Despite more than 100 years of oil discoveries and nearly 20 years of hydrocarbon exploration, it is still challenging to demystifying the geologic evolution of the Zagros Mountains of the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Yet this challenge provides opportunities for new discoveries and revisions of previous geologic interpretations.

As one plate goes beneath another one along the convergent margin, magmas and fluids are released from the downgoing plate. The ascending material interacts with its medium and makes its way to the surface as volcanoes. During this process, fluid-saturated melts may rest in the upper part of crust

(less than 10 km from the surface) and precipitate minerals during heat loss over time.

As the collision of two plates intensifies, rock layers deform, mountains form, and the earth's crust thickens. Meanwhile, the erosion of mountain tops and deposition in the adjacent deflected lands form sedimentary basins.

The consensus regarding such convergent plate boundaries is that, even though they might be associated with natural hazards, they host a considerable amount of natural resources such as metallic minerals and hydrocarbons. However, to properly identify resources and mitigate the effects of natural hazards at convergent margins, understanding the timing and mechanisms of mountain formation is essential.

For instance, determining the timing of the engagement of the basement – the hard rock beneath sedimentary rocks – in the process of deformation helps to elucidate the timing of hydrocarbon migration and the spatial distribution of petroleum systems in terms of their construction

and destruction. The inaccurate presumption of stacked, faulted sedimentary rocks via duplexing versus basement-cored deformation could lead to misidentification of petroleum plays.

Constraining the timing of individual structures and the overall progression of the fold-thrust belt is also critical for evaluating petroleum-system processes, including assessing the relative timing of the formation of structural traps, as well as hydrocarbon generation and migration, to avoid drilling dry holes.

The Zagros Mountains are a prominent collisional orogen that stretches for roughly 2000 km across the Middle East, which formed over roughly 70 million years ago as a consequence of the Arabia-Eurasia convergence involving the subduction of the Neotethys oceanic plate beneath Eurasia and a subsequent collision of the Arabian and Eurasian continental plates.

This long period of deformation resulted in an amalgamation of different terranes between the Arabian and Eurasian plates. Since each tectonic

Kurdistan Chronicle

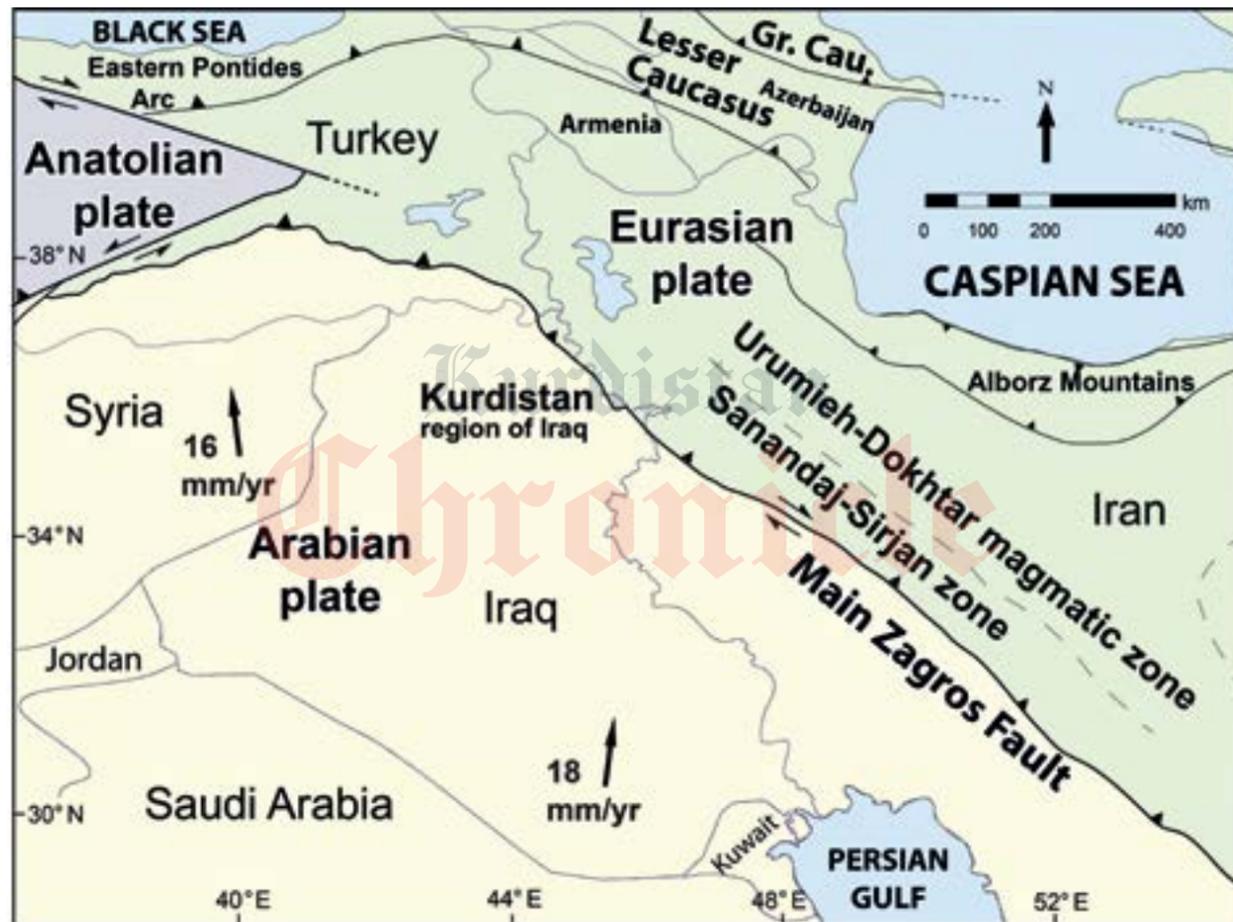
Kurdistan Chronicle

accretion process overprinted the preceding configuration, reconstructing how the present-day Zagros Mountains were formed is daunting.

