

Kurdistan Chronicle

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KURDISTAN WARMLY
WELCOMES THE
CARDINAL OF
CHALDEAN
CHRISTIANS



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Unveiling Insights

Kurdistan Chronicle's Sixth Edition Discourse



Nahro Zagros

The latest edition of *Kurdistan Chronicle* emerges as a beacon of insightful discourse, shedding light on a myriad of critical subjects that resonate deeply within the region. As we delve into the pages of this sixth installment, we are greeted with a compendium of thought-provoking articles penned by diverse writers, spanning an array of themes encompassing current political dynamics, the rich tapestry of cultural diversity within the Kurdistan Region, captivating glimpses into history, vibrant artistic and entrepreneurial pursuits, and more.

Amidst this milestone in our young publication's journey, the readership of the magazine has experienced a notable surge, cementing our position as the preeminent English-language periodical in the Kurdistan Region. This symbiotic relationship between the Chronicle and its avid readers is a testament to the resonance of the issues we explore and the quality of content we put forth.

Coinciding with this edition is the commemoration of the current Kurdistan Regional Government's fourth anniversary. This juncture prompts a reflection on the journey undertaken by the Ninth Cabinet, which assumed office amid a tempestuous landscape of fiscal constraints and intricate political challenges. Over the past four years, the Ninth Cabinet has navigated the challenges of a global pandemic, financial turmoil, and volatile oil prices, evincing remarkable resilience and unwavering determination. Guided by the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, the Kurdistan Region has surmounted countless adversities and harnessed its latent potential across a diverse set of sectors, all oriented towards the ambitious goal of forging a stronger Kurdistan.

Within these pages, we shine light on the re-

cent accord between the Kurdistan Region and the Federal Government of Iraq concerning Kurdistan's allocation of the Iraqi budget. In addition, a poignant contribution by the British Consul General delves into the heart-rending account of the Yazidi genocide, offering emotional reflections on the importance of remembrance and justice. Hoshiyar Zobari, a venerable figure with past roles as Iraqi Foreign and Finance Minister, also lends his voice to the plight of Iraq's Christian communities, underscoring the imperative for Iraq to uphold the rights and dignity of its religious minorities.

Meanwhile, a story commanding our attention is the expulsion of the Cardinal of the Chaldean Catholic Church from Baghdad, a story that has reverberated across international media. This issue features two dedicated articles on this subject, illuminating the nuanced dimensions of this event. On July 31, we also remembered the tragic Barzani genocide from the early 1980s, when around 8,000 innocent Barzani villagers were brutally killed by the Ba'athist regime – their only crime was residing in villages around the Barzan area.

Many other articles await you within the pages of this edition, spanning the realms of culture, history, music, art, and a host of other engaging subjects that collectively render this issue a true gem in the Chronicle's six-month run. The richness of content knows no bounds, as each article adds a distinct layer of depth to the publication. From delving into the intricate tapestry of cultural diversity to unearthing the less understood narratives of history, this issue is a testament to the magazine's commitment to exploring a diverse spectrum of topics that pique intellectual curiosity.

We earnestly hope that you, our esteemed readers, find within these pages a repository of invaluable insights and perspectives. ●

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Erbil and Baghdad Strengthen Relations



Marewan Hawramy

Marewan Hawramy is a writer and he holds a Master's Degree in diplomacy and international relations.

In a series of meetings aimed at resolving key issues between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Federal Government of Iraq, significant progress has been made in ensuring the protection of the Kurdistan Region's constitutional rights.

On July 20, 2023, the KRG delegation continued its discussions with the Iraqi government at the office of the President of the Council of Ministers in Baghdad. During these crucial talks, the KRG delegation emphasized the importance of safeguarding the region's financial entitlements and its rightful share of the federal budget.

Despite concerns about certain provisions in the federal budget, the KRG delegation reaffirmed its commitment to the budget law during the meetings. This commitment was well received and acknowledged by the Iraqi government, signifying a step forward in resolving budgetary disputes and fostering cooperation.

At this crucial juncture, the agreement becomes significant since employers in the Kurdistan Region have been encountering salary delays. These delays are attributed to the Iraqi government's failure to send the Kurdistan region's share and the persisting disputes between the two governments.

Resolving salary delays

The timely resolution brought about by the most recent agreement holds immense significance as it addresses a pressing issue affecting the livelihoods of employers in the Kurdistan Region.

For a considerable period, these hard-working individuals have been enduring salary delays, directly resulting from the prolonged disputes between Erbil and Baghdad.

The protracted disagreements between the two administrations have had a direct impact on the financial stability of the Kurdistan Region, trickling down to affect the timely disbursement of salaries to employees. As paychecks were withheld or delayed, many workers experienced financial hardships, struggling to meet their daily needs and obligations.

The situation reached a critical point, with mounting frustration and concern among affected employees. Their unwavering dedication and commitment to their jobs were put to the test as they grappled with the uncertainties surrounding their financial well-being.

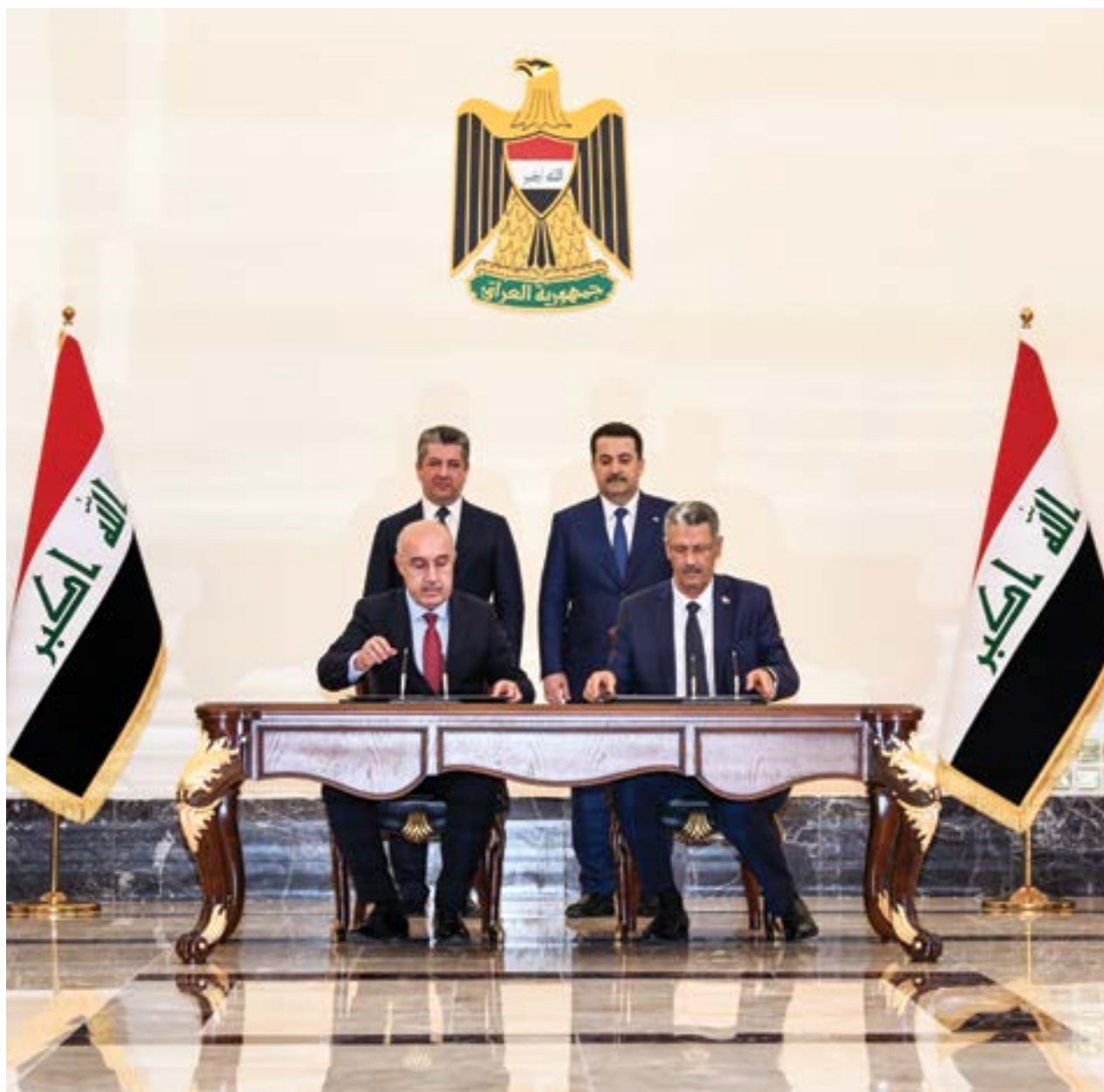
Fortunately, the recent agreement between Erbil and Baghdad offers a glimmer of hope and relief for the hard-working employers in the region. By addressing the longstanding disputes and reaching a consensus, this agreement sets a promising precedent for resolving future disagreements through dialogue and diplomacy.

With the underlying issues being tackled and a commitment to cooperation demonstrated by both parties, there is renewed optimism that salary delays will be a thing of the past. The agreement not only aims to ensure the timely disbursement of salaries but also seeks to establish a more stable and harmonious relationship between the two governments.

The positive impact of this agreement extends beyond the financial aspect; it reinforces the value of open communication and collaboration in resolving complex issues that affect the lives of countless individuals. Since the con-



Gentlemen adorned in Kurdish and Arab attire leisurely strolling outside the Erbil Citadel



Leaders from the Kurdistan Region and Iraq signing an accord concerning oil and budget disputes

cerns of employees in the Kurdistan Region are being acknowledged and addressed, a sense of trust and confidence is being restored, fostering an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect.

As the implementation of the agreement progresses, it is crucial for both governments to remain committed to its provisions, ensuring that the livelihoods of hardworking employees are safeguarded and their salaries are disbursed on time. This step forward signifies a significant milestone in the pursuit of stability, prosperity, and progress for the Kurdistan Region.

Mutual understanding

Recognizing the significance of their discussions, both sides took the initiative to sign the minutes (or notes) of the perspectives and understandings that resulted from the recent meetings. This act underscores both sides' mutual commitment to finding common ground and addressing key issues in a constructive manner.

Future dialogue

The meetings have proven to be constructive and fruitful, paving the way for future dialogues. The KRG delegation is expected to return to Baghdad for further talks in the follow-



Men representing both Kurdish and Arab heritage in their respective traditional clothing

ing week, demonstrating a willingness from both parties to engage in sustained discussions and to work towards forging lasting solutions.

Enhancing transparency

Transparency emerged as a core concern during the meetings. The KRG delegation stressed the importance of conducting an audit process to ensure accountability and openness. As part of this commitment, an auditing of the budget provisions is scheduled to take place next week, conducted jointly by Iraq's Federal Board of Supreme Audit and the KRG's Department of Financial Audit. This step will undoubtedly strengthen the financial management

process and foster transparency in resource allocation.

Positive outlook

Aumed Sabah Othman, the President of the KRG's Diwan of Council of Ministers who headed the KRG delegation to Baghdad, expressed optimism about the outcome of the negotiations. He believes that the agreement reached between Baghdad and Erbil will solidify their relationship and establish a framework for resolving future issues through dialogue and understanding.

The recent meetings also mark a significant milestone in strengthening relations and finding common ground

on contentious issues. By emphasizing constitutional rights, financial entitlements, and budgetary allocations, both parties have demonstrated their commitment to resolving disputes through constructive dialogue.

The signing of the minutes of perspectives and understandings also further cements their dedication to working together for a prosperous and harmonious future. As the audit process moves forward, enhanced transparency is expected to create a foundation for efficient resource management and accountability. With this positive progress, there is renewed hope for a more cohesive and cooperative relationship between Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. ●

UK Acknowledges Yezidi Genocide by ISIS



Rosy Cave

*Rosy Cave is the
Consul General of the
United Kingdom in the
Kurdistan Region.*

Last year, there was an exhibition of photos taken by the renowned architectural photographer and RAF officer Anthony Kersting during his time in the Kurdistan region in the 1940s at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London.

The photos captured scenes of daily life, particularly among the Yezidi community, as well as some of the traditional architecture of the region. Seen in the context of everything that has happened to the Yezidi community in the intervening years, they

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”
are heart-breaking, highlighting how much
has changed for the community.

The horrendous atrocities that the Yezidi community faced at the hands of ISIS must never be forgotten or brushed over, and efforts by all parties to redress the crimes committed against them must be redoubled.

This August marks the 9th year since the

lives and livelihoods of Yezidi families were shattered by the horrendous atrocities perpetrated against them. On August 1 of this year, the UK Government formally acknowledged that acts of genocide were committed against the Yezidi people in 2014.

This determination only strengthens our commitment to ensuring that the Yezidi people receive the compensation owed to them and are able to access meaningful justice. The hatred and intolerance that led to the killings must never again be allowed to grow in people's minds and destroy lives and livelihoods again.

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The UK Government
advocated strongly
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In May, as part of the first ever royal visit to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh met survivors of ISIS-perpetrated sexual violence from the Yezidi, Turkmen, and Shabak communities. She heard firsthand the testimony of those who suffered unimaginable cruelty at the hands of ISIS and about the ongoing challenges they face. Yezidi and other minority communities, including those that continue to be displaced, need continuing holistic support and services, including psychosocial support and skills training. Efforts need to advance to rescue the nearly 3,000 women and girls who remain missing, and solutions need to be



*In 1946, a Yezidi girl striking a pose
within the Lalish Temple, captured in the
Anthony Kersting Archive*

found for the children born of ISIS rape.

The UK Government advocated strongly for the passing of the Yezidi Survivors Law, an important first step towards assistance, justice, and accountability for survivors of the sexual violence committed by ISIS. In 2021, we funded the technical and practical implementation of the law, which will provide reparations for women from minority communities who have suffered from ISIS atrocities and conflict-related sexual violence. This year, we are providing a further £100k to develop capacity for ISIS accountability and increase survivor access to reparations and rehabilitation. The UK is continuing to listen to survivors regarding the challenges and re-traumatization they face in accessing reparations and lobbying to improve accessibility and implementation.

In parallel, the UK government has contributed £2 million to the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh/ISIS (UNITAD). We continue to champion its work in gathering evidence of crimes, including against minority communities. We also promote the Murad Code, a global survivor-centered code of conduct on gathering information and evidence of conflict-related sexual violence, helping to ensure that survivors are not re-traumatized when sharing their testimonies and contributing to achieving justice and accountability.

The UK has given over £278m in humanitarian support to Iraq since 2014, providing a vital lifeline of emergency food, shelter, medical care, and clean water to the most vulnerable in Iraq, including to minorities such as Yezidis.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) deserve to be able to return safely and securely with dignity to Sinjar. That is why the UK Government supports the implementation of the Sinjar Agreement and hopes to see a mayor appointed urgently to help manage Sinjar's reconstruction needs. As the world commemorates the 9th anniversary of ISIS' campaign against the Yezidis, the United Kingdom stands in solidarity with Yezidi and other minority communities. We will continue to support them in their fight for reparations, justice, and accountability. ●



Photo: Sufin Hamid

Kurdistan Region Welcomes Chaldean Church Leader

“the decision of the Iraqi president was wrong and not legal”.

Patriarch Louis Sako



Wladimir van Wilgenburg

Wladimir van Wilgenburg is a seasoned reporter and analyst who specializes in Kurdish affairs, and holds a Master's degree in Kurdish studies from Exeter University.

On July 21, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani warmly welcomed the Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako to Erbil, “the capital of peaceful coexistence for all religions.”

“The Kurdistan Region and the alchemy of coexistence that thrives here are sources of pride to us all. We condemn the treatment directed towards the Patriarch,” PM Masrour Barzani tweeted.

On July 12, Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid revoked Decree 147, an executive order issued by former Iraqi President Jalal Talabani in 2013 that had recognized the appointment of Cardinal Sako as the head (patriarch) of the Chaldean Catholic Church, arguing that the appointment was unconstitutional.

“This decree was issued by the former Iraqi President Jalal Talabani in 2013 after the election of his beatitude the Patriarch,” Ano Jawhar Abdoka, KRG Minister of Transportation and Communications and Representative of Christians told online new platform *White House in Arabic*.