Geologically, the Kurdistan region of Iraq is the northwestern part of the Zagros belt, a strategic location where the Arabian and Eurasian tectonic plates met for the first time 30 ± 5 million years ago. The area along the Iraq-Iran border is the suture of the two plates and includes rock masses that originally formed at 10s of kilometers deep and at

After the development of a subduction zone within the Neotethys Ocean roughly 115 million years ago, piles of rocks from the Earth's lower crust and upper mantle were emplaced on the northeastern margin of the Arabian plate roughly 70 million years ago. Eroding sediments from the uplifted rocks shed on the newly formed land depression adjacent to the rocks as evidenced from the detrital zircon provenance data and detrital zircon (U-Th)/He ages.

Afterwards, for about 30 million years, magmatic



various geologic settings within oceanic and along continental plates.

In recent years, researchers have shed new light on the geological development of the Zagros belt in the Kurdistan region by using cutting-edge technologies in geochronology and thermochronology to understand the order and style of events that shaped present-day geology. Fieldwork supported by laboratory analysis of rock samples also permitted testing new ideas.

activity escalated along the Eurasian plate margin. Remnants of these rocks are partially preserved in the Arabia-Eurasia suture zone. The fingerprint of this magmatic activity is also indicated by the detrital zircon geochronological and thermochronological data from sedimentary rocks.

Starting between 26 and 36 million years ago, a significant reduction of magmatism was observed. Supported by evidence, this period represents the timing of the collision between the Arabian and



Eurasian plates from the beginning to the complete suturing in the NW Zagros. After the collision, the Zagros collisional zone underwent uplift and erosion starting about 22 million years ago. Later, between 4 and 14 million years ago, a further enhanced uplift of mountains took place from the mountainous area toward the interior of the Arabian plate.

Fine tuning these events and revealing the details of each process, will help better understanding geological concepts and identifying potential areas for mineral accumulation in associated extinct magmatism. Field observation shows widespread igneous and metamorphic rocks in the suture of

Arabia and Eurasia. As an example, among other metallic minerals, existing preliminary investigations show indicators of copper (Cu) deposits occurrence, a much-needed mineral for future green technologies.

In short, the imperative to optimize the utilization of natural resources and secure new reserves for sustainable growth necessitates investing in geoscience scientific research.

Dr. Renas Ismael Koshnaw, is a postdoctoral researcher at Georg-August-University Göttingen, Germany.

Mountains of Kurdistan The Switzerland of the Middle East for Hiking

Many people around the world visit mountains for a unique opportunity to get in touch with nature and think deeply about themselves. Mountains can also be places where farming and raising herd animals is the main source of income.

For Kurds, however, a mountain signifies far more than a physical elevation change.

Mountains are existential to Kurdish people, as they have historically been vital to their revolts against tyrants. The Kurds have an old saying that they “have no friends except the mountains.” Another goes, “Kurds’ home ends where the mountains end.”

Kurdistan mountain names are popular names for Kurdish children, including Halgurd, Safeen, Mateen, Shereen, Zagros, and Bestoon. The mountains in Iraqi Kurdistan are quite jagged

and rocky with lots of valleys where rivers wind and waterfalls reside.

The Kurds’ connection to their mountainous terrain never seems to change no matter how much Kurdish society evolves. Yet, with relative peace and stability since 2003, the Kurds discovered that their attachment to the mountains extended beyond survival and recreation, as mountaineering and hiking have grown in popularity in recent years.

Spring and autumn are ideal seasons for hikers to trek in the Kurdistan mountains. Rock climbing and caving are growing rapidly in popularity, but professional mountaineering is still in its early stages.

Kurdistan has several 3500-meter peaks, and has become a stepping stone for professional mountaineers to train and gain experience before

attempting to climb larger mountains in other countries.

Ari Othman and his wife Hawzhin have climbed Kyrgyzstan’s Lenin and the Himalayas’ Manaslu and describe the burgeoning scene in Kurdistan.

“Rock climbing is growing in Kurdistan. We have more than 20 climbing routes in Erbil’s Safeen Mountain and even more in Sulemani’s Hazar Merd Mountain. Many climbers participate in advanced climbing, such as multi-pitch climbing,” Ari Othman said.

Othman, on the other hand, explained that the lack of good mountaineering and climbing teaching organizations has caused Kurdish mountaineers to lag professionally. As a result, mountaineers lack the basic skills required to climb difficult and technical routes, particularly during the cold seasons, while mountain rescues are scarce.

“If a climber becomes lost or injured, the situation can rapidly escalate into a life-threatening one. Though most of the mountains in Kurdistan have



Mountaineers climbing

cell phone coverage, calling for emergency services only connects you to the police, who are woefully unprepared for such a situation,” Othman added.

“There were only about 10-20 hikers in 2015, but now we have over 100 hiking groups with over 7,000 members,” Othman concluded.



A group of hikers in the mountains of Soran, Kurdistan Region

Most hikers avoid the riskier areas, especially those with dormant landmines. During the 1980s, the former Iraqi regime planted thousands of explosives in the Kurdistan Region and other disputed territories to impede Iranian troop advances, particularly along the two countries' shared border.

In addition to connecting with nature and savoring Kurdistan's breathtaking scenery, hiking in Kurdistan allows you to experience the rich and welcoming Kurdish culture, none more special than in its mountain communities.

Rock Climbing

Halgurd Mountain

Mount Halgurd is the most recognizable and the highest peak in the country at altitude 3606m, Fresh mineral water running down the mountain springs and so many nomads living in the mountain lowlands.

Sakran Mountain

Sakran mountain is considered as the most technical mountain to climb in the region, it requires advanced mountaineering skills like ice axe and ropes. One of the most striking things about Sakran is its crater lake, located right on the summit. After

Kurdistan has several 3500-meter peaks
There were only about 10-20 hikers in 2015, but now we have over 100 hiking groups with over 7,000 members.

one or two days of climbing, the moment that you reach the summit, the wondrous nature in front of you will make you forget how tired you are of climbing.

Barzan

Protecting and maintaining the aspects of wildlife is a must for people's lifestyles in Kurdistan's mountainous Barzan area. Traditions remain valuable even in the wake of modern agriculture with traditional habits going back a century. Locals prioritize the safety of wildlife from recreational



hunters, including threats from mountain goats who are not deterred by people's presence.