“This decision taken by the Iraqi president will weaken the legal status of the patriarch, especially upon the Chaldean church properties, and threaten the patriarch’s

PM Barzani warmly welcoming Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako in Erbil (July 21, 2023)



Photo: Sabr Dri

status in the Iraqi community. These decrees were issued since the time of the Abbasid Caliphate, the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Iraq, and the Iraqi Republic in 1958 and until the present.”

Following his arrival in Erbil in late July, the Chaldean Patriarch met with several senior Kurdish leaders, including KRG President Nechirvan Barzani and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) President Masoud Barzani, who expressed hope that the decision would be revoked and justice would prevail.

Amir Othman, Director of Religious Coexistence Section at the KRG Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs, told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that “the patriarch views the Kurdistan Region as the only place in Iraq that would safeguard Christians and their dignity.”

“The Christians consider the Kurdistan Region a secure haven amidst the political and religious conflicts entangling Iraq, prompting them to choose to relocate there. We, in the Kurdistan Region, promote peaceful coexistence and wish for it to be a haven for every individual, irrespective of their religion.”

“

Following his arrival in Erbil in late July, the Chaldean Patriarch met with several senior Kurdish leaders, including KRG President Nechirvan Barzani and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) President Masoud Barzani

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During the meeting with President Masoud Barzani, Patriarch Louis Sako expressed gratitude for the respect and appreciation shown by the Kurdistan Region towards religious figures of different faiths and expressed his appreciation for the culture of coexistence in Kurdistan.

Patriarch Louis Sako criticized the decision by Iraqi President Rashid “as a wrong and dangerous decision that harmed Christians and contradicted the principles of coexistence and reconciliation.”

Michael Knights, fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policies (WINEP), told *Kurdistan Chronicle* that Kurdistan has since 1992 been a haven for those fleeing repression in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. “Kurdish people are famous for their hosting of refugees and now we see the most senior Christian religious figure among them.”

“Kurdistan is only a haven if Kurdish courts and security forces can protect the refugees from being seized and taken to Iraq or other countries. Exiles like Patriarch Sakho have put their full trust in the hospitality and protection of Iraqi Kurds,” Knights added.

The Christian community in Iraq has

experienced a drastic decline in numbers, plummeting from 1.5 million before 2003 to a mere 150,000 in 2023, predominantly concentrated in the Kurdistan Region.

Patriarch Sako told *Kurdistan Chronicle* in an interview after a very busy Sunday Mass in a Church in Ankawa that the decision of the Iraqi president “was wrong” and not “legal”.

“He not only offended the Chaldean community, but all Christians. This is a kind of persecution.”

Churchgoers in Ankawa warmly welcomed the Cardinal Sako, hugging and kissing him. “Here (in Erbil) people are very nice around me, they are around me, celebrating the mass. The church is full. They are very concerned about this decision and are showing me their support,” Sako said.

Sako also said that he was warmly welcomed by officials of the Kurdish government, such as the head of the Kurdis-

Miller also expressed his worries about the harassment of Cardinal Sako. “We look forward to his safe return,” he said.

“We are concerned that the cardinal’s position as a respected leader of the church is under attack from a number of quarters, in particular a militia leader who is sanctioned under the Global Magnitsky Act,” he said in reference to Rayan al-Kildani, the leader of a Christian Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) faction called the Babylon Movement, which was sanctioned by the U.S. government in 2019.

“We have engaged directly with the Iraqi Government to make our concerns clear,” he added.

Rayan al-Kildani, the head of the Babylon Movement and the Iran-backed Babylon Brigades armed group has been attempting to become a leader of the Christians in Iraq. He currently controls four of the five seats reserved for Christian MPs in the Iraqi Parliament after the most recent elections.



Photo: Wiladimir van Wildenburg

tan Democratic Party, Masoud Barzani, president Nechirvan Barzani, PM Masrour Barzani, and other ministers. “They showed me their support and solidarity.

The Chaldean Patriarch called on the international community to push the Iraqi government “to renew my decree.”

On July 18 U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew

He has also extended his influence and control in the Nineveh Plains, causing distress among Christians and leading to protests. He hopes to further expand his reach into the Christian communities in the Kurdistan Region.

Cardinal Sako has consistently voiced his strong disapproval of Rayan al-Kildani, alleging him to be appropriating assets belonging to the Chaldean Church and confiscating land of



Photo: Wiladimir van Wildenburg

Patriarch Sako engaging with the Christian community during a meeting at a church in Ainkawa, Erbil

Christians in the Nineveh Plains, while failing to genuinely represent the Christian community. There are indications that the Iraqi President's choice might have been influenced by al-Kildani's influence.

Cardinal Sako told *Kurdistan Chronicle* it is clear al-Kildani is behind the Iraqi President’s decision, with the goal “to silence me and also to put the hand on the properties of Christians.”

In May, eleven European countries and PM Masrour Barzani affirmed their support for Cardinal Sako, after he faced such attacks. Therefore, the removal of his position by the Iraqi President was viewed as a move influenced by al-Kildani.

However, the Office of the President of Iraq defended its decision and refused to revoke the decision, arguing this would be unconstitutional, and summoned the U.S. Ambassador in Baghdad.

“The Christians consider the Kurdistan Region a secure haven amidst the political and religious conflicts entangling Iraq

“The Iraqi Government’s actions against Cardinal Louis Sako, Patriarch of the Chaldean Church, sends a dangerous message about the status of Christians and other religious communities in Iraq,” Nadine Maenza, the President of the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Secretariat, told *Kurdistan Chronicle*, who recently met Sako in Erbil.

“President Rashid should immediately reinstate Decree 147 and make it clear that all religious communities are welcome and have equal standing in the country.”

She also added that it is encouraging to see that the KRG welcomed “Cardinal Sako to Erbil and offers him support and refuge.”

“If the Patriarch chooses to continue living in Kurdistan, he has every right to do so, and we will provide our full support. The Kurdistan Region is a constitutional part of Iraq, and our policies aim to ensure a secure environment for all individuals seeking to work freely here,” KRG official Amir Othman added. “We hold no conflict with any group in Iraq and strive for enduring peaceful coexistence in our communities.”

In an open letter, Cardinal Sako has vowed to stay in Erbil until the end of Iraqi President Rashid’s term in October 2026. ●

What Iraq Truly Needs from Its Christian Community?

In this article, Hoshiyar Zebari, former Iraqi foreign minister, sheds light on the pressing issue of the recent crisis between the Presidency of the Republic and the Iraqi Christian Chaldean Patriarchate, which raises fundamental questions about Iraq's expectations from its Christian community. Beyond mere curiosity, this inquiry delves into a "sovereign question" with profound implications for Iraq's national security. Zebari emphasizes that Iraqi Christians are integral to the nation's identity, playing a crucial role in shaping its political, social, cultural, and spiritual landscape.

Through his writing, Zebari draws attention to the plight of the Christian population, calling for safeguarding their presence and rights as a vital national duty.



Hoshiyar Zebari

Hoshiyar Zebari is the former Iraqi Foreign and Finance Minister, also a member of the KDP's politburo.



Photo: Adnan Barzani

The recent crisis between the Presidency of the Republic and the Iraqi Christian Chaldean Patriarchate has raised an urgent question: what does Iraq want from its Christians?

This question goes beyond mere curiosity; it carries the weight of a "sovereign question" concerning the national security of Iraq. The essence of the modern Iraqi state, as defined in its constitution, revolves around democracy, civil and federal principles, universal values, and human rights. Christians, being an integral part of Iraq's national identity, contribute politically, socially, culturally, and spiritually to the nation.

The value of Iraqi Christians

Iraqi Christians are not merely a significant numerical minority but a vibrant and dynamic community that brings

about positive change and development within the country. Their continued presence is vital for Iraq's progress and prosperity. However, Iraq has already lost many Christians due to civil violence and a failure to protect its citizens. Thus, safeguarding the remaining Christian community becomes a crucial national duty for all institutions and authorities in the country.

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Iraq has already lost many Christians due to civil violence and a failure to protect its citizens

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The new Iraq

As Iraq transitions from a repressive military state to a democratic, civil, and federal nation, it must uphold the values of inclusivity and diversity. All branches of power – legislative, exec-

President Masoud Barzani graciously receiving Patriarch Sako and other Christian leaders in Erbil

utive, and judicial – should practice positive discrimination, ensuring equal treatment for all civil components, especially those with fewer numbers. Furthermore, non-public affairs, including ecclesiastical and endowment matters, should be left to the traditional institutions of their respective components.

Protecting Christian rights

By adhering to these conditions, Iraq can become a participatory state, where no component can impose its will on another, even if it holds a majority. It will also ensure that authorities are subject to the law, with certain internal powers reserved exclusively for the component's people. These conditions do not undermine Iraq's sovereignty but rather enhance its strength and unity.

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A plea for Iraqi Christians

This call is not to defend specific Christian institutions or figures but to protect the rights and well-being of Iraqi Christians themselves, who are an integral part of the nation. Past neglect and mistreatment of this community have led to unfortunate consequences. We must recognize the vital role that Christians have played in shaping the modernity and civilization of Iraqi cities.

As someone who has experienced the diverse regions of Iraq and witnessed the contributions of Christians firsthand, I urge Iraqi politicians and leaders to prioritize the greater vision of inclusivity and protection. Calculations based on narrow interests will only diminish Iraq's rich cultural tapestry and historical wealth. ●



Photo: Safin Hamid



Photo: Safin Hamid

Patriarch Sako uniting with fellow Christians at an Erbil church for a session of prayers



Photo: Safin Hamid

Embracing Linguistic Diversity



Mohammad Dargalayi

Mohammad Dargalayi is a journalist and photographer with 13 years of experience. He is a member of IFJ Global.



Photo: Shaima Bayez

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq takes great pride in fostering a society where all religious and ethnic communities have the right to life without discrimination. Among the many factors contributing to this unique coexistence is the right to study in one's own language, a practice that has been widely embraced in the region. As a result, various communities, including the Turkmen and Syriac, cherish the opportunity to preserve their mother tongue and enrich the fabric of Kurdish education.

Sabah Salih, Head of Turkmen Education in the Ministry of Education of the Kurdistan Regional Government, highlighted

the significance of education in the mother tongue, calling it a fundamental right outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

According to Salih, the first Turkmen school was established in 1993, following a decision made by then-President Masoud Barzani. This decision was an essential step towards providing Turkmen children with an education that honors their cultural identity. "We are very happy that our children are educated in their mother tongue and learn to decide freely and enthusiastically which language to study," Salih stated. He further emphasized that the curriculum in Turkmen schools is the same as the Kurd-

ish curriculum, but thoughtfully translated into Turkish to ensure an inclusive learning experience.

Similarly, the Syriac community has been empowered by the Kurdistan Region's commitment to promoting its language and heritage. Sabah Anton, head of Syriac primary and secondary education in the Ministry of Education of the Kurdistan Regional Government, expressed gratitude for the exclusive Syriac education process offered in the region. "What has been done for us here has not been done for us in any other country in the region," Anton remarked.

He highlighted the significance of mother tongue education, stating, "Mother tongue is a legitimate right of every nation. We are happy that our children are studying in their mother tongue here. This is why the Syriac language remains alive as an ancient nation of the Kurdistan Region."

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Mother tongue is a
legitimate right of every
nation
”

Ivan Jane, a father and head of the Assyrian Cultural Center in Diyana district, Erbil province, expressed immense joy that his children are educated in their mother tongue. "It is scientifically proven that children should learn in their mother tongue from childhood, so that they can comprehend as much information as possible," Jane stated.

Reflecting on the past, he noted the oppressive practices imposed by previous Iraqi regimes, forcing the Syriac community to learn Arabic, which led to cultural disconnection. However, in the Kurdistan Region, Ivan Jane finds hope and inclusivity, stating, "What is happening in the Kurdistan Region is that we have no problems. We have never felt treated differently."

Educational institutions for Assyrian and Turkmen communities in Erbil



Photo: Mohammad Dargalayi

Multilingual education reinforces coexistence

The spirit of coexistence in the Kurdistan Region is celebrated as unparalleled, where children from different linguistic and religious backgrounds often study side by side. Sabah Anton shares a heartening example, revealing how many Kurdish Muslim children in Ankawa also study in Syriac and fluently speak the language. "The history of this coexistence goes back thousands of years in the Kurdistan Region. This is a sign of mutual acceptance," Anton remarked. He further expressed appreciation for the KRG cabinet's respectful approach towards other ethnic groups and religions, fostering an environment of harmony and acceptance.

In the Kurdistan Region, the multilingual education system stands as a beacon of inclusivity and harmony, empowering each community to embrace and preserve its rich cultural heritage. The region's unwavering commitment to linguistic diversity not only enhances the lives of its inhabitants but also sets an inspiring example for the world. Here, education in mother tongues fosters a celebration of coexistence, mutual respect, and a shared dedication to pluralism, making Kurdistan a truly exceptional corner of the world.

This exceptional approach to coexistence and the right to education in one's mother tongue holds profound significance, especially when contrasted with the challenges faced by the Kurdish nation in other parts of Greater Kurdistan, where speaking in the mother tongue has been met with great obstacles. In the Kurdistan Region, this right is not only valued but nurtured, creating an environment that honors and empowers other nations within its borders, granting them the precious gift of linguistic freedom and cultural preservation. ●

Education in the Kurdistan Region A Snapshot

- Total number of schools: **6,816**
- Total number of students: **1,755,775**
- Total number of teachers: **120,009**
- Total number of employees: **36,310**
- Number of Syriac schools: **25**
- Number of Turkmen schools: **18**
- Number of Arabic schools: **116**
- Number of Kurdish schools: **6,629**
- Number of students studying Syriac: **3,218**
- Number of students studying Turkmen: **2,399**
- Number of students studying Arabic: **35,061**

Erbil and Nashville Unveiling an Extraordinary Opportunity



Rahim Rashidi

Rahim Rashidi, a Washington DC-based Kurdish journalist, is widely recognized as "Mr. Kurd." He is focused on Kurdish affairs in Kurdistan and abroad.

"This sisterhood will improve relations between the Kurdistan Region and the United States" – Omed Khoshnaw, Governor, Erbil Province

After a decade in the making, Nashville's city council voted on July 6 to make Erbil, the capital of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), its newest sister city, marking a significant milestone as Erbil becomes the first Middle Eastern city to partner with the state capital of Tennessee.

In a statement sent to Kurdistan Chronicle, Nashville Mayor John Cooper expressed his pride in the partnership with Erbil.

"This partnership presents an incredible opportunity to strengthen cultural exchange, foster economic growth, and build lasting connections between our cities. Together, we will create a brighter, more interconnected future for both our cities. I look forward to watching our cities grow and prosper together," said Mayor John Cooper.

“

This sisterhood will improve relations between the Kurdistan Region and the United States

”

Omed Khoshnaw
Governor of Erbil Province

Mayor of Nashville addressing attendees at a ceremony in Erbil (May 2023)



Photo: Gaylan Haji

Kurdish officials participating in a ceremonial event alongside Nashville Mayor in Erbil (May 2023)

Internationally, Nashville is known as Music City, but among Kurds, it is called Little Kurdistan, as it is home to over 20,000 Kurds.

“Nashville owes so much of its strength and success to the Kurdish community and to its New American residents as a whole. We are lucky to have these families plant roots here and form communities that strengthen our city,” cited Mayor Cooper.

Mayor Cooper's statement revealed his personal joyfulness following his visit to Erbil as part of Nashville's Sister City delegation a few months ago. He described the experience of immersing in Erbil's vibrant and rich culture as unforgettable.

“It was an honor to experience Erbil's bright and rich culture; it was an experience I will never forget,” he concluded.

Starting sisterhood

Erbil has been a governorate for 100 years, but its history goes back

6,000 years, making it the world's oldest continuously inhabited city. Erbil province has a population of over two million people, with one million residing in Erbil city.

Governor of Erbil Omed Khoshnaw told Kurdistan Chronicle that both Erbil and Nashville can play pivotal roles in enhancing cultural relations, municipal development, education, healthcare, the arts, sports, and various other sectors.

“The citizens of both cities stand to benefit greatly from strengthened public and cultural diplomacy, and this sisterhood will also foster improved relations between the Kurdistan Region and the United States,” said Governor Khoshnaw.

The governor fondly recalled leading a delegation from Erbil to Nashville in May 2022 with the primary objective of revitalizing the sisterhood process, which had encountered delays due to the war against ISIS and the subsequent emergence of the coronavirus pandemic. He also announced plans for

another delegation from Erbil province to visit Nashville soon to formally sign a memorandum of understanding, cementing the alliance between the two cities.

A “win-win” initiative

Gregory W. Sullivan, Senior Advisor to U.S. Department of State for Iraq Public Diplomacy believes Sister City relationships between Nashville and Erbil will create educational and economic opportunities, enhance the rule of law, and strengthen Iraqi Kurdistan's ability to meet challenges in healthcare and climate change.

Sullivan mentioned that over 25 years ago, the good people of Nashville opened their homes and their hearts to thousands of Iraqi Kurdish refugees fleeing Saddam Hussein's brutal Anfal campaign. And now the people of the city of Nashville are opening their hearts once again through the launch

of this Sister City relationship.

Meanwhile, U.S. Consul General in Erbil Irvin Hicks congratulated both Erbil and Nashville and expressed the U.S. commitment to strengthening bilateral relations between the people of the Kurdistan Region and the U.S., including through sister city programs between the region and U.S. cities.

“The Nashville-Erbil Sister City initiative provides a ‘win-win’ outcome that will benefit the citizens of the IKR and the United States,” said U.S. Consul General Hicks.

The consul general added, “The IKR provides for a variety of trade and investment opportunities for American businesses, and the Erbil-Nashville Sister City partnership provides an excellent mechanism to promote new initiatives in the areas of trade and investment and people-to-people cultural and educational exchange programs.”

“The U.S. Consulate General in Erbil is very keen on promoting economic growth and deepening trade and investment ties between the IKR and the United States. Supporting American and Kurdish entrepreneurs, small and medium businesses, and major corporations is a priority,” Consul General Hicks reaffirmed.

The Sister City program, initiated by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1956, has been an emblem of building bonds between diverse communities and cultures across the globe.

Nashville, since connecting with its first sister city of Edmonton, Canada, in 1991, has gone on to establish nine other sororal relationships, including with Belfast, Northern Ireland; Caen, France; Chengdu, China; Kamakura, Japan; Magdeburg, Germany; Mendoza, Argentina; Taiyuan, China; Tamworth, Australia; and now Erbil in the IKR. ●

Kurdish women warmly welcoming the Nashville delegation at the Kurdistan Parliament (May 2023)



KRG's New Representative in Washington DC



Treefa Aziz, recently appointed as the Kurdistan Region Representative in the United States

In a significant move to bolster diplomatic relations and strengthen ties with the United States, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has announced the appointment of Treefa Aziz as its new representative in Washington, D.C. This appointment comes at a crucial juncture in the region's history, marking a pivotal moment in Kurdistan's engagement with the international community.

Treefa Aziz, a seasoned diplomat and advocate for Kurdish rights, brings a wealth of experience and expertise to her new role as the KRG's representative. She has an impressive track record of over 25 years of expertise in U.S. politics, policy, and advocacy.

Aziz's distinguished career has been marked by pivotal and influential positions in both the government and the private sector, where she has spearheaded critical initiatives on a wide array of international and domestic issues. She also worked in Congress for a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee.

Diplomacy and engagement

Aziz's appointment reflects the KRG's commitment to engaging with the international community and fostering constructive dialogue on critical regional issues.



Jennifer Gavito, Acting Assistant Secretary for U.S. State Dept - Near Eastern Affairs; Safin Dizayi, Head of Kurdistan Department of Foreign Affairs; and Treefa Aziz, KRG representative in the US (July 20, 2023)

The role of the KRG's representative in Washington, D.C. holds immense importance as it serves as a crucial link between the Kurdistan Region and the United States government. With the evolving political landscape in the Middle East and ongoing regional challenges, having a capable and dedicated representative is essential in effectively conveying the aspirations and concerns of the Kurdish people.

One of the key areas that Aziz is expected to focus on during her tenure is the ongoing cooperation between the United States and the Kurdistan Region in the fight against terrorism. The Kurdistan Region has played a pivotal role in countering ISIS, and the appointment of Treefa Aziz signifies the KRG's commitment to strengthening this partnership.

Furthermore, economic ties and trade relations will be high on Aziz's agenda. Kurdistan's vast natural resources and economic potential also present numerous opportunities for collaboration with the U.S. private sector. By promoting investment and trade, Aziz aims to boost economic growth in the Kurdistan Region and foster mutually beneficial partnerships.

cultural exchanges to further enhance mutual understanding and appreciation.

As she assumes her new position, Treefa Aziz expressed her dedication to advancing the interests of the Kurdistan Region and deepening the bonds between Kurdistan and the United States. As a Kurdish-American, she wholeheartedly dedicates herself to forging connections and becoming a formidable champion for the Kurdish people, aspiring to foster shared understanding for the mutual advancement of both nations.

The appointment of Treefa Aziz comes amidst a period of critical developments in the Middle East, and her diplomatic expertise and commitment to Kurdish causes will undoubtedly be vital in navigating the



Treefa Aziz formally assuming office as KRG representative in the US (July 17, 2023)

community residing across the United States, Aziz will work towards addressing the needs and concerns of this vibrant community and promoting

complexities of the region. Her appointment sends a clear message of the KRG's commitment to fostering strong and enduring relationships with the international community. ●

MEMORIAL

A Museum of History and Emotion

Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi



Amed Demirhan

Amed Demirhan MLIS, MADR is the General Manager/Director of Barzani National Memorial.

On 30 November 1970, a journalist from the *Los Angeles Times* asked Mustafa Barzani to describe what qualities define a

ni did for his nation.

Kurdistan is one of the oldest nations in the world. In the greater Middle East of



Mehmet, E. (1911/12). Tarih-i umumi ve Osmani atlası. Mekteb-i Harbiye Matbaası, Istanbul = General History and the Ottoman Atlas. Published by Ottoman Military Printing Press Istanbul.

leader, to which he responded, “A leader should be judged by what he has done for his people.” The diverse quality and quantity of visitors to the Barzani National Memorial (BNM) reflect this sentiment: the people of Kurdistan appreciate what Barza-

ni did for his nation. Kurdistan is one of the oldest nations in the world. In the greater Middle East of the 760s, there were only two nations with their current names, Kurdistan and Arabistan, as seen in the Ottoman map of the early Abbasid era below.

However, the Treaty of Lausanne, signed



Barzani with the Head of the Reference and Bibliographic Department of the V.I. Lenin State Library of the Soviet Union in Moscow after visiting the International Scientific Center – Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in Dubna on December 10, 1960. (Report on the visit of Chairman of the Kurdistan Democratic Party Mustafa Muhammad al-Barzani to the USSR (1960, December 11). Ogonyok. 1960. No 50. P.7)

on July 24, 1923, by the victors of World War I, legally and politically eliminated the Kurds and Kurdistan from the face of the earth for the first time in history.

Since then, Kurdish patriotism became criminalized by the states that were established on the lands of the Kurds, and the Kurds have been subject to mass murder, imprisonment, deportation, and persecution, with “no friends but mountains.” After many years of

fighting and struggle, on March 11, 1970, Mustafa Barzani finally forced legal and political recognition for Kurdistan with an agreement for autonomy with the state of Iraq.

Since BNM opened on May 11, 2023, it has been overwhelmed by visitors from across greater Kurdistan and the diaspora and by diplomats and international delegations. It has remained open every day except the first day of the Eid holiday and is scientifically organized according to the best international practices of museum curation.

In the main entrance to the museum, a mosaic

mural presents the liberation movements led by the Barzanis, including Sheik Abdulsalam Barzani (1903), Sheik Ahmed, and Mustafa Barzani, all of which aimed for the peaceful co-existence of ethnic and religious diversity in Kurdistan, environmental protection, women's freedom, and social justice for all. These murals thus set the stage for the rest of the museum's presentation of Kurdistan and how the Barzani movements were at the vanguard of freedom and social justice.

After the mural, visitors learn a short history of Kurdistan and Barzani, which



Just A Small War

A little known war is raging in the rugged mountains of Northern Iraq. But Malik Mustafa Barzani (top) relaxes with a book in his mountain hide-out while Iraqi President Abdul Salam Arif (below) wrestles with problems and prepares a major offensive.

is based on scientific methods using official international documents. After that, they watch a 20-minute documentary film on the liberation movements before entering a part of the museum that presents photos of the movements' leadership and its major events, as well

Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (May 11, 1965) News of the World in Pictures (p. 14) Chicago, IL, United States.

s the personal artifacts of Mustafa Barzani and Idris Barzani.

From here, visitors move to a gallery that displays the weapons through the liberation struggle from Sheik Abdulsalam to Mustafa Barzani. In addition, a gallery displays photos of the massacres and crimes committed against the people of Kurdistan and humanity. In the second section of this gallery, there are portraits of the leaders of the major Kurdish resistance movements and in the third section, various photos of historical sites in Kurdistan. Finally, the visitors see the cars used by Kurdistan's leaders.

Emotional outpourings from visitors

Most visitors express their admiration for the museum and are proud that Kurdistan has built such a great institution. Many pray for the founders of the museum.

Some are overwhelmed by emotion and pray and cry when they enter and see Mustafa Barzani photos. These occurrences become quite emotional for us as museum staff, and handling them is our biggest challenge but also one of the most rewarding. Some of their sentimental attachments, respect, and regard for Mustafa Barzani extend beyond imagination.

For instance, some visit the museum before going to Mecca for their pilgrimage, making Barzani their first stop on their journey. Another group visited after they had completed their pilgrimage, making Barzani the final step of their pilgrimage.

The other day a highly educated group of religious women from the Qadari sect of Islam visited the museum and played their *duffs* (framed drums) while singing hymns for Barzani. It was quite emotional and spiritual, and they played and sang in the museum's private meeting room.

Others who might have been part of the Barzanis' *peshmarga* or belong to *peshmarga* families and have grown up hearing of the legend of Barzani, will display similar emotional reactions. Nevertheless, regardless of religion and political orientation, most patriots of Kurdistan consider Barzan their Mecca and Barzani their national hero.

Mostly, visitors feel happy and further enlightened by learning more about the history of Kurdistan and Barzani from their visit. Regardless of educational level, every visitor learns something new and frequently they express their gratitude.

In its first two months, more than 30,000 people from all walks of life have visited BNM. Considering the population of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the museum's location, BNM had more visitors per capita than the Nelson Mandela Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa, (NAMANYA, M. (2023, June 19). A day at Nelson Mandela museum) or the Madurai Gandhi Museum in India. (The Times of India (2022, May 22. Footfall at Madurai Gandhi museum)

We are proud of this early success and remain open to welcome all visitors to this vital part of the history of Kurdistan. ●

“

Since BNM opened on May 11, 2023, it has been overwhelmed by visitors from across greater Kurdistan and the diaspora and by diplomats and international delegations

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In its first two months, more than 30,000 people from all walks of life have visited BNM

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9th

#Stronger_Kurdistan

Triumph over Challenges

The 9th cabinet ministerial lineup photographed on its inaugural day in July 2019



Shores Ghafouri

Shores Ghafouri a member of the Kurdish Writers' Union, is a notable figure in the realm of data analytical surveys and worked in the KRG's Department of Media and Information for several years.

In a remarkable display of resilience and steadfast leadership, the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) 9th Cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, stands on the precipice of its fourth anniversary. Against a backdrop of relentless challenges, this tenure has witnessed an unparalleled transformation – a metamorphosis that has propelled the Kurdistan Region from the throes of crisis to a position of strength and innovation.

Weathering the storms of adversity

The tenure of the government has been defined by a series of daunting trials, including natural disasters and man-made crises that would have tested even the most resilient of administrations. Yet Prime Minister Barzani's unwavering determination, complemented by the unwavering spirit of Kurdistan's citizens, has formed the bedrock upon which the KRG's survival and resurgence have been built. The combined efforts of the cabinet, marked by continuous reform and steadfast action, have ensured the region's continued ascendancy.



Photo: Mohamad Shwani



Photo: Farhad Ahmad

PM Barzani surveying areas impacted by a flash flood in the outskirts of Erbil (October 31, 2021)

A multi-faceted reform drive

At the heart of the 9th Cabinet's mission lies an ambitious reform agenda that spans thirteen crucial areas of governance. Prime Minister Barzani's vision for a transparent, just, and efficient administration has driven comprehensive reform measures, including:

- A sweeping overhaul of the public service sector to enhance efficiency and responsiveness.
- The digitization of administrative processes to streamline operations and improve service delivery.
- Scrutiny and accountability for senior government officials to uphold the

highest standards of governance.

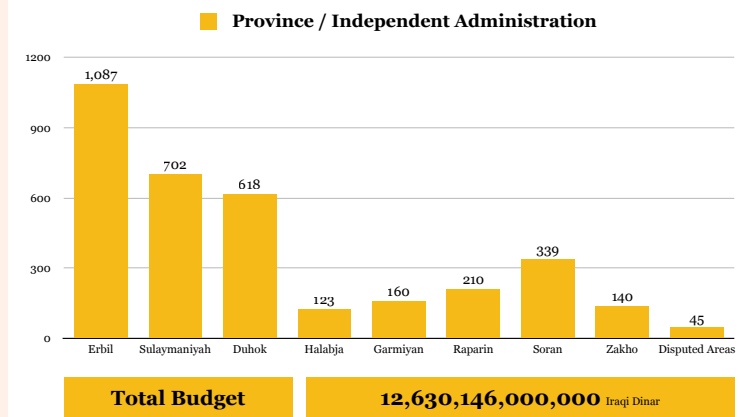
- A relentless campaign against financial and administrative corruption, bolstering transparency.
- Robust measures to ensure transparency in fiscal matters, promoting confidence in financial management.
- Reforms in the healthcare, pharmaceuticals, and food sectors, enhancing public well-being and self-sufficiency.
- Modernization of the tax system to ensure equity and sustainable revenue generation.
- Measures to prevent monopolies and promote fair competition.
- Adherence to oversight procedures

in the Kurdistan Parliament, ensuring checks and balances.

- Strengthening the pension fund system to provide for the region's retired citizens.
- Reforming the peshmerga forces to fortify the region's defense capabilities.
- Upholding the rule of law and fostering respect for the judiciary, thereby ensuring justice for all.

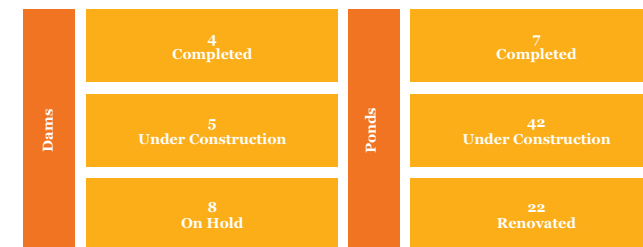
This comprehensive suite of reforms has not only rejuvenated the region's administrative machinery but has also revitalized its financial landscape. As a result, the government has been able to consistently disburse salaries, surmounting economic challenges to achieve this commendable feat.