Some of the activities that are becoming more common include; Rafting and kayaking are some of the most popular activities, prompted by the increased interest in outdoor recreational activities, rafting has become widespread as well. The beautiful river in Barzan, has attracted the frequent participation of locals and tourists.





A Homage to Kurdish Tea

Judit Neurink

Imagine the embers of a smoldering fire, a blackened metal tea pot in the middle, a bird singing nearby, mountains rising around you, perhaps even an orange sun setting behind one, and then a glass of tea, brewed patiently with the smoke of the fire.

For a tea drinker like me, this is an enormous gift, one that as you can see brings fond memories. The best picnic in Kurdistan ends with a sweet, strong, and smoky tea.

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq is my tea paradise. It is the place where tea is always ready to be served, even at the front lines. When I visited the Kurdish

frontlines with ISIS near Bashiqa a couple of years ago to talk to one of the generals, there came the tea, fresh and hot. As was the case in most of the offices I visited to speak to government officials, managers, and directors.

Kurdistan is a place where they know how tea should be made. Good *chai* is made from the best leaves that are put in a pot with cold water, brought to a boil, and then allowed to boil for a minute.

Sometimes cardamom is added to enhance the taste and the smell. A pot of hot water is placed on top of the teapot to water down the brew, so every tea drinker can have it at just the right strength.



Photo ▶ Safin Hamid

The best tea I ever had was made by Hassan, my Iraqi student from Baghdad who lived for a year in the media center I led in Sulemani. He knew exactly how I liked my tea: freshly brewed and without sugar, so not too strong. He had made it his task to provide us in the office with a fresh pot at least once every day.

This kind of tea you should drink from a glass, preferably a thin one, or *istikhan*, that attractive little belly-shaped glass, often with gold around

tea that isn't too light? Or a strong one with a tiny bit of sugar – and not the one heaped spoon that he or she considers as a 'little sugar'?

Tea boy – oh yes, in Kurdistan that really is a job, mostly for men and very often for young men or boys. Often, they are so attractive that I have been wondering if they were selected based on their looks. Many offices have such tea boys. For when a visitor enters there, the rules of hospitality dictate that he or she is welcomed with a freshly poured tea.



Photo ▶ Safin Hamid

Group of men drinking tea in famous Mam Khalil chaykhana, Erbil

the rim and sometimes with the glass painted over. It stands on a small but deep saucer, which could be from matching glass but more often is made of white porcelain.

The pouring of the tea starts with a couple spoons of sugar, which is when the struggle that I associate with tea in Kurdistan begins.

The tea is so strong that it requires sugar, but I prefer my tea pure. Moreover, I cut sugar out of my diet years ago. So how do I get the tea boy or the host to pour me sugar-free, light

Where the West has its cafes, Kurdistan has its *chaykhanas*, tea shops where the male owner pours tea from big steaming pots. Mostly, these are places

for me to meet and chat over tea or hot creamy milk. Women may drink tea together at home. But when I go into a *chaykhana* with a friend, we are usually welcomed warmly, and even more so if I order another and yet another glass of tea,

which I usually do as a tea addict.

Perhaps that is where my love for the Kurdistan

Kurdistan is a place where they know how tea should be made.



Photo ▶ Safin Hamid

Kurdistan Chronicle

The famous Machko chaykhana around Erbil citadel

Region started. With the glasses of tea that always appear when I arrived for an interview or a social visit. Usually, in those offices with the long couches around the walls, a bottle of water is offered before the tea.

Nowadays, you may also be offered coffee depending on the hour.

Coffee is a beverage I do not consume. Be it Arabic coffee, filter coffee, or instant, I like the smell but not the taste. So, when it appeared on the side table next to me during an interview, I faced a dilemma. It is impolite to refuse – and being polite is an important part of the local cultural code – yet I find it just as impolite to ignore that coffee next to me, which often has been made with just as much love as the tea.

The solution I found is to apologize profusely for the fact that I do not drink coffee. Usually, I am then offered the tea I was already pining for. Kurdistan is my country because it is a country for tea drinkers.

And the locally offered tea is of a good quality, not with funny additives and tastes, not the Moroccan way with mint, and not brewed too long and made bitter like in Turkey.

Although, with outside changes and the influences, ‘teabag tea’ entered Iraq long ago. Sometimes you will even be presented with the choice: *chai* or teabag tea. Teabag tea comes in a cup or mug of course, and the bag would suffice for a whole pot in my home country, the Netherlands.

But in Kurdistan and Iraq, one bag is just enough for a strong cuppa, assuring that the dark brown color will be achieved. And never with milk! I love the ritual that follows: the bag is taken from the cup with a teaspoon, and the thread is turned around bag and spoon to carefully take out all the liquid. Not a drop is wasted.

A cardinal rule for *chai* is that it must be drunk piping hot. If you are in a hurry, you can use the deep saucer to drink it so as not to burn your



Photo ▶ Safin Hamid

Mam Khalil pouring tea in istkan

mouth. Strange perhaps, in a country that has such a hot climate most of the year. And yet, the iced tea that is popular in the West though available is not very popular here.

In Kurdistan, tea is a beverage for all situations, unlike in my own country, where it might be drunk at breakfast and in late afternoon and leads to roughly 700 cups per person per year. In Iraq, the number is at least triple. I was not really surprised to see that the *chaykhanas* in Mosul were amongst the first shops to reopen after the recent war there.

When I travel from Kurdistan and Iraq back to my present home country, I always take packets of tea that I buy in local supermarkets. And in my handbag, I carry a few teabags to make sure that I do not have to drink the green or healthy mountain tea that is mainly served here. That’s why, at this moment, a freshly brewed bag of tea from Kurdistan is at the side of my desk.

Judit Neurink is a Dutch journalist and writer who lived and worked in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq from 2008 to 2019.

Duhok Film Festival Brings Art to Refugee Camps

Sardar Sattar

Last December, more than 300 artists and film critics arrived in Kurdistan to gather for the 2022 edition of a prestigious international film festival in Duhok, a city that has not only hosted the event for the past 12 years but also sheltered nearly one million Syrian refugees and Iraqi displaced families since 2014 when the Islamic State (ISIS) took over swaths of territories in Iraq and Syria.