Number of Projects Completed between 2019-2023



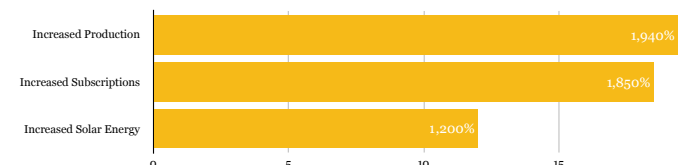
Water Project

Kurdistan Regional Government The Ninth Cabinet (2019-2023)



Electricity and Clean Energy

Kurdistan Regional Government (2019-2023)



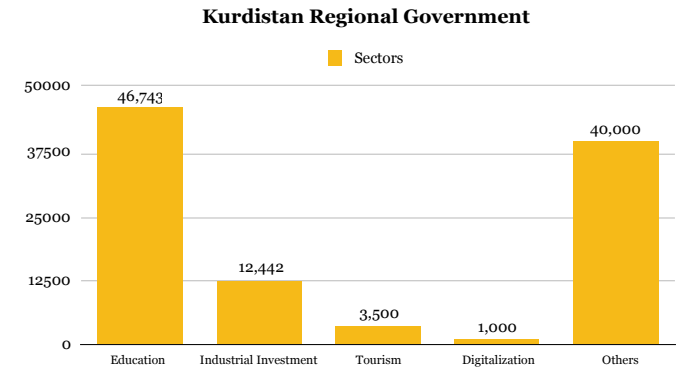
Catalyzing transformative projects

The tenure of the 9th Cabinet has been characterized by an array of visionary projects, each designed to uplift and transform the Kurdistan Region's infrastructure and quality of life. These transformative initiatives have spanned multiple sectors, with a resolute focus on equitable development and service distribution. Noteworthy projects include:

- Roads and transportation projects (1,015): enhancing connectivity and accessibility.
- Water and sewerage projects (651): elevating essential amenities for all citizens.
- Energy consumption and production projects (473): laying the foundation for sustainable growth.
- Infrastructure and community services projects (447): augmenting living standards and public well-being.
- Education projects (263): nurturing a knowledge-based society for generations to come.
- Agriculture projects (192): fostering self-sufficiency and agricultural innovation.
- Healthcare projects (89): bolstering public health infrastructure for a healthier populace.
- Tourism initiatives (63): showcasing cultural heritage and driving economic diversification.
- Banking and financial services projects (39): strengthening economic resilience and financial systems.

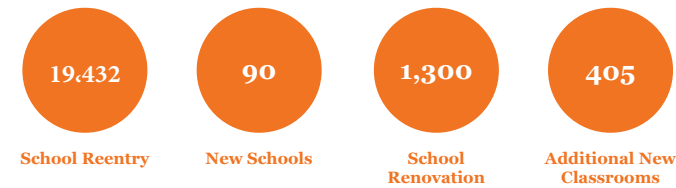
In addition to this, the government's unwavering commitment to private enterprise has led to issuing over 705 factory licenses, which have generated over 12,000 employment opportunities. Investment licenses, totaling 251, have injected fresh dynamism into a wide spectrum of sectors, underscoring the administration's resolve to build a robust economic ecosystem.

Employment Opportunities

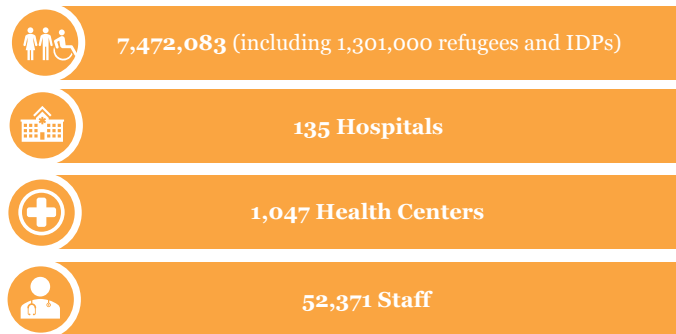


Education and Higher Education Overview (2019-2023)

	Education	Higher Education
Schools / Universities	6,756	33
Students	1,864,693	150,560
Educators / Staff	158,642	10,819



Health Sector Overview



Pioneering the digital revolution

Under Prime Minister Barzani's visionary leadership, the Kurdistan Region's governance has embarked on a comprehensive digitization drive, aimed at catapulting the region into the vanguard of technological progress. This digital transformation has transcended administrative processes, with more than a dozen government services seamlessly transitioning to digital platforms.

A watershed moment arrived with the unveiling of the Digital Government Transformation Strategic Project. Encompassing a spectrum of strategic activities, including digital governance, engineering, data privacy, and security, the project aspires to position the KRG as a regional leader in technological governance by 2025. The strategy's implementation, marked by milestones such as the establishment of a central data center and innovative population information systems, reinforces the Kurdistan Region's commitment to pioneering efficient and transparent governance.

Empowering health and education

Prime Minister Barzani's administration has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to fortifying the region's healthcare and education sectors. In a commendable achievement, maternal and birth mortality rates have significantly decreased over the past four years, a testament to the administration's dedication to public health. Healthcare infrastructure has been notably bolstered, with the establishment of numerous hospitals and health centers, enhancing the capacity to serve over 14,000 individuals per facility.

Simultaneously, the education sector has been invigorated through curriculum enhancements, construction of new schools, and scholarship initiatives, ensuring the region's future generations are equipped with a robust educational foundation.

Sustainable growth and environmental stewardship

The government's commitment to environmental preservation and sustainable practices stands as a shining example of



PM Barzani paying a visit to a farmer's vineyard in Duhok (September 27, 2022)

responsible governance. In the face of a changing climate, the administration has worked tirelessly to safeguard Kurdistan's natural resources. The quest for clean energy has led to a commendable 20% increase in electricity generation from clean sources.

Additionally, substantial afforestation projects, encompassing the construction of fire-resistant zones spanning 6 million square meters, stand as a testament to the administration's dedication to environmental preservation. Efforts to curtail illegal water drilling by 90%, incinerate medical waste, and rigorously implement environmental guidelines underscore the government's resolve to safeguard the region's ecological well-being.

Nurturing economic resilience

The government's tenure has been marked by a proactive pursuit of economic resilience, epitomized by its dedication to job creation and support for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and

refugees. Notably, more than 100,000 jobs have been generated through various projects, catalyzing economic growth and enhancing citizens' quality of life.

The region's commitment to supporting IDPs and refugees has been unwavering, with substantial financial allocations aimed at providing essential services and support. This commitment has been particularly evident in the provision of education and healthcare services, ensuring that vulnerable populations are not left behind.

A testament to coexistence and democracy

The Kurdistan Region's history of coexistence, exemplified by harmonious relations between diverse communities, has been championed by the current government. The administration has undertaken a range of measures to promote religious tolerance, cultural inclusivity, and gender equality. From revising religious programs to imple-

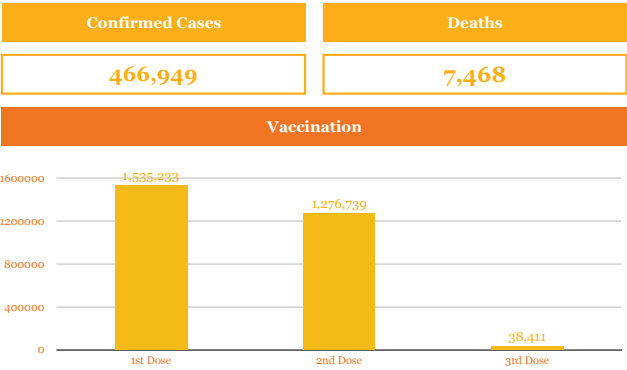
menting child protection systems, the cabinet's initiatives reflect a steadfast commitment to nurturing a society built on the principles of freedom and democracy.

As the 9th Cabinet of the KRG marks its fourth anniversary, the accomplishments achieved under the leadership of Prime Minister Masrour Barzani serve as an inspiration for visionary governance, resilience in the face of adversity, and unwavering dedication to progress. The transformative reforms, groundbreaking projects, and unwavering commitment to the well-being of the KRG's citizens have not only steered the region through crises but have also illuminated a path towards a prosperous future.

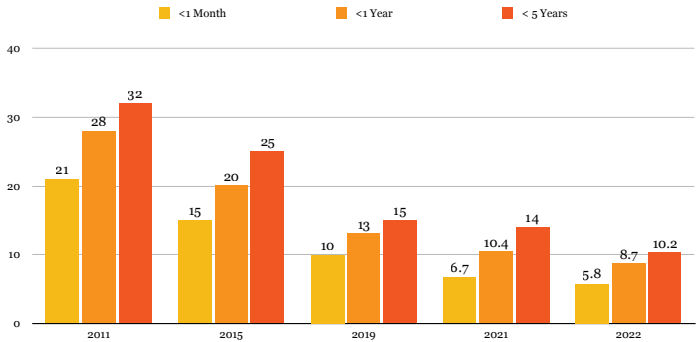
As the Kurdistan Region continues its journey from strength to strength, underpinned by the bold initiatives of the government's leadership, it provides a remarkable example for nations around the globe to draw inspiration from, as they strive for lasting prosperity and advancement.

Photo: Farhad Ahmad

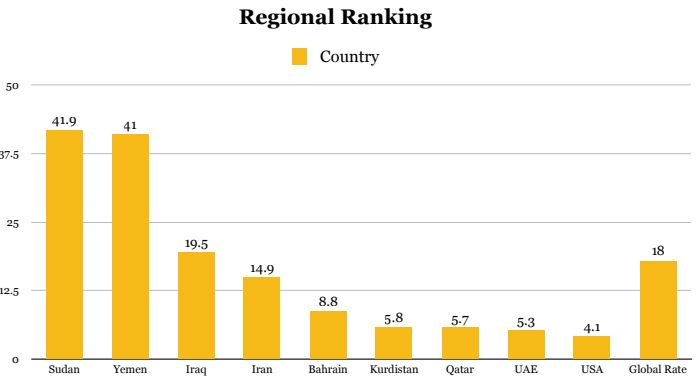
Kurdistan Region COVID-19 Records



Infant and Child Mortality Rate / 1,000 Newborns



Infant and Child Mortality Rate / 1,000 Newborns (<1 Month)



Implemented Projects / Sector

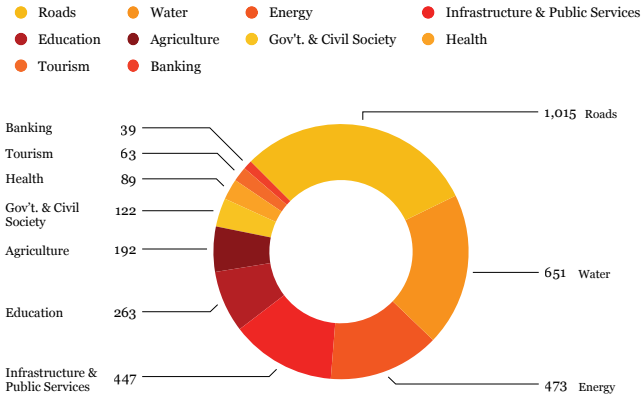


Photo: Star Ahmad

Aerial view showcasing the development of the Khabour river bank as a tourist attraction

Photo: Sabr Dri

9th #Stronger_Kurdistan

Delivering on Strategic Vision

In this article, Judi Barzani, Erbil's Director of Follow-Up Projects, emphasizes the government's vision. Key to their strategy is the Department of Follow-Up, ensuring vigilant project oversight across ministries through inspections, safety measures, material assessments, and schedule adherence. The piece showcases vital projects like the Rovia-Gopal road, Shahidan Monument, and Barzan water supply, underscoring the Cabinet's dedication to advancing Kurdistan Region's development.



Judi Barzani

Judi Barzani is Director of Erbil's Department of Follow-Up at the Kurdistan Regional Government.

H.E. KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani has spearheaded the 9th Cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) since July 10, 2019. His remarkable resilience against all odds has allowed the Kurdistan Region to overcome countless adversities and to prosper by unlocking the region's potential in a variety of sectors, with the ultimate vision of building a stronger Kurdistan.

Despite the 9th Cabinet facing many setbacks and hardships, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the financial crisis, and a decline in oil prices, it has managed to withstand and prevail over all those obstacles.

The Prime Minister's vision

From the cabinet's initial appointment, Prime Minister Barzani envisioned and initiated a strategic agenda aiming towards building a stronger Kurdistan. Four years later, the cabinet's success is evident in supporting Kurdish youth, exporting agricultural products, improving education, bolstering infrastructure, introducing digitalization, promoting freedom, and nurturing peaceful coexistence in the region.

What is the Department of Follow-Up (DPF)?

The Department of Follow-Up is a branch within the Council of Ministers consisting of a highly qualified team of specialists and engineers, such as architects, civil engineers, electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, road and bridge specialists, and dam and water experts.

A strong and effective government needs a corresponding follow-up department to closely monitor and inspect every project launched by the KRG's different ministries, ensuring they are on track and handed over in time to the people without any shortcomings.

What does the DPF do?

The department starts by contacting the different ministries of the cabinet to request an updated list of projects. They then order the projects in terms of strategic importance and survey them on a weekly basis.

Prior to surveying each project, the team ensures they have a full-scale understanding

PM Barzani's visit to the Martyrs' Monument in Erbil



of the design and the plan so that they can evaluate it accurately and provide thorough feedback.

They do so through two key steps:
The team reviews the contract and the bill of quantity between the government and the contractor.

The team reviews the design approach of the contractor implementing the project.

Groundwork

After design and contract revision, the team visits the project site without informing the supervisory team to examine whether the work is being undertaken in accordance with regulations.

The team focuses on specific aspects during its site inspection. Initially, safety is the top priority during the project inspection. The safety of the construction workers and engineers as well as the inhabitants of the surrounding area is not to be compromised whatsoever.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is a crucial part of any construction site, and the head of the supervisory team must always ensure that all workers comply with proper PPE requirements at all times during the construction phase.

Similarly, the accumulation of huge volumes of waste may be hazardous to the workers and the surrounding environment; hence, the assigned employers must ensure regular disposal of waste and maintain a clean and organized workplace in order to enable maximum productivity and avoid safety hazards. A clean and organized worksite helps reduce the risk of accidents.

Employers must implement strict measures to ensure the safety of the workers operating at heights.

Effective communication between all the parties working on the construction site is crucial to avoid accidents.

The team must frequently inspect materials and equipment to prevent malfunctions and ensure smooth operations.

Regular examinations of the project site are undertaken to inspect even the finest details of the design as they relate to the project as a whole in order to ensure the highest quality of work. Moreover, providing positive feedback and rectifying flaws can help motivate workers to do stronger work in the long run and improve overall safety and efficiency.

Lastly, time management is critical during construction to ensure that the project is completed and handed over without delays. The supervisory team must make sure that workers adhere to an efficient schedule and complete their daily tasks on time.

After the groundwork is concluded, the team prepares a report on each project, in which it provides updates, describes the level of progress, and identifies potential issues. They then forward the report to their directorate, which sends it to their respective ministries. The ministries then respond and act promptly to resolve any potential issues.

This is an ongoing process coordinated between the DCF and the ministries during the entirety of the construction period until completion. This helps ensure that government projects are completed safely and efficiently in a manner that benefits the people of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Rovia-Gopal road development project

The Rovia-Gopal road development project lies between the main roadways of Erbil and Duhok. It is 22 km in length and has three lanes on each side, six overpasses, and two concrete bridges.

The road connecting Rovia and Gopal was infamously known as “Death Road”. It was one of the most dangerous roads in the region, with a high number of car accidents occurring there. According to traffic police data, the terrible road conditions caused daily accidents and numerous deaths.

Despite numerous obstacles, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the global financial crisis, and political issues in the region, the Prime Minister and 9th Cabinet still managed to complete and deliver the project to the people.

The project has enabled citizens to travel through the Duhok Governorate on clean, modern highways that shorten the distance between towns. Most importantly, it has provided a safer road for drivers, resulting in fewer car accidents.

Below you can find more detailed information about the project.

Estimated cost of the project:
95,997,749,000 Iraqi Dinars

Length of project: 22 km

Width of project: Three lanes on each side

Overpasses in the project: Six

Concrete bridges: Two

Shahidan Monument (Kasnazan Road-Erbil)

The Shahidan monument is a structure under construction in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. As the region continues to develop, the idea was put forth of a building a monument representing the history of the Kurds in Iraq. The structure’s design is intended to reflect the Kurdish people’s painful history.

It was designed by the architect Khasraw Jaff in 2010, but construction was halted for eight years as the region was immersed in the war with ISIS.

The monument aims to represent the history of all Kurds in Iraq and will welcome international delegates and envoys from around the world. It will also serve as an educational site for future generations of students and scholars.

The project’s investment was approved, and construction resumed in 2019 under the Ninth Cabinet.

Water supply project for 51 villages in Barzan

The project will provide drinking water to 51 villages in the Barzan region – 120 km northwest of Erbil, Soran administration, Mergasur district – starting from the Balenda village on the Blue River to Shivadz village on both sides of Baroj and Nizar villages.

The water source of the project is the Blue Water River and works by building an intake on the river with a weir to raise the water level. This will be built 500 meters downriver on the Blue Water River before flowing into the Great River. The water treatment plant will be located within the boundaries of Balinda village at 900 meters from the receiver.