The theme of this year's Duhok International Film Festival was thus "migration," to bring attention to the suffering of migrants and refugees to artists worldwide and, more importantly, the international community and global policymakers.

What made this year's event unforgettable was the screening of several films inside the Domiz 1 Camp. A few days before the opening ceremony, a large inflatable screen, projector, and roughly 200 red velvet theater seats were installed in a hall, transforming it into a temporary cinema for residents of the refugee camp. The hall had originally been used for weddings and funerals - this time it was to witness the excitement of young boys and girls born as refugees who were experiencing real cinema with massive screens and high-quality sound systems for the first time.

Located on the outskirts of Duhok, Domiz 1 Camp is home to over 30,000 Syrian refugees making up 7,200 families. Duhok province to date hosts more than 250,000 refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP).

The city has made a name for itself after welcoming waves of desperate families looking for refuge in



the Kurdistan Region after ISIS emerged in Syria and crossed into Iraq in 2014. Shawkat Amin Korke, the artistic director of Duhok International Film Festival, said in a recent interview that they decided to screen some of the Kurdish feature films in the Domiz 1 camp in order to create a bridge between refugees and the festival.

With millions of Ukrainians scattered around Europe and millions more around the Middle East still

Children who were born in refugee camps experienced watching films on a big screen for the first time.

risking their lives to reach Europe, Korke said that the global challenge of migration inspired this year's festival. "Because of all the things that

that accept films from all over the world. Every year, films from the festival's Kurdish and World Cinema Competition are up for several awards.

Winning films are chosen by the section jury and awarded with 18 different titles in different competition circles including World Cinema, World Documentaries, World Shorts, Kurdish Cinema, Kurdish Documentaries, Kurdish Shorts, NUHAT, Duhok City Award, and Fipresci World City Award.

Since its first edition, the festival has premiered over 1,200 films and hosted more than 1,500 guests from around the world. Its organizers have had to cancel the event twice - once in 2014 when ISIS took Mosul and announced its barbaric so-called Caliphate in Mosul only 75 kilometers away from Duhok, and then in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The festival, despite its challenges, plays a leading role in promoting Kurdistan

and Duhok as locales with an international orientation and ethos have become a registered member of numerous international institutes, organizations, and events.



Photos ▶ Zavar Babiri

have happened in this part of the world, because migration has been steadily rising in recent years, because in our region there are many refugee and displacement camps, because of the war in Ukraine, migration is a universal theme," Korke said.

The festival had other, unforeseen joys for some living in the region's camps. With the festival attracting many foreign and Kurdish filmmakers to Duhok in recent years, many have returned to shoot movies in the area's stunning nature, offering opportunities for some of the refugees and IDPs to play roles in different films and connect with well-known local and international directors and producers.

The Duhok International Film Festival features several categories





Kurdish Music Tunes Imbued with National Sentiment

Argun Çakır

The Kurds gained international renown, rather sadly, through wars—be it ones waged against them or they themselves launched for their freedom.

Most recently, they appeared on the world scene through their fierce fighting against ISIS in Syria.

In the four nation-states that came to control the Kurdish homelands following World War I, the experiences of the Kurds have been commonly characterised by severe violence, both symbolic and physical.

For over a century, Kurds have been endeavouring to improve their situation politically while fostering group solidarity by constructing an image of themselves that imbues them with strength, patience, and perseverance. Among other things, this process involved elevating elements of Kurdish culture to the level of national symbols. One of these elements has been music.

The Kurdish elite in the late 19th century who pioneered Kurdish nationalism in the modern sense cited various elements of culture, including literature, myths, proverbs, and legends in their claims for nationhood.

However, music did not capture ideological attention in this way until later in the twentieth century when it was celebrated as a prime element of national culture. From then on, for musicians playing and recording folksongs and for their audiences, the simple act of listening to them became a literal performance of Kurdishness and a demonstration of allegiance to the cause of emancipation.

For the Kurds, the significance of music goes deeper than developing into a performative medium for Kurdishness. Music itself played a vital role in the rise of national sentiment among the Kurds.

From the 1930s onwards, songs invoking the Kurds and Kurdistan were broadcast on the radio across a vast geography, routinely traversing national borders. These songs further consolidated the idea of the Kurdish nation in the minds of their audiences.

Later, in the 1960s, music became a means to enlist support to the burgeoning Kurdish political resistance. It is important to remember that musicians who performed in Kurdish, regardless of their repertoire, risked persecution by state authorities with some even paying for it with their lives.

Music had seldom been devoid of political sentiment for the Kurds. Some of the most prestigious genres of Kurdish oral tradition were based on actual historical events and spoke of the feats of traditional leaders who fought as much

among themselves as with the military forces of nation-states.

These genres, which were fashioned after laments musically, were generally regarded as reactionary by Kurdish left-wing organizations of the 1960s and 1970s and thus excluded from nation-building efforts.

In the 1990s, however, they not only met a renewal of interest, but began being exalted as the authentic forms of Kurdish musical and literary performance as well as documents of Kurdish native history.



Music concert, Erbil citadel

Photo ▶ Safin Hamid



Tambur player

Photo ▶ Safin Hamid

This was particularly fortunate for the performers of these genres, most of whom had long lost the battle against political oppression, the disinterest of the younger generations, and the corrosive effects of television on oral performance.

These performers—commonly known by the name

contemporary online music and video concept that has caught on with many musicians.

But music is much more to the Kurds than the musical elements constituting it. For them, music has been a pillar on which Kurdish selfhood stands, a door opening to a past that is fast fading from



Photo ▶ Safin Hamid

dengbêj—now sit in the highest echelons of Kurdish culture and are mythologized as Kurdish Homers.

Notwithstanding music's immense significance, Kurds long remained audiences of music rather than performers. Most professional musicians in Kurdish society are talented singers and instrumental players as well as local peripatetics (in common parlance, "gipsies") or less commonly, non-Muslims.