Raw water will be taken from the Ava Shin River near Balinda using deep submersible pumps. It will then be pumped

to the water treatment plant by means of DN 500 Ductile Iron Pipes.

The planned capacity of the water treatment plant is 1,200 m³/h. The raw water will be treated and purified before being pumped into a clean water storage tank with a capacity of 8000 m³.

From the clean water storage tank, potable water will be pumped to the Barzan water tank (5,000 m³) through DN 500 ductile iron pipes. The water will also be pumped to the Sewre main storage tank (2,700 m³) through DN 300 ductile iron pipes.

From the above-mentioned water tanks, potable water will be distributed to 51 villages in the Barzan area by means of ductile pipes. A total of 200 km of ductile iron pipes will be used in the project.

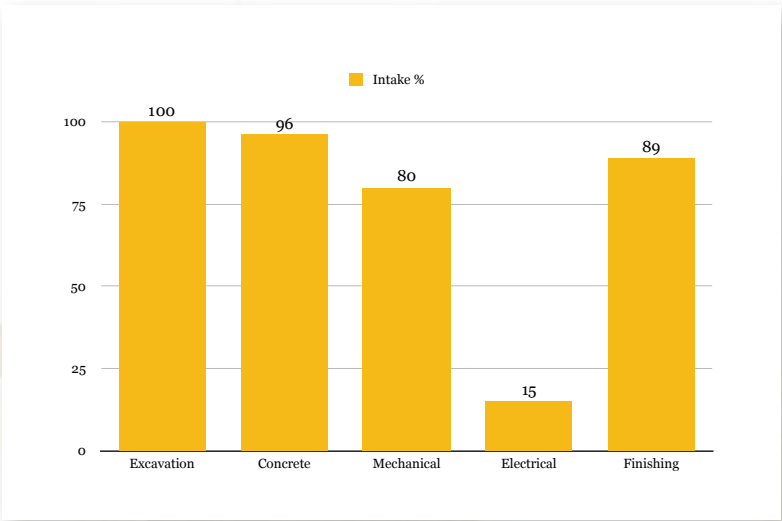
There are 100 m³, 200 m³, 300 m³, 500 m³, and 1,000 m³ water-collection tanks present near these villages. Main storage tanks with volumes of 8,000 m³, 5,000 m³, 4,000 m³, 2,700 m³, and 1,000 m³ are also part of the project area.

Clean water will be distributed from the storage tanks to the villagers through HDPE pipes that have diameters of 75 mm, 90 mm, 110 mm, and 200 mm.

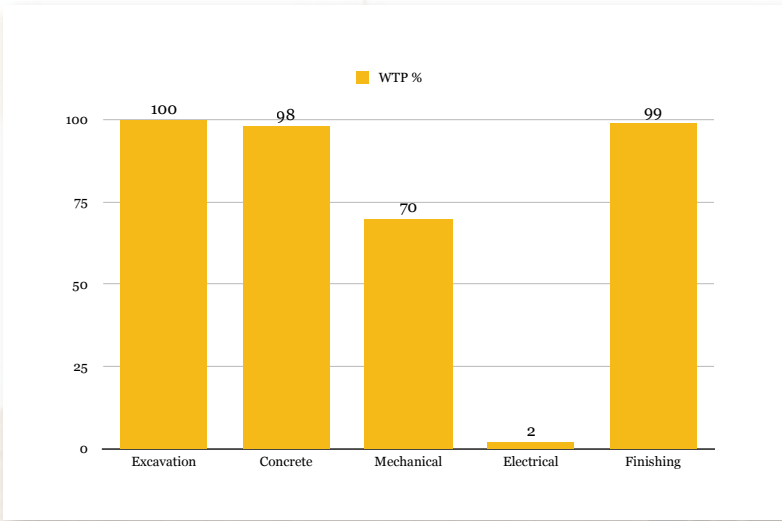
Contract value : 138,448,845,185 Iraqi Dinars



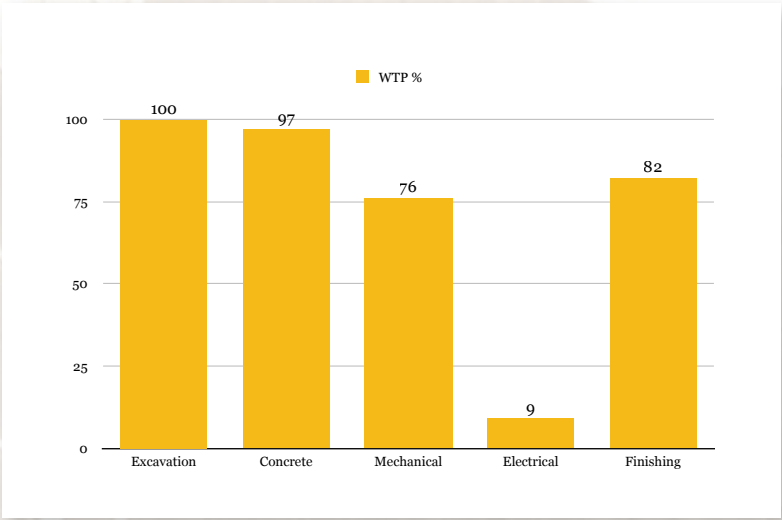
Intake work



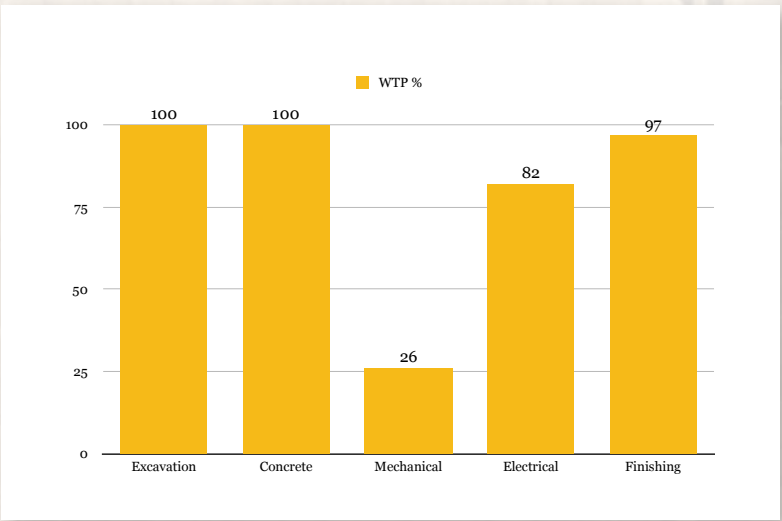
Sewer main water tank



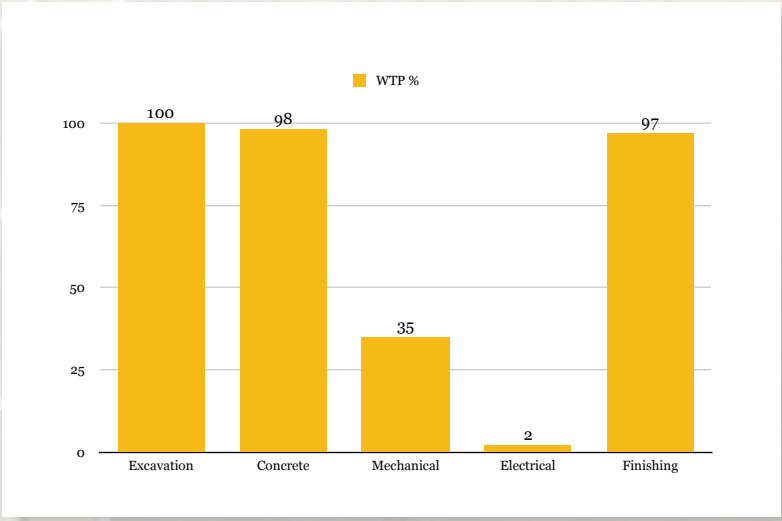
Water treatment plant work



Villages water tank



Barzan pump station work



KRG's Bold Steps for Gender Equality

In a thought-provoking interview with Kurdistan Chronicle, Dr. Khanzad Ahmed, Secretary General of the High Council for Women and Development (HCWD) in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), discussed the accomplishments and initiatives that are shaping the landscape of women's rights and gender equality in the region. Dr. Khanzad's insights provide an understanding of the remarkable progress achieved under the leadership of Prime Minister Masrour Barzani's 9th Cabinet.



Enhancing safety: Registered SIM cards

One pivotal achievement has been addressing the security implications of unregistered mobile phone SIM cards, as Dr. Khanzad explained: "Through consultations with women, civil society organizations, and government agencies, we identified the risks associated with unregistered SIM cards. This led us to advocate for a decision that mandates mobile companies register their customers, bolstering safety measures for women and girls."

She highlighted that this measure not only enhances personal security but also promotes the overall empowerment of women. By ensuring that communication remains a safe and accessible avenue, women are better equipped to pursue education, seek employment opportunities, and engage in civic participation. The registered SIM card initiative, while addressing a seemingly technical aspect, contributes significantly to the broader landscape of gender equality.

Economic empowerment: Labor law reforms and inclusive growth

A commitment to fostering women's economic inclusion prompted significant labor law reforms, about which Dr. Khanzad elaborated: "Recognizing the importance of creating an environment conducive to women's participation in the private sector, the labor law reforms sought to dismantle barriers hindering women's engagement. This endeavor has contributed to fostering a more inclusive and vibrant eco-

Driving change: The High Council for Women and Development's role in empowerment

At the heart of the Kurdistan Region's transformation to achieve gender equality lies the HCWD, a multifaceted institution that serves as the cornerstone for progress. With its roles encompassing coordination, advisory guidance, technical expertise, monitoring, and policy formulation, the HCWD has emerged as a vital force driving change. "Our achievements stem from a practical approach, responding to the needs of society and translating them into actionable decisions, laws, plans, and programs," said Dr. Khanzad.

Concrete milestones

Several noteworthy accomplishments underscore the tangible progress made in advancing gender equality:



Photo: Muhammad Mraz Akoyi

dents of violence and creating a more stable society. She emphasized that this measure particularly resonates with women and families, who often bear the brunt of the consequences of weapons-related violence.

Global commitment: Aligning with UN Resolution 1325

The Kurdistan Region's commitment to global women's rights standards found expression in a comprehensive plan aligned with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. "Our plan focuses on the rehabilitation of survivors of conflicts and crises, while simultaneously enhancing the capacity of government institutions to assist displaced women and girls, thereby contributing to sustainable peace," Dr. Khanzad explained. This alignment with international principles reflects the KRG's dedication to creating a society where the impact of conflict is mitigated, and the resilience of women is harnessed. By focusing on rehabilitation and empowerment, the plan recognizes the multifaceted challenges faced by women in conflict-affected areas. The head of the HCWD stressed that this approach not only addresses immediate needs but also lays the foundation for long-term stability and progress.

Prime Minister Barzani's vision: A catalyst for women's empowerment

The 9th Cabinet, under the astute leadership of KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, has demonstrated a resolute commitment to women's rights. "Prime Minister Barzani's recognition of women's pivotal role and his emphasis on their active participation have created an environment conducive to supporting our initiatives," Dr. Khanzad underscored.

Prime Minister Barzani's vision resonates deeply with the principles of inclusivity and equality. His recognition of the importance of women's contributions to every facet of society reveals the government's determination to foster an environment where women are not

conomic landscape."

The reforms underscore the government's recognition of the essential role that women play in economic growth and stability. By breaking down barriers that impede women's participation, they pave the way for a diversified and dynamic workforce. As she pointed out, this strengthens the economy and empowers women to contribute their skills and talents to the nation's progress.

Safeguarding security: A modern framework for gun control

In collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, the KRG also embarked on a comprehensive overhaul of laws related to weapons possession. "Acknowledging the adverse impact of unregulated firearms on personal security, we set out to replace what are outdated laws with a modern framework. These new laws, which restrict both civilians and security personnel from carrying weapons, have significant implications for overall security," Dr. Khanzad clarified. The modernization of gun control laws is a testament to the government's commitment to creating a safe and secure environment for all citizens. By curbing the proliferation of unlicensed firearms, the KRG is significantly reducing inci-



only beneficiaries but active agents of positive change. Dr. Khanzad highlighted that this commitment sends a powerful message, both domestically and internationally, that gender equality is a fundamental tenet of Kurdistan's progress.

Paving the way: A five-year blueprint for gender-responsive governance

In the pursuit of gender-responsive governance, the HCWD has devised a comprehensive five-year plan, collaboratively developed with ministries and the World Bank. “Our focus is on integrating women's demands into ministry plans and budgets, promoting an inclusive approach to policy formulation that addresses the unique needs of women,” said Dr. Khanzad.

The five-year plan represents a strategic roadmap towards integrating gender considerations across all aspects of governance. Dr. Khanzad noted that this approach recognizes that gender-responsive policies are not an isolated endeavor but a holistic transformation that permeates every level of decision-making. By incorporating women's perspectives into budgeting and planning, the KRG is taking a crucial step towards ensuring that women's needs and priorities are prioritized and integrated into the fabric of governance.

Mitigating violence: Strengthening legal protections and support mechanisms

In addressing urgent issues related to violence, Dr. Khanzad elaborated on the prohibition of unlicensed firearms, stating, “Our aim is to curtail incidents of violence by restricting access to unregistered firearms, thereby contributing to overall security and the well-being of women and society at large.”

The prohibition of unlicensed firearms reflects the government's commitment to safeguarding the well-being of its citizens. By enacting measures to prevent the misuse of weapons, the KRG is sending a clear message that violence, particularly gender-based violence, will not be tolerated. The head of the HCWD stated that this measure aligns with international efforts to create safe environments for women and contributes to fostering a culture of respect and security.

Advocating for equality: Elevating the voices of Yezidi women

The HCWD's commitment to advancing the cause of Yezidi women is reflected in its integration within the Sinjar (Shingal) agreement. “Our focus extends to inclusion, protection, and prevention measures that align with international principles on women, peace, and security, paving the way for a more secure and equitable future,” said Dr. Khanzad.

The integration of women's perspectives within the Sinjar agreement is a testament to the KRG's commitment to addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalized communities. Dr. Khanzad added that the focus on

Khanzad clarified.

The proposed amendments reflect a commitment to continuous improvement and adaptation to evolving societal dynamics. Dr. Khanzad pointed

She proudly cited a central tenet of the current KRG cabinet, led by Prime

Minister Masrour Barzani, which declares, “we will stand against any forms of discrimination and attempts to mini-



Photo: Safin Hamid

inclusion recognizes that women's voices are essential in shaping policies that directly impact their lives. By advocating the Yezidi cause, the KRG not only demonstrates solidarity but also sets a precedent for inclusive governance that resonates beyond its borders.

Amending domestic violence law: A step towards enhanced protection

Proposed amendments to the Domestic Violence Law are deeply rooted in contemporary realities. “Our amendments aim to enhance the law's effectiveness by incorporating specialized courts, criminalizing various forms of violence, and establishing robust support mechanisms for survivors, thereby strengthening the legal framework for safeguarding women's rights,” Dr.

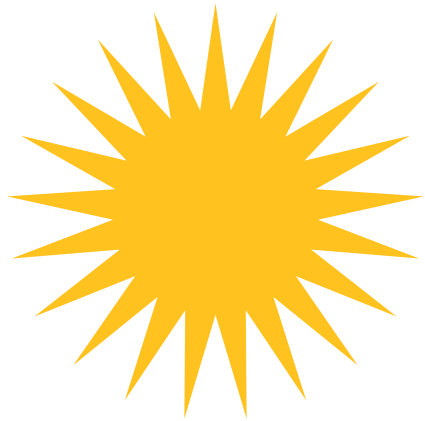
out that the amendments not only enhance legal protections but also send a message that violence against women will not be tolerated. By establishing specialized courts and support mechanisms, the KRG takes a proactive stance in addressing domestic violence, empowering survivors, and holding perpetrators accountable.

A collective endeavor: The path forward

The efforts of Kurdish women underscore the collective nature of progress. “Our journey towards gender equality is an endeavor that requires the concerted efforts of individuals, political parties, organizations, and state institutions. It calls for continuous education, comprehensive training, and a steadfast commitment to the cause,” Dr. Khanzad said.

mize the role of women in society. It is vital that women are permitted to make a full contribution to the community, the economy, and within the political arena.” She views this principle as a cornerstone of their governmental work.

Dr. Khanzad's sentiments encapsulate the essence of the Kurdistan Region's journey towards gender equality, which is marked by collaborative determination, visionary leadership, and an unwavering commitment to justice and inclusivity. As the KRG continues to champion women's rights and advance gender equality, it is laying the foundation for a future where every individual, regardless of gender, can flourish and contribute to the nation's advancement. The significant strides taken thus far stand as a testament to the region's resilience and its aspiration to shine as a beacon of progress for the Middle East and world. ●



The Colors That Define Us

A Brief History of the Kurdistan Flag



Goran Shakhawan

Goran Shakhawan is a Kurdish-American journalist and author based in the United States. He covered news for several Kurdish news outlets and was a former senior correspondent for Kurdistan24 in Erbil and Washington D.C. He has published several books in Kurdish.

Flag martyr

“Early one morning, Ibrahim enthusiastically prepared himself for work as he did every day. He smiled as we enjoyed breakfast together and engaged in small talk. Never did it occur to me that this would be our last time to be together,” said Sazgar Adel, Ibrahim’s wife.

On February 7, 2021, Ibrahim Sabah, a 36-year-old teacher was electrocuted while raising the Kurdistan Flag at the Sork primary school in the Shaqlawa district of Erbil province and sadly passed away.

Following this tragedy, President Massoud Barzani bestowed Ibrahim Sabah the title of ‘Martyr of the Flag’. Moreover, to honor Ibrahim, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani ordered the Ministry of Education to change the name of Sork to Shahid (Martyr) Ibrahim’s School.

Today, a large flag hangs in Ibrahim’s living room where his wife, along with his 10-year-old daughter Ewara and eight-year-old son Awer reside. “Being fatherless has had a huge impact on our lives, but we are proud of him because he died for his country and our flag,” his children told me.

Ibrahim’s sacrifice in the arms of the Kurdistan flag stirred a sincere outpouring of emotion across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. A few weeks ago, I spoke with one of Ibrahim’s close friends and former colleagues, Ayub Kamal. I could easily sense the pain of loss in his voice and how much he dearly missed his friend. “His strong feelings of patriotism really stood out; he was such a loyal friend,” said Ayub, as he

“
President Massoud Barzani bestowed Ibrahim Sabah the title of ‘Martyr of the Flag’
”

choked up recounting memories of his dear friend, “He was always the rock for his friends. He would reach out to anyone who needed help and be there for them.”

How the flag unites humanity

A flag is an essential symbol of national identity but also represents the culture, identity, and history of a country. It is a constant reminder of who we are and what we fought for. If it were a mere piece of cloth, I don’t believe anyone would be willing to sacrifice so much for it! The profound symbols and meanings of the flag have always carried countless stories of victory, struggle, and sacrifice. The flag instills a sense of belonging and builds national unity.

The significance of the flag lies not only in what it represents, but in what it symbolizes. Why was it created and what are the influences behind it? A nation’s flag can inspire courage, hope, and patriotism. Was it

not the burning of the flag that brought the U.S. military back home from the Vietnam War? These acts were carried about by Americans who no longer wanted their sons to die in the war. The flag burning was a key reason that U.S. political leaders understood the public’s opposition to the war and eventually withdrew.

The flag thus remains a powerful reminder of what people fought for in the past, the achievements they have defended, and why they are willing to die for their country today. Disrespecting the flag of any country is like insulting the history and sacrifices of those who fought and died for their freedom. After all, the importance of the flag to the nation is immense: it inspires nationalism, pride, and a sense of unity. It is indeed much more than a mere piece of cloth.

History of Kurdistan’s flag

The origins of Kurdistan’s flag date to the conclusion of World War I. In 1919, several Kurdish intellectuals and politicians established the Kurdistan Social Organization Movement in Istanbul and designed a national flag for Kurdistan.

Years later, in 1927, the Khoyboun Movement, a Kurdish nationalist organization that supported the Ararat Uprising led by Ihsan Nuri Pasha, was founded in Lebanon. The same flag with the sun in the middle was raised in most parts of Kurdistan thereafter and was printed on the cover of the magazine Hawar, which was published in London.

There is additional evidence of this flag’s use. For example, the Turkish newspaper Vakit published a report on the joint operation of the Turkish and Iranian armies against the Ağrı revolutionaries in its August 17, 1930, issue. The newspaper also displayed a picture of Kurdistan flag with the words “Flag of Khoyboun,” with the word ‘Khoyboun’ seen on the flag.

When the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, led by Qazi Mohammed was established on January 22, 1946, the flag from 1919 was raised, although with slight modifications. At the time Mullah Mustafa Barzani was the leading general and his fighters were the backbone of the Republic of Mahabad. In December 1946, the Iranian army surrounded the city and captured and hung Qazi Mohammed, which in turn led to the downfall of the Mahabad Republic. However, before being captured, Qazi Muhammad entrusted the flag to Mullah Mustafa Barzani.

The story of the Mahabad flag actually began in 1945, when Mullah Mustafa Barzani asked one of his Peshmerga, Nahman Issa Barzani, to make the Kurdish Flag. Nahman asked his wife Fati-



Photo: Sharmal Abdulla

mah Assad to sew it by hand, which she willingly undertook. “Just give me the pattern,” she said. The same flag that was stitched by Fatima’s hands is now preserved in the Barzani National Memorial in Barzan.

Additionally, the Badr Khan family played an important role in protecting the Kurdistan flag, which was first printed in Philadelphia in 1928 on the cover of a book by Sureyya Bedir Khan entitled *The Case of Kurdistan Against Türkiye*. The Badr Khans then safeguarded the flag for generations, passing it down from Amin Ali Badr Khan to Jaladet Badr Khan and then to Rawshan Khan

and finally to Sinem Badr Khan, who ultimately presented the same flag to President Massoud Barzani as a gift.

Sinem Badr Khan stated that she feels at ease now because, “The flag has finally fallen into the rightful hands.” This flag is also housed at the Barzani National Memorial.

After the establishment of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in August 1946 under the leadership of General Mustafa Barzani, the Kurdistan flag was flown in most of KDP’s congresses and conferences alongside the party’s flag. Eventually the Kurdistan flag was

elevated to fly atop most official institutions in 1992. On November 11, 1999, the Kurdistan Parliament issued Law No-4 that the flag be officially raised throughout the region.

The Kurdistan flag consists of four colors—red, white, green and a yellow sun with 21 rays. In 2009, the Kurdistan Parliament declared December 17 as Kurdistan Flag Day, a time to renew and replace all the flags soaring above the institutions of the region. After all, it was on December 17, 1945, that the Kurdistan flag was raised and preserved above the institutions of the Republic of Mahabad. ●

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Strengthening US-Kurdistan Economic Ties

Kurdistan Chronicle

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Dori is eager to promote Kurdistan's substantial business and investment opportunities

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The American Chamber of Commerce in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, known as AmCham, was founded in 2012 with the lofty goal of fostering and supporting US businesses operating in Kurdistan, as well as facilitating partnerships for Kurdish firms and business executives operating in the United States.

AmCham has since grown to 37 members, with a mix of American and local businesses under its current chairman Dori F. Abouzeid, an entrepreneur and CEO of a private aviation company who aspires to build on AmCham's foundation and leave a lasting legacy.

Dori considers networking and connecting US entrepreneurs with Kurdish businesses to be proactive steps, but he also believes they are insufficient. He is determined to see measurable results from these interactions and is encouraging follow-up actions. His primary goal now is to increase AmCham's membership, believing that a larger membership base will grow the organization's influence and allow for more effective lobbying efforts in

Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

both the United States and the Kurdistan Region.

“My vision for AmCham is to become a strong organization that commands the attention and respect of stakeholders in both the US and Kurdistan Region,” he said

He aptly compares this concept to weightlifting: “If you try to lift 50 pounds, no one will notice, but if you lift 150 pounds, people will say wow, he is strong. That is my suggestion—let us become strong enough so that they will say, ‘This is an effective organization, and we should work with them’.”

Targeting key sectors

Passionate about both Kurdistan and the United States, Dori is eager to promote Kurdistan's substantial business and investment opportunities. He is also determined to dispel misconceptions about the region's safety and encourages businesses to look beyond the conventional franchises and explore sectors such as manufacturing, IT services, solar energy, water management, recycling, and sewage.

Drawing from his interactions with Kurdish businessmen, he has learned that Kurdish businesses have faith in American products and admire the American way of conducting business.

He also underscored that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), led by Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, is eager to make changes to attract more businesses and diversify the economy.

Recently, the KRG took a significant step towards improving the business climate by launching the online Business Registration System. This move has substantially reduced the cost for a company to obtain licensing by over 80% according to government officials.

A delegation of about 30 US agriculture companies, including manufacturers of farm equipment and fertilizer,

recently visited the Kurdistan Region. The delegation met with government officials to discuss policies, regulatory reforms, and initiatives aimed at encouraging companies to invest and grow their businesses in the Kurdistan Region and in Iraq.

Dori's ultimate goal is to encourage the growth of American businesses in Kurdistan, particularly in key sectors like manufacturing, IT services, and potentially banking in the future. He is convinced that Kurdistan will continue to be the gateway to the rest of Iraq, owing to its safety and well-established infrastructure in housing and transportation.

Paving the way forward

Despite these opportunities, Dori recognizes that there are challenges. He mentions a lack of human resources, particularly in the hospitality industry. Due to a lack of trained local personnel, many AmCham members face high costs by having to import staff from outside Kurdistan. To address this, he advocates for the establishment of vocational schools to provide locals with the necessary skills for the labor force.

He also emphasizes the significance of standardization for foreign companies registering in and operating in Kurdistan. He believes that a more streamlined and transparent process will attract more investors, whereas rumors about complexities may deter potential businesses.

Lastly, he would like to see the KRG offer greater support to AmCham members. As the relationship between AmCham and the government gets friendlier, he remains hopeful that a strengthened relationship will pave the way for enhanced economic cooperation and mutually beneficial initiatives.



Photo: Mohammad Dargalayi

MACAIR, where aviation dreams take wing

In addition to his role with AmCham, Dori serves as President and CEO of MACAIR, a prestigious corporate aviation firm based in Orange County, California. MACAIR has excelled in providing top-tier aircraft charters, sales, management, and acquisitions on both the domestic and international fronts since its inception in 2000. The company manages a diverse fleet of jet aircraft, including light jets like the Citation CJ4 and intercontinental jets like Gulfstream V, as a luxury aviation charter operator and boutique management firm.

With over 14,000 hours of international and domestic flight experience as a licensed aircraft mechanic and pi-

lot, Dori's expertise is unquestionable. He boasts an impressive resume that includes flying distinguished country dignitaries and renowned celebrities, a testament to his passion for aviation.

Thirteen years ago, he set his sights on the Kurdistan Region when he explored the idea of establishing a national airline. After careful consideration of civil aviation and related factors, he deemed the project unfeasible. However, undeterred, he conceived a visionary plan for a state-of-the-art aviation facility that would provide pilots and passengers with unparalleled luxury and convenience. This envisioned facility would offer a relaxing pilot lounge, concierge services, red carpet treatment, and an exclusive VIP area.

Even though his dream facility has yet to come to fruition due to land and

permission constraints, Dori remains optimistic that his vision will be realized one day. “Private jet travel is becoming increasingly popular around the world, particularly in the post-COVID era. Every international airport should be able to accommodate private jets,” he said, emphasizing the increasing demand for such amenities.

Dori firmly believes that MACAIR's services are a valuable addition to Erbil International Airport that will enhance its appeal and functionality. Having flown to numerous airports around the globe, he considers Erbil Airport to be among the safest he's encountered.

Despite Erbil Airport's excellent safety record, he believes it is unfair that insurance companies charge these operators extra money to fly to Erbil.

He noted that since its inception in the Kurdistan region in 2011, MACAIR has been synonymous with excellence. “Over the last 13 years, the company has not received a single complaint regarding their services, customers, timing, or efficiency,” he said.

Moreover, Dori's satisfied clients no longer worry about safety concerns when flying to Erbil, given the airport's impeccable track record.

Meanwhile, he continues to lend his support to the region by assisting with aircraft procurement for Kurdistan and Iraq. In this capacity, he emphasizes the importance of aircraft maintenance to ensure optimal performance and safety and meticulous record keeping that traces each aircraft's maintenance history and parts used. ●

How Oil Shaped the Treaty of Lausanne

This article explores how oil played a crucial role in shaping the decision not to grant the Kurds a state during the Treaty of Lausanne negotiations in 1923. The UK and its allies, understanding the strategic importance of oil for economic and military power, were cautious about granting the Kurds control over the oil-rich Mosul vilayet (province). The complexities and potential instability of sustaining two additional states, Kurdistan and Israel, led the UK to incorporate the Mosul vilayet into the new state of Iraq. The consequences of this decision continue to impact the Kurds' pursuit of self-determination and stability in the region to this day.



Howri Mansurbeg

Howri Mansurbeg is a prominent figure in Petroleum Geosciences who holds a PhD from Uppsala. His focus is on Middle Eastern carbonate reservoirs for hydrocarbon exploration. He is a respected academic at Salahaddin University-Erbil and an adjunct professor at the University of Windsor.

The pivotal role of oil in shaping the decision not to grant the Kurds a state during the Treaty of Lausanne negotiations cannot be overlooked. As the aftermath of World War I unfolded, global power dynamics were in flux, and access to valuable resources, particularly oil, emerged as a critical factor in defining the new world order. The victorious nations, especially the United Kingdom, were acutely conscious of the strategic significance of oil in upholding economic and military supremacy.

In the early 20th century, the Kurds' longing for self-determination was evident in the region. The creation of a Kurdish state would have necessitated the allocation of territory, and the Mosul vilayet, renowned for its substantial oil reserves, became a central point of contention. Granting the Kurds control over this oil-rich area raised concerns among the



“Speculations arose that the UK might have contemplated supporting an independent Kurdish”

participating nations, notably the UK.

Oil and naval power

We should remember that in the early 20th century, two momentous events set the stage for significant geopolitical shifts that would reshape the Middle East forever. First was the technological revolution in naval warfare, with the British Admiralty replacing coal with oil for its fleet and thus gaining a crucial advantage over the German fleet during the war. However, this shift also exposed the UK's reliance on limited oil resources. The second event was the establishment of the Turkish Oil Company by Calouste Gulbenkian in Istanbul, financed in part by Germany's Deutsche Bank. These events laid the foundation for the intense struggle

over oil resources and influence that would play out in the region in the subsequent decades.

The UK had strategic interests in securing access to Middle Eastern oil reserves to fuel its rapidly growing industries and navy. Additionally, the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which promised a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, was a consideration. Speculations arose that the UK might have contemplated supporting an independent Kurdish state connected to Israel to ensure a safe conduit for oil destined for Britain. However, creating and sustaining two additional states in the region, both Kurdistan and Israel, was deemed impractical due to complex regional dynamics.

Zagros oil reserves

With the British Admiralty now requiring oil, attention turned to the untapped reserves in the Middle East, particularly in Mesopotamia's Zagros foothills. The Anticline theory, suggesting that oil accumulated beneath folded rock layers, piqued the interest of exploration companies and Western governments. Simultaneously, concerns arose over Germany's ambitious plans to construct a railway connecting Berlin to Baghdad, potentially accessing the Zagros oil reserves.