Today, Kurdish music is a vibrant cultural domain encompassing a broad array of styles, constantly evolving in the hands of musicians of highly diverse tastes, influences, and aspirations.

Kurdish music appears in all shapes and forms, whether in recognized traditional genres and sound, put to electronic beats, or in a "mashup," a

memory, and an existential risk to even enjoy. Regardless of the paths that Kurdish music may take in the future, unless Kurds attain political stability and security as a people, music will most assuredly remain a key medium for the conveyance of Kurdish desires for freedom and an anchor of solidarity.

Argun Çakur is an anthropologist and ethnomusicologist specialising on the peripatetic mode of subsistence with a geo-cultural focus on Kurdistan. He is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Bristol, UK. For his PhD, he researched the socioeconomic transformation of peripatetic groups in the area around Mardin (Mêrdîn) in southeastern Turkey. His ethnomusicological work focuses on Kurdish sung oral literature and its performers, especially the kemaçe performance tradition around Mêrdîn

The Harmony Between Modernity and Kurdish Traditions

Rostam Aghala in His Words

Born in 1969 in Koya, Kurdistan Region - Iraq.

Graduated in 1989 from Institute of Fine Arts, Sulemani.

Director of Zamwa Gallery for 12 years.

Aghala's Key National Exhibitions

1989- First Successful Show at Media Gallery Hawler Kurdistan (shown 500 Paintings).

1992- Show at Sulemani and Koya.

1994- Show in this year at Sulemani.

1995- Show in Media Hall, Hawler.

1996- Show in Sulemani Hall (Daboka).

2008- A show in Germany Consulate Gallery.

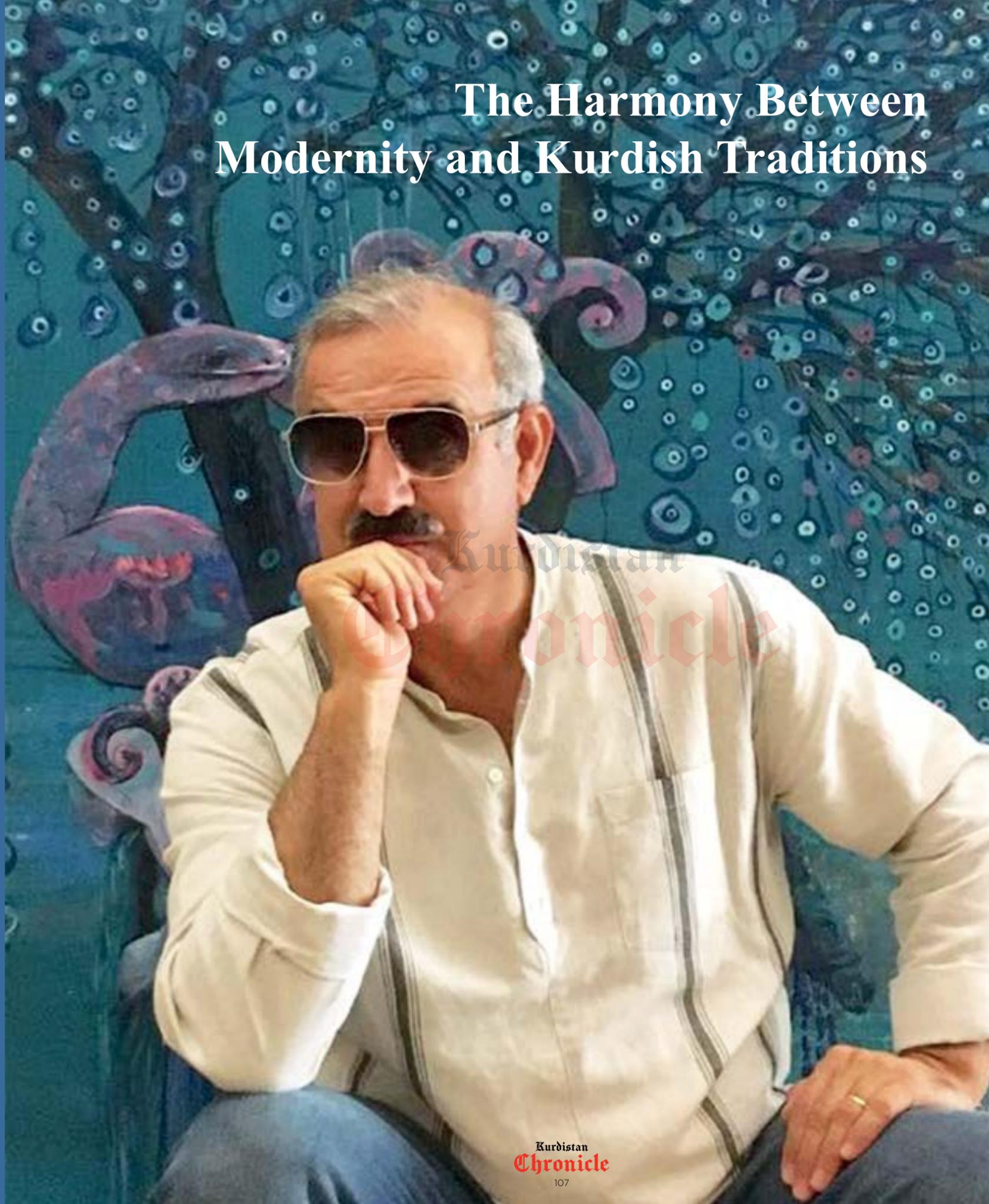
2013- Private Exhibition American Consulate in Erbil.

2018- Private Exhibition in Suleimani.

2018- Construction and Opening of the Aghala Museum in Koya (took nine years).

2020- Private Exhibition in Erbil Hotel Divan.

2022- Private Exhibition American Consulate in Erbil.





I built a wall between people and me. Not because I want to get away from society, but because I want to enjoy my paintings. I found my deepest personality in paintings and felt my deepest pain in art. In the midst of this art, I was torn to pieces. Millions of people live and die like cows and sheep without leaving skins to make cosmetics or shoes.

I want to be a cow, I want to be a sheep, whether I like it or not. Sometimes I feel like a donkey because I have to carry my stuff and set it up over and over again. For 35 years, I have been painting non-stop without thinking about what I am doing, why or how I am painting. Now that I've established my own style, I feel like I've come to the point where I don't have to be told not to draw in my own way. Whenever students who want to study art are asked how many Kurdish painters they know, most mention my name, Rostam Aghala.

My art is a carrier of national identity and human suffering in a Kurdish form, and I have painted with highly classical European techniques. The subjects of my paintings are broken, angry, and lonely Kurdish personalities. Trees in my paintings and people and birds are alive, dying, and going away. Nestless birds and burnt nests occupy a large space in my paintings.

In dozens of my paintings, the donkey struggles



To graduate from the Institute of Fine Arts, Rostam was asked to present a copy of a masterpiece. In an Iraqi magazine, he had seen a reproduction of a painting he instantly admired called Love. Without knowing the name of the artist, Rostam proceeded to painstakingly reproduce the image and present his work, which was rejected on the pretext that the artist was "not a great master."

Years later, a foreign journalist gave Rostam a book about the work of Gustav Klimt and, only then did Rostam discover the identity of the painter whom he had copied for his graduation project.



Chris Kutschera

French journalist, researcher, writer and specialist on the Middle East, with particular interest focused on Kurdish national movements.

I very much realize that if I throw my realistic figures in front of my tableaux or throw them away, they get much closer to becoming more global, although I also understand the opposite side.

My drawings are not documentaries for the sake of beauty. I have not drawn for public morale or at the request of anyone. My work has always been the result of reactions, playing with and defending the eruption of my emotional moments and instability be it intended or not. Before describing my work as beautiful, harmonious, or successful, they are telling neck-breaking stories of failure, pains, and dissatisfaction. These are the key factors behind them.

We the artists, when we reject each other as persons, belittle each other's methods. If we just look around, we realize that our audience accepts our work, and the public writes and reads about us.

Each of those famous people whom we consider as our pioneers had their own different method.

If I realize that my audiences are no more interested in my work and do not like my method, I will refrain from showing my art and try to prevent them from knowing about my art, as I will need to make that decision and conclude that I had had enough of that method and was indirectly told so.

I am not Kandinsky in trying to extract the figures of my tableau. This does not mean that I am not trying or feeling modern. Oftentimes, modern work kills the personality.

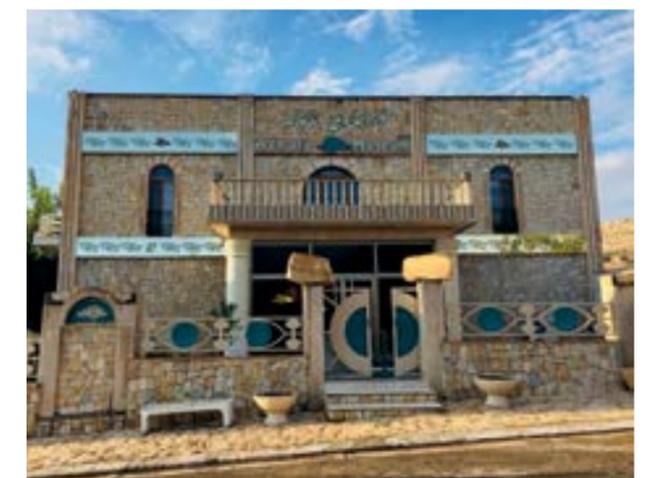
Culturally, I would like to use modern forms to benefit from other nations' cultures. If we look at

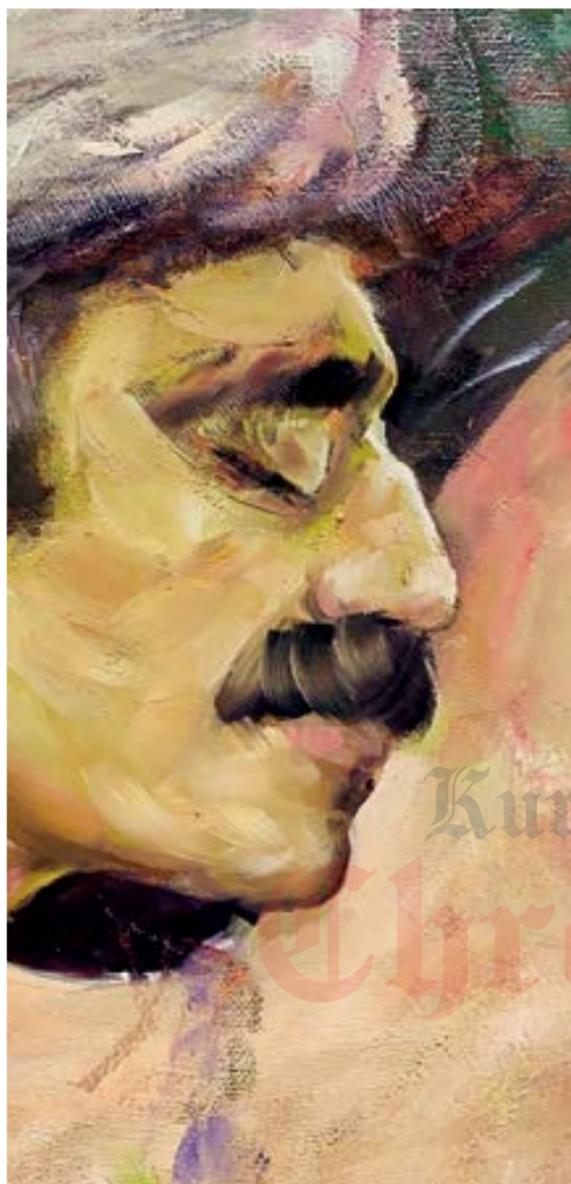
with humans and creates civilization. It is no wonder that I am the only artist in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to have my own museum to exhibit my art in Iraq. The museum is unprecedented in Iraq.

My paintings are attracting the highest prices in Kurdistan. Now, it is time to open the doors of museums and galleries so that I can exhibit my paintings. My goal is to showcase my art as a Kurdish artist in the world because my art is comparable with the best artists in the world. I want to show the pain of my soul and nation to the eyes and feelings of the people of the world. Then I want to sell my paintings at a higher price in Kurdistan.