While the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand is often cited as the trigger for World War I, deeper tensions over expanding spheres of influence in the Middle East played a sig-

Working on the first pipeline in Kirkuk to transport oil.
AOLOC-16200-14256 Date: 1932

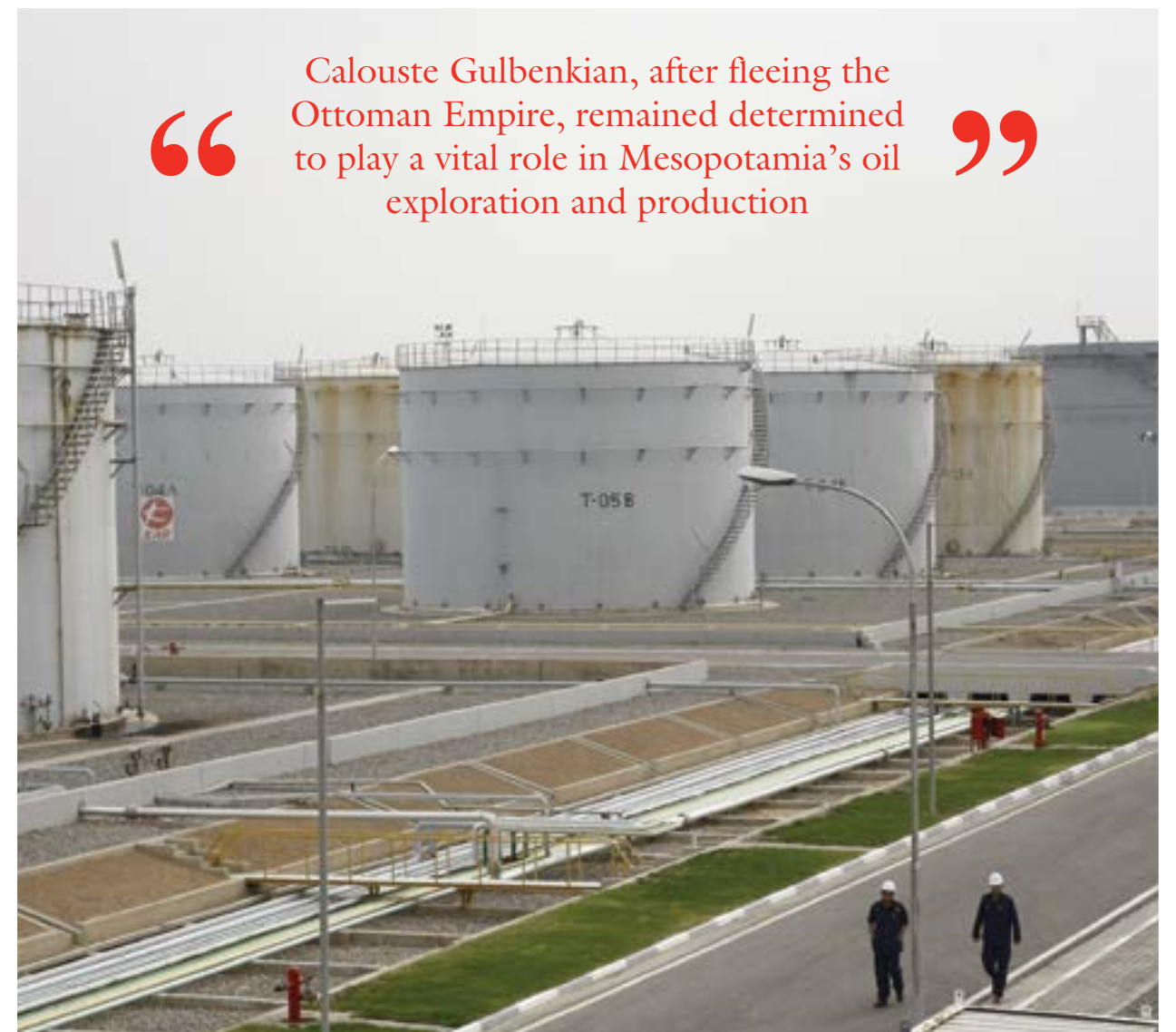


Photo: Safin Hamid

“ Calouste Gulbenkian, after fleeing the Ottoman Empire, remained determined to play a vital role in Mesopotamia's oil exploration and production ”

nificant role. The UK and its allies saw an opportunity to settle these disputes and secure their interests amidst the changing global power dynamics, with oil being a central element in their calculations.

Calouste Gulbenkian, after fleeing the Ottoman Empire, remained determined to play a vital role in Mesopotamia's oil exploration and production. The newly established Turkish Petroleum Company formed a strategic alliance with the victorious Western forces, solidifying the UK and France's foothold in the region.

Gulbenkian's involvement in defining the border between Turkey and the Mosul vilayet, with its promising oil-rich anticlines, fueled speculation about

his motives. Regardless, his contributions were recognized, and he received a 5% share of the revenue.

Oil and Lausanne

The Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 represented more than just post-war revenue distribution. It was a complex battle of interests, with nations and their affiliated oil companies fighting for influence in the new world order. Each country sought access to the valuable resource, and their oil companies actively lobbied and negotiated to secure favorable outcomes.

The absence of a strong, secular unifying figure comparable to Mustafa Ataturk in the Kurdish regions also raised

concerns about stability. The UK and its allies likely believed that incorporating the Mosul vilayet into the new state of Iraq, over which they had considerable influence, would better serve their interests in securing access to the oil resources.

As a result, the Kurds' aspirations for statehood were not fulfilled during the Treaty of Lausanne negotiations. The competing interests of the participating nations, coupled with the strategic importance of oil reserves in the region, influenced the decision-making process and the shaping of the post-war Middle East. The legacy of this decision continues to hinder the Kurds' quest for self-determination and stability in the region to this day. ●

Shaikh Mahmoud and the Kurdish Uprising

In this article, Richard Wilding examines relations between the Kurds and the British in the years following World War I. His research uses the written accounts and photographs of British administrators based in Kurdistan, as well as interviews with Kurdish historians and the descendants of Kurdish leaders.



Richard Wilding

Richard Wilding produces award winning exhibitions, films and books that explore the history and heritage of Kurdistan and other regions of the Middle East.

Since 2012, Richard has been Creative Director of Gulan, a charity which promotes Kurdish culture in the UK. In 2021, he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, London.

Richard is currently producing a film about Shaikh Mahmoud and 100 years of Kurdish / British relations.

Following the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I, Britain gained control of the three former Ottoman vilayets of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. However, since the British occupied Mosul after the armistice was signed, Turkey continued to claim the Mosul *vilayet*, together with its mainly Kurdish population, until 1926. To counter Turkey's claims, Britain proposed the establishment of one or more autonomous Kurdish provinces within the Mosul *vilayet* that would be loosely attached to any future administration in Baghdad.

In their search for a figure with widespread public support to head this Kurdish region, British political officers had been in contact with prominent Kurds, in particular with Shaikh Mahmoud Barzanji (1878-1956), the head of the leading Saiyid family of Southern Kurdistan.



Shaikh Mahmoud Barzanji, 1928. Sait Veroj Archive / The Photo Library of Kurdistan



Tomb of Kak Ahmad, great-grandfather of Shaikh Mahmoud, Sulaimani. Richard Wilding, 2022

In addition to being a *saiyid* (an honorific surname bestowed upon descendants of the Prophet Muhammad), Shaikh Mahmoud was also the head of an important branch of the Qadiri Sufi order. Sufi Shaikhs of outstanding personality are commonly credited with the power of working miracles, attracting the veneration of their followers. They and their descendants have, in consequence, often acquired considerable worldly power.

The British sent Major Edward Noel to Sulaimani, instructing him to establish a temporary system of administration under Shaikh Mahmoud. In November 1919, the British Secretary of State informed the British Civil Commissioner in Baghdad that:

"Kurdistan must be left to its own devices, and the practical question is how this can be done consistently with peace and security on the Mesopotamian frontier. We are advised by Noel that there are three essential conditions: (1) that Turkish authority should be excluded from Kurdistan; (2) that

Kurdistan should not be partitioned; and (3) that the frontier should follow as nearly as possible the ethnological line between Kurds and Arabs. Noel's view is that Kurds, if left to themselves, will be strongly pro-British and will need no encouragement or assistance from us to keep the Turks out."

However, Major Noel's colleague Cecil Edmonds questioned whether Shaikh Mahmoud understood the role that the British had in mind for him:

"I have no doubt that Shaikh Mahmud saw... a benevolent British Government intervening, not to exercise any control over his... rule, but only to prevent the Persian and the future Arab Governments from interfering..."



Sulaimani "is little more than a collection of mud huts." Cecil Edmonds / St Antony's College, Oxford

When Major Noel arrived in Sulaimani, the town was in a bad way, with corpses lying in the streets and empty houses. According to some sources, just one quarter of the town's population had survived a famine of 1914-18. Noel's first duty was to provide food and clothing for the destitute, and these humanitarian services were recalled with gratitude in later years.

Shaikh Mahmoud was informed that any Kurdish tribes wishing to accept his leadership would be allowed to do so. He was given the title of *bukmdar* (ruler), with a British political officer (PO) to 'advise' him. However, in April 1919, Major Noel was replaced by Major Ely Banister Soane. A man of very different temperament, Soane imposed a direct administration more like the rest of the occupied territories of Mesopotamia.



Adela Khanum, Major Soane, Lynette Soane, Capt. G.M. Lees and Ahmad Beg in Halabja, September 1919 Courtesy of Sheri Laizer.

Sensing that he was about to lose much of his autonomy, Shaikh Mahmoud organized an uprising. He was joined in this rebellion by the Hamawand tribe, some sections of the Jaff tribe, and the 16-year-old future Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani. Surprising Sulaimani at dawn on May 23, 1919, in a few hours Mahmoud had imprisoned the British personnel, seized the Treasury, and hoisted his flag (a red crescent on a green background) in place of the Union Jack.

A small garrison of British troops was stationed at Kirkuk, and their commanding officer received orders to send a detachment as far as Chamchamal. However, he underestimated the fighting capabilities of the Kurds and decid-



The First Division of the National Army taking oath to serve the Kurdish nation in front the flag of Shaikh Mahmoud.

Drakhshan Hafid Archive / Photo Library of Kurdistan

ed instead to advance on to Sulaimani with cavalry, armoured cars, and Ford vans equipped with Lewis guns.

As they reached the Tasluja pass, twelve miles from Sulaimani, the British forces were unexpectedly attacked from all sides and compelled to withdraw. The pursuing Kurds relentlessly followed the retreating British troops for twenty-five miles, inflicting severe casualties.

This humiliation of the British convinced many waverers to join Mahmoud's cause. Even across the Persian border, tribes rose up against their government, demanding incorporation into a Kurdish state under the Shaikh. It was now clear that a full-scale operation would be required by the British to retake Sulaimani.



*Ford convoy, Kirkuk - Chamchamal Road
Cecil Edmonds / St Antony's College, Oxford*

Cecil Edmonds was to accompany the expedition, which left Kirkuk for Chamchamal on June 15, 1919. The next morning, Edmonds was up at half-past three for a reconnaissance towards the Bazian Pass, which Shaikh Mahmoud was reported to be holding on both sides. Edmonds described the dramatic setting for the pending confrontation:

"In the clear morning light... we could see the long wall of the Qara Dagħ coming up from the south-east, dipping down in front of us to form the V-shaped gap that has been the scene of so many locally decisive battles..."

On June 18, before daybreak and in complete silence, the British infantry began to scale the heights on either side of the Bazian Pass and had nearly reached the top when, with the first light of dawn, their guns opened fire.



*We attacked at dawn, Bazian Pass.
Cecil Edmonds / St Antony's College, Oxford*

Edmonds says little of the battle itself but goes on to describe how he questioned two captured Kurdish officers, who had both seen Shaikh Mahmoud injured. He then received a note saying that a well-dressed Kurd, evidently a person of some importance, had been found lying wounded by the roadside. Edmonds found the man a little farther along, describing him as *"wearing voluminous Kurdish trousers tucked into top boots of Russian pattern...one boot was ripped open at the ankle and blood was oozing through his shirt at the waist."*



*Shaikh Mahmoud guarded by Indian troops.
Benke Jin Archive / The Photo Library of Kurdistan*

Captain Bond, the A.P.O. for Chamchamal, was sent to Bazian to identify the distinguished prisoner and on arrival confirmed that it was indeed Shaikh Mahmoud. A statement published by the British on August 3 announced that the whole of Southern Kurdistan had been pacified. Shaikh Mahmoud, as soon as he had sufficiently recovered, was tried by military court for rebellion and condemned to death. The sentence was later commuted to one of ten years' imprisonment, and he was exiled to India. But this was not the end of Shaikh Mahmoud. ●



*Shaikh Mahmoud with his fighters
Benke Jin Archive / The PhotoLibrary of Kurdistan*

Soviet Union's Politics Toward the Iranian Kurds



Kenan Demirel

Kenan Demirel is research Assistant Doctor, Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Muş Alparslan University.

On August 25, 1941, during the Second World War, Iran was invaded by the three Allied powers – the Soviet Union, United Kingdom, and United States – citing the presence of German specialists in the country. As per the agreement signed by the Allies with the Iranian government after the invasion, the northern part of the country was assigned as a Soviet sphere of influence and the southern part as British, with the regions populated by Iranian Kurds falling within both parts.

Initially, Soviet policy towards Iranian Kurds centered on the city of Mahabad, which is known for its nationalist and conservative nature and had been attacked by the Russian/Soviet army in the First and Second World Wars. The Kurdish policy towards the Soviets, on the other hand, developed in parallel with the course of the war and the general Iranian policy.

Early Soviet policy

In the early years of the occupation, the primary goal of Soviet forces in Iran was to ensure stability and security in the north. There was no clear policy towards Iranian Kurds since their main goal was to resist Nazi forces. In addition, the Kurdish population in the West Azerbaijan Province, which remained in the Soviet occupation zone, was quite small compared to the Azerbaijani Turks. Meanwhile, the rather conservative Sunni Kurds remained distant from the communist Russians, whom they considered nonbelievers. For this reason, Soviet authorities remained aloof from the Kurdish issue.

The Russians were also afraid that a national movement would arise among the Kurds in northern Iran and that the Kurds in the British occupation zone might join, triggering a British-Soviet clash. This hesitation continued to the end of the Battle of Stalingrad, after which it began to appear that the Germans would be defeated.

During this period, the main goal of Soviet policy towards the Iranian Kurds was to prevent the Germans from spreading their influence among Kurdish tribes in the region and using their areas to attack the Soviet Union. It also aimed repair the lingering ill effects

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Soviet authorities
remained aloof from
the Kurdish issue

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among the Kurds of what the Tsarist army had done in and around Mahabad during its occupation in the First World War. For this reason, Soviet political of-

ficers in the occupied regions attempted to earn the sympathy of the Kurds, advancing a cautious and optimistic policy towards them that avoided offending the influential tribal chiefs.

After the Battle of Stalingrad and the failure of the negotiations on oil concession, Soviet policy shifted towards achieving pragmatic goals, driven by the principle of obtaining maximum profit with minimal losses. By capturing Iranian Azerbaijan and part of Kurdistan, the Soviet Union would have had a profound effect on the political geography of the region and greatly strengthened its position in the Middle East.



A snapshot from 1946 featuring the legendary Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani alongside a group of his Peshmerga comrades

The primary objectives of its Iran policy were to move closer to the Persian Gulf through Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, have wide borders with Turkey, and become a bordering neighbor with Iraq.

First and second Baku visits

In parallel with the shifting Iran policy between 1941-45, the Soviet Union increased its activities among the separatist elements in Iranian Azerbaijan and Kurdistan and established an intelligence network that reached from Mahabad to Urmia and Tabriz to Baku.

Baku was the center where separatist movements in Iranian Azerbaijan were organized. Mir Jafar Baghirov, the Prime Minister of Soviet Azerbaijan, was the head of this organization. At the end of 1941, the Soviet government invited a group of about 30 Kurds who remained in their sphere of influence to Baku, with the aim of gaining the sympathy of the Kurds and disarming the tribal elements in Urmia.

In this regard, it can be said that the policies followed by the Soviet Union and Britain regarding ethnic elements in

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The main goal of Soviet policy towards the Iranian Kurds was to prevent the Germans from spreading their influence among Kurdish tribes in the region

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Iran during the early years of the occupation were similar. Both Soviet and British authorities sought to avoid problems with the armed tribal elements in their respective occupation zones and to establish friendly relations with the local populations. However, the Soviet invitation of the Kurds to Baku signaled that it was beginning to take an interest in ethnic elements in northern Iran. With the exception of Ghazi Muhammad and Seyf Ghazi, almost all the Kurds who were invited to Baku were conservative, feudal tribal members.

After the first visit to Baku, the Soviet Union's policy towards Iranian Kurds was put on hold until the oil concession negotiations failed in 1944 due to the opposition of the Iranian government, Britain, and the United States, as well as the lack of a decisive Soviet victory against the Germans. Following the Iranian government's rejection of the Soviet Union's requests for oil concessions, the Soviets increased their dominance over Iran's separatist minorities and invited a delegation of Kurds to Baku for the second time in 1945.