There are numerous articles written about me, but I find them weak and focused on describing themselves while ignoring my feeling and techniques. Therefore, I am not going to repeat what has been written about me. I am not intending to write on Kurdish art, or methods of plastic art at the cost of my art.

My level of experience is at a stage where I do not care when and what to draw. I am not very much focused on which artistic theory to follow. I am also not that busy minded to search for various types of material techniques to draw a tableau but am more focused on the composition of the drawing. For me, technique and material are not the sole parts of art.





Institute of Fine Arts in Sulemani, I was trying irregular work. For example, I was using a wide piece of fine wood instead of a brush for painting my canvases. For the Halabja massacre, I opened an exhibition in one of the rooms at night in my dormitory in the Sarkarez. This building was destroyed and burned by an illiterate housekeeper burning six tires.

I also helped clean Koya's old shopping area, which was closed for 35 years. It took me two months to clean that place, which was located downtown. I found that initiative important and considered it as art, where I discovered myself through changing the past and introducing today's art.

In the 1990s, I considered goodwill initiatives, findings, and reminiscences about the past as art. Also, I considered all the hardships that I had faced in cleaning the abandoned shopping area as determination. This does not mean that I am remorseful for what I did, but I will not do it again.

That piece of work gave me a lot. The first inauguration of the shop in that town coincided with the inauguration of the first elected government in the Kurdistan Region in 1992. Now instead of cleaning an old shopping area to have an exhibition, I am building a gallery in Koya similar to it.

In 1993 I collected old and rusty oil 'Raay' cans from a neighborhood and brought them to the main busy street in Koya, despite a lack of interest or moral and material support. That type of work became a new method in all Kurdistan. As a result of that project, I was named 'Rostam Qody,' which translates to 'Rostam the can man'.

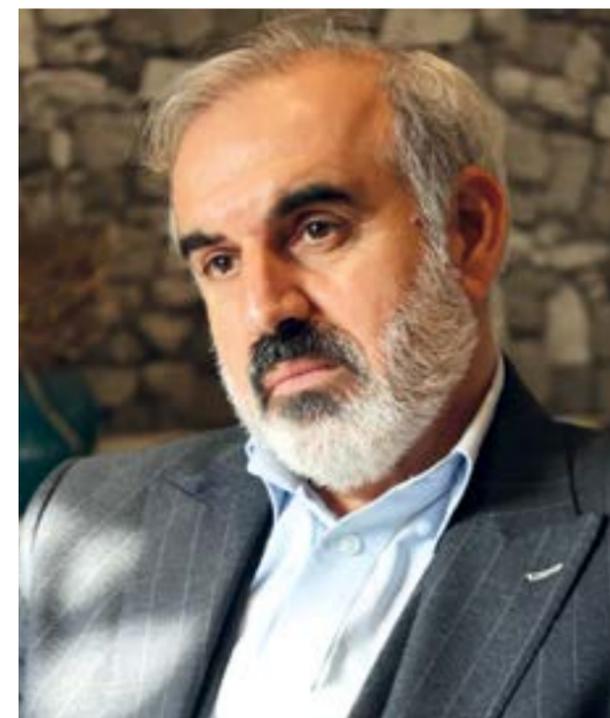
If I slightly reflect on my past, starting from the time when I was a student at the Institute of Fine Arts, I feel I did some unacceptable work.

I do not forget the summer days of my childhood when I was working on the streets in 'Shawker Village'. Those three

months I was missing the town. On the hot plains, I was listening to the sound of passing cars. Or from the top of Haibat Sultan mountain, I was watching the shining reflections of car screens, which was giving me a nice feeling that I was going back to town.

In the summer of 1980, when I was a student at the Institute of Fine Arts, I was selling farmer's hats in Sari Razh, Sulemani, Baghdad, Pirdê, and many other cities and towns across the country. I do not forget the summer of 1986 when my brother Kamal and I were working on sunflower farms in the Sarwchawa area. That was the most difficult experience of my life.

The images of that difficult experience and life during those periods have become the soul of many of my tableaus. But this does not mean that I am sharp in retaining memories.



modern artists, they have benefited from cultures beyond Europe. In Chinese and Japanese graphics, for example, they have used skeletons from Picasso's and Braque's worlds to provide color to the last moments of their lives - colors were their main work. I do not know when form leaves my work. Sometimes I use color for creating a form.

In Kurdish Fine Arts, our classical and modern art examples lie behind that history. We are growing on a digital stage, which is why our stages are empty and without results. They are all mixed but easy to separate. They are quite similar. We are at the stage of growing and ending.

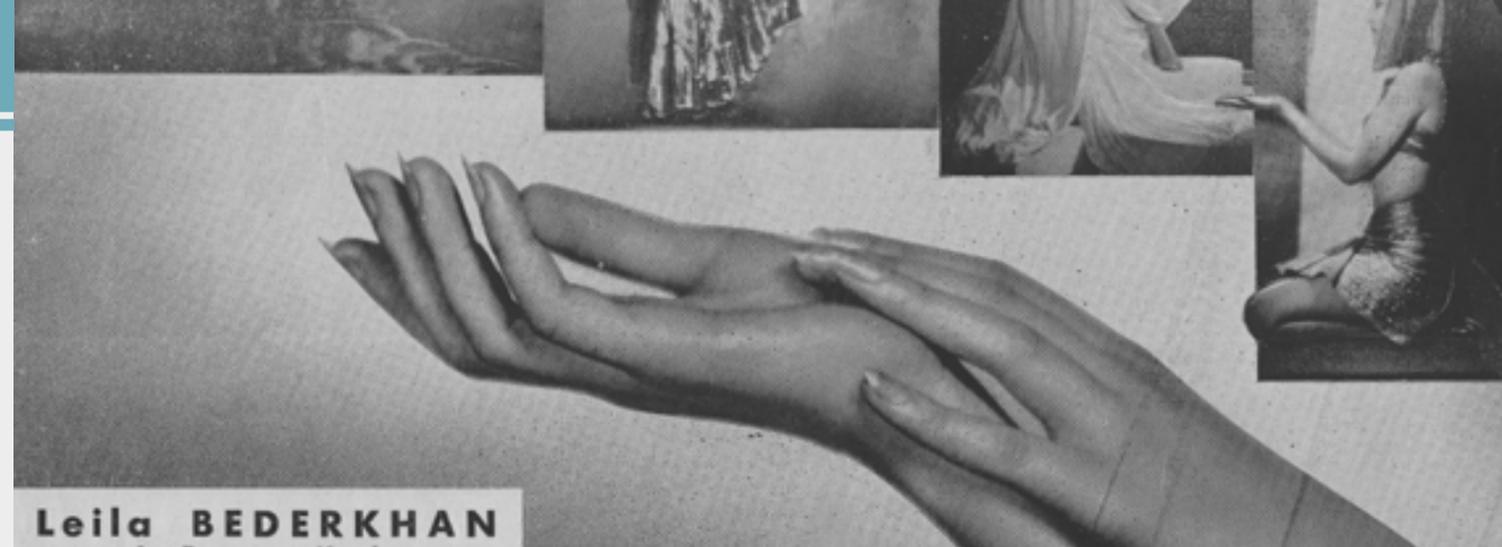
Early in the 1990s, I tried hard to modernize my work. In the 1980s, when I was a student at the



Leila

The Kurdish Princess Who Once Captivated Western Theater

Qassim Khidhir



Western journalists dubbed her "Leila of a Thousand and One Nights," "The Princess Carrying the Perfumes of Eastern Nights," "The Bright Moon of Oriental Nights," but most commonly "The Kurdish Princess and the Princess of Dancing."

Leila Bederkhan, born in Istanbul in 1903, was the daughter of Abdulrazzaq Bederkhan and Henriette Ornik, a Romanian Jewish dentist. Her father was a descendant of Bederkhan, a legendary Kurdish leader and ruler of the Cizera Botan Emirate in modern-day Turkey's southeast.

Leila and her mother fled Istanbul for Egypt when she was a baby after her parents divorced. She never saw her father again because he was involved in Ottoman disputes and later started a movement to establish an independent Kurdistan.

When she was 14, she moved from Egypt to Vienna and then to Paris, where she remained ever since. She would dance in Europe, free of family and religious constraints, drawing inspiration from her glamorous past and refashioning her cultural heritage.

Leila developed her own unique dance style, her own oriental creations. She was famous for her long arms and once stated that "hands are more expressive than feet in dancing." Her fingers and arms were described by journalists as having "calligraphy from an ancient Arabic manuscript."



Leila's stylized dances incorporated elements from Persia, Egypt, India, Assyrian, and Yezidi cultures as well as Zarathustrian of Mesopotamia and Kurdistan.

Leila went on to become a famous artist in the 1920s and 1930s. When she was dancing, she was world famous; there were many female dancers on stage, but few who danced on both sides of the Atlantic. She performed in the United States and Canada, as well as India, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Europe, including the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Romania, and Sweden. Her debut performance at The Town Hall in New York was featured in the New York Times on March 4, 1931.

Her arrival in New York made headlines, and her image appeared in newspapers and on newsreels.



Newspapers dubbed her as “The Dancing Princess” and “The Kurdish Princess.”

The highlight of Leila’s trip to America was a tulip. John T. Scheepers introduced a new tulip named for Princess Bederkhan at the international flower show in New York in 1931, as Kurdistan is one of the tulip’s original habitats.

Leila also became the first modern-day woman to dance before the Sphinx in Egypt during the reign of King Farouk.

The ballet of the leading Italian music composer Ottorino Respighi, “Belkis, Regina di Saba,” featured the Kurdish princess as “Belkis.” Belkis was one of Respighi’s most ambitious stage works, with an enormous orchestra that included unusual instruments like sitars and wind machines, off-stage brass, a chorus, several vocal soloists, and a narrator who told the legendary story in verse.

“Leila was a heroine and courageous”

Leyla Safiye, a Turkish author, is the only one who has written books about Leila Bederkhan. Inspired by her namesake, Safiye started researching and learning about Bederkhan in the 1990s. In her English-language book *Searching for Leila, The Kurdish Princess of Dance*, Safiye describes Leila as a heroine and advocator for women empowerment.

“I admire Leila for standing on her own two feet and saying what she thinks; she was a witty, intellectual, and courageous woman. Many people admired her, and not just for her dancing. She was a strong supporter of women’s empowerment and equality with men,” Safiye told the Kurdistan Chronicle.

She performed in the United States and Canada, as well as India, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Europe.



being Persian, Turkish, or Armenian, but she always insisted she was Kurdish, even when nobody really knew much about the Kurds.

“In that sense, one could say that through her dancing and interviews, she put the word Kurd in the global media,” said Safiye.

Leila is a popular Kurdish name. Many Kurds recognize Bederkhan’s name but know little about her. There is only one video of her on the Internet, less than a minute long, in which she performs a snake dance.

Despite having danced on both sides of the Atlantic, Leila had never had the opportunity to dance in her homeland.

“During the Second World War, she helped Jewish female dancers all over Europe escape the Nazis and provided them with shelter,” Safiye added. “She was an advocate for female dancers; she performed in an Indian temple to support female dancers who had lost their reputation and were being treated as prostitutes. She was a pioneer in making Eastern/exotic/interpretive dance respectful.”

In her interviews with Western media, Bederkhan said a woman has the right to shape her own life as a man has the same right to shape his. She was disappointed that women could not make full use of their rights and would give up on their careers once married.

“When she was young, Leila seemed to harbor a wise old woman within. Being an outsider sharpened one’s ability to see more clearly,” said Safiye.

The Kurdish Princess is so important to Safiye that she named both her daughter and granddaughter Leila.

Leila always went by her given name and title whenever she performed. Many mistook her for

Qassim Khidhir has 15 years of experience in journalism and media development in Iraq. He has contributed to both local and international media outlets.



Abdulrazzaq Bederkhan, Leyla Bederkhan’s father

Visit Kurdistan

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