Qazi Muhammed alongside Kurdish leaders, including General Mustafa Barzani, during the foundation of Kurdistan Republic in Mahabad (1946)

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Komela J. Kaf did not have cadres trained in the Soviet Union, as was the case with the Azerbaijan Democratic Party

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enough assistance to the Kurds because they valued them less than the Azerbaijani movement and did not trust them.

During his second visit to Baku, Baghirov's request from the Kurdish delegation to be subordinate to the Azerbaijani movement and his idea that Kurdistan's independence was tied to the success of the Kurdish movements in Turkey and Iraq exemplified this situation. After all, the Kurds were not communists, and Komela J. Kaf did not have cadres trained in the Soviet Union, as was the case with the Azerbaijan Democratic Party. This was the most important reason why the Soviet Union provided less assistance to the Kurdish movement and did not accept it as a separate Azerbaijani entity. ●

The First Kurdish Alphabet



Ahmet Muaz Yakupoğlu

Ahmet Muaz Yakupoğlu is a dual citizen of Syria and Turkey and proficient in Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish, English, and Ottoman languages. He is currently overseeing operations at the Famer Center for Ottoman Studies in Istanbul.

The existence of an ancient Kurdish alphabet was known only to a small group of Kurdish intellectuals but had no tangible evidence supporting it. As a child, I heard this idea more than once during my father's meetings with his intellectual friends.

Discovering the source of the Kurdish alphabet

As an adult, my hopes of finding the alphabet have long been disappointed. My first discouragement came as a preparatory student in Damascus, when 'the Kurds' were mentioned in my history textbook—perhaps the only time the term evaded Syria's textbook censors—and one of the students asked the teacher: who are the Kurds? He responded to the extent that he could, but another student asked: do they have special letters? He answered in the negative, prompting me to state proudly that the Kurds had indeed had special letters since ancient times but had abandoned them. This prompted the old teacher to mock me, saying this was just a fabrication until proven otherwise. When I returned home, I searched throughout my father's huge library but only found a single orphan line in *Kurdistan and the Kurds* by Mulla Ael-Kurdi that was not supported by a reference. I realized then that I had no reliable evidence to prove the claims I believed to be true.

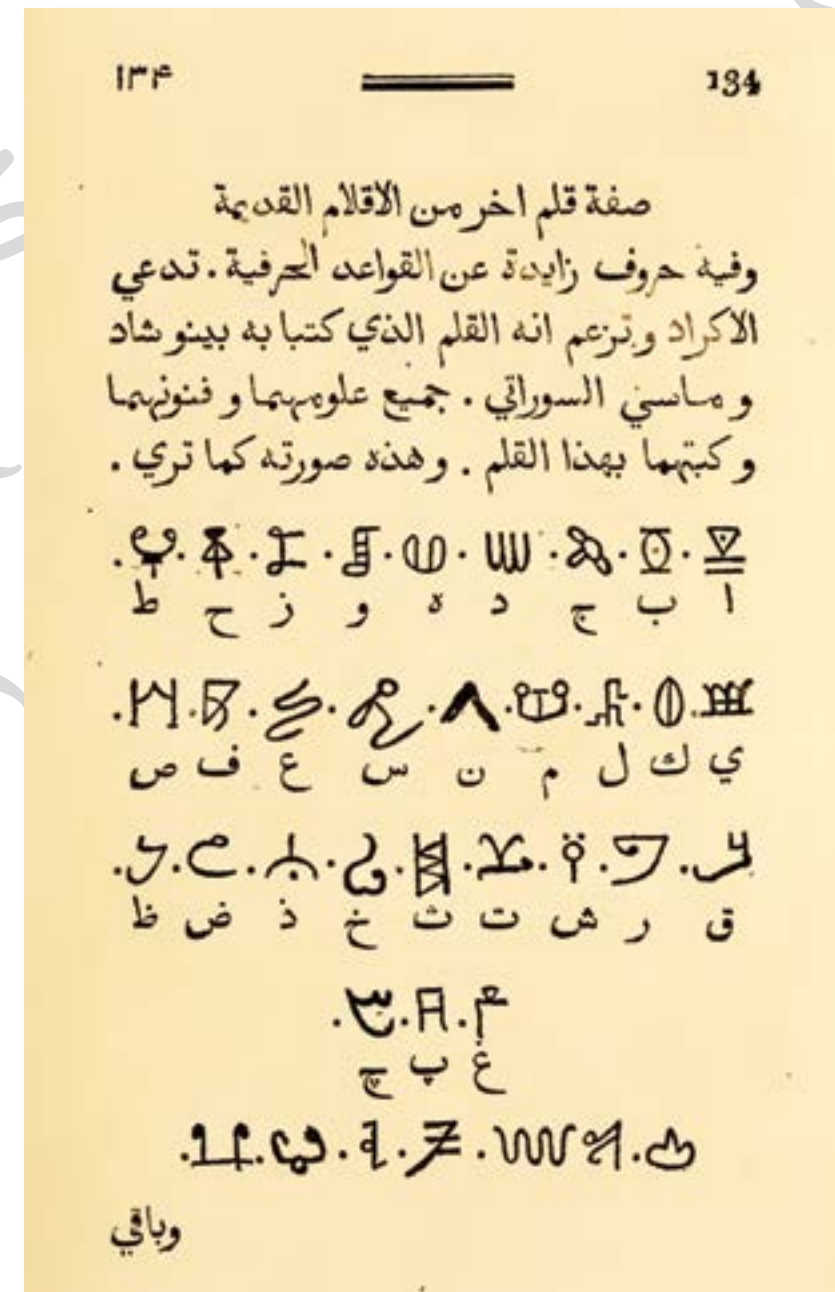
Later, while studying for my master's degree in 1999, I found mention in both the *Dictionary of Arabic Publications* by Elian Sarkis and a biography of Ibn Wahshiyya, which noted Wahshiyya translated books from Kurdish! I then learned that Wahshiyya's *Shawq Al-Mustaham* had been printed in Europe two centuries before and that the original manuscript was more than ten centuries old. So I set out in search of the book, hoping to find titles of other old Kurdish books in the process. Little did I know that this search would lead me to discover the Kurdish alphabet!

In 2003, I was working as the director of the Digital Manuscripts Center in Damascus, when I wrote to several parties to obtain a copy of the manuscript. I learned that Ayad al-Tabbaa had discovered a new copy in Iran, which had been issued in print. What surprised me was that he described the Kurdish alphabet in detail and how its letters corresponded to those in Arabic. Consequently, I obtained the reviewed edition of the book by the Austrian Orientalist Joseph von Hammer.

After this, I published a series of articles about these discoveries in the electronic newspaper *Al-Kurdiya News* in the UAE, translated by Dr. Haşim Özdaş into Turkish for the 5th issue of the Kurdish history journal *Kürt Tarihi* in Istanbul in 2013. Özdaş also translated them into Kurdish for the 4th issue of the *Journal of Living Languages* Institute at Bingöl University in 2016. Most recently, our friend Dr. Khanzadi Sabah gave a lecture about the discoveries to her students in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Ibn Wahshiyya and his book

Ahmed bin Ali, known as Ibn Wahshiyya, was Chaldean by origin and a chemist and scholar of other sciences. He authored books and translations, including from



ancient Kurdish.⁽¹⁾ *Al-Fihrist* by Ibn el-Nadim in the 11th century is the oldest Arabic bibliography that is known to exists. In it, Ibn Wahshiyya is described

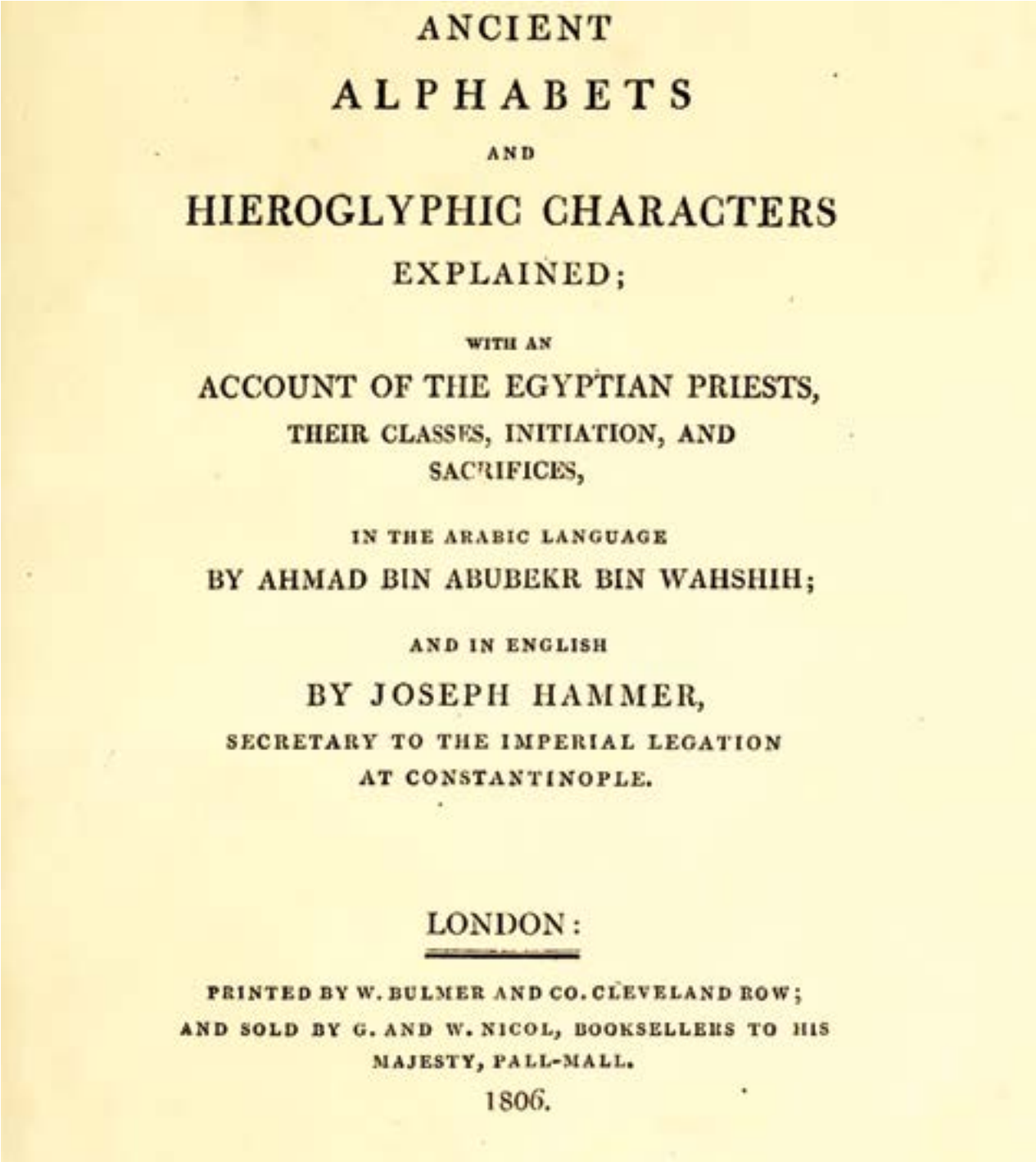
lies in the fact that it deals with dozens of ancient languages and deciphers their letters in Arabic, including hieroglyphs. Noted French Orientalist Jean-

don in 1806. Nearly two centuries later, it was printed by Ayad Al-Tabbaa in Damascus in 2003, after a new copy was discovered in Iran in 1998. As for

preserved in the National Library of France, No. Arabe 6805.

not describe the hieroglyphs as ancient, although he mentions some of the letters that preceded hieroglyphs and were used by the pharaohs as an ancient al-

He also fails to mention whether one should write the letters of the Kurdish alphabet continuously or separately. Nor does he discuss the direction of



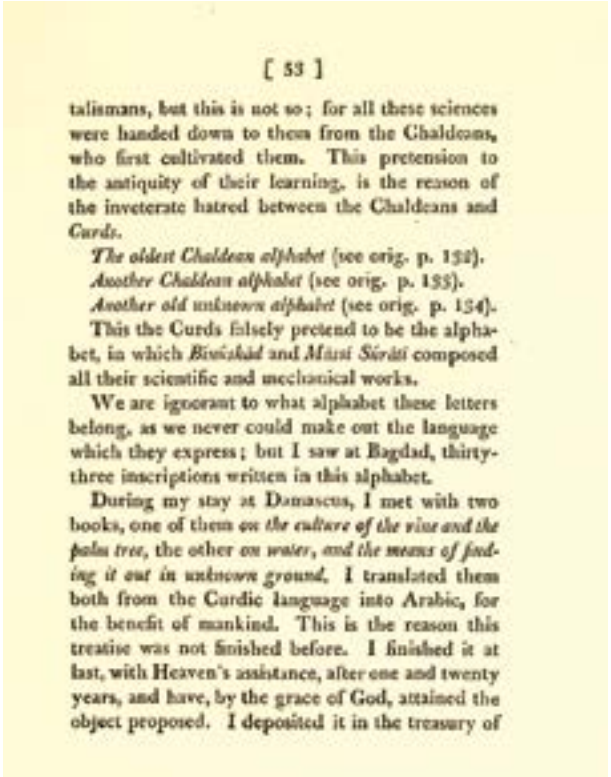
as one of the translators of Nabataean into Arabic, and the titles of many of his works are provided.⁽²⁾

François Champollion is one believed to have benefited significantly from Wahshiyya’s work.⁽⁴⁾

the available copies of the manuscript, there are, as far as I know, three: British Museum copy No. 444. H.173, a copy in the Sepahsalar High School Library in Iran No. 3312/2863, and a copy dating to the Ottoman period

The importance of the book, which he wrote in the year 241 AH/ 856 AD,

The first to discover the manuscript was Hammer, who printed it in Lon-



Was there more than one Kurdish alphabet?

Kurds are mentioned in Wahshiyya’s work more than once, which hints at the possibility of multiple Kurdish alphabets. Significantly, the author notes a set of letters which “Kurds claim is the alphabet with which Binoshad and Masi el-Tawrati wrote all their sciences, arts, and books”. This would place the Kurds alongside other contemporary peoples of the time, who reserved different alphabets for their rarified and common people, such as the alphabet of the Assyrian kings, which differs from the Syriac letters currently in use.

History of the Kurdish alphabet

The history of the Kurdish alphabet, according to the manuscript, dates to ancient times, as the writer divides the alphabets contained in his book into two parts: a section he describes as ancient, and another not. For example, he does

phabet. Importantly, when mentioning the alphabet of the Kurds, he includes it among the “ancient alphabets,” a description which he seems to use only to denote the alphabets of the peoples of Mesopotamia, such as the Hermesians, Nabateans, Chaldeans, and the Kurds.

Description of the first Kurdish alphabet

The Kurdish letters in his book are distinguishable from all other alphabets through things like letter count, typography, pronunciation, and translations. Wahshiyya finds 37 letters in the Kurdish alphabet, which is the second highest number of any he studies, after the Hermesians’ alphabet. Among the collection are 7 letters for which he can find no equivalent in the Arabic alphabet.

He describes the Kurdish alphabet as one of strange letters and drawings, and the pronunciation of its letters as not corresponding to other languages.

writing—from right to left or vice versa—although this qualification is applied to all the alphabets in the book.

Was this alphabet known and used at the time?

According to the author, the Kurdish alphabet was in use across various regions. He himself translated a number of books written in this alphabet into Arabic, which we may see as an indicator of the past importance of the Kurdish language and its spread.

What Wahshiyya’s work leaves us with then, is a surety that the Kurdish language is one of the oldest living languages still in use today. It had a special alphabet that was unique in its drawing and pronunciation, and was used to write many books of the time, some of which were translated into languages such as Arabic. ●

“My Body is in Prison, Not My Mind”

Yılmaz Güney's Lifelong Commitment to Art and Narrative



Husên Duzen

Husên Duzen is a Kurdish writer, translator, and journalist from Mardin. He is based in Germany since 1979. He is an accomplished author with a strong influence in Kurdish and global literature.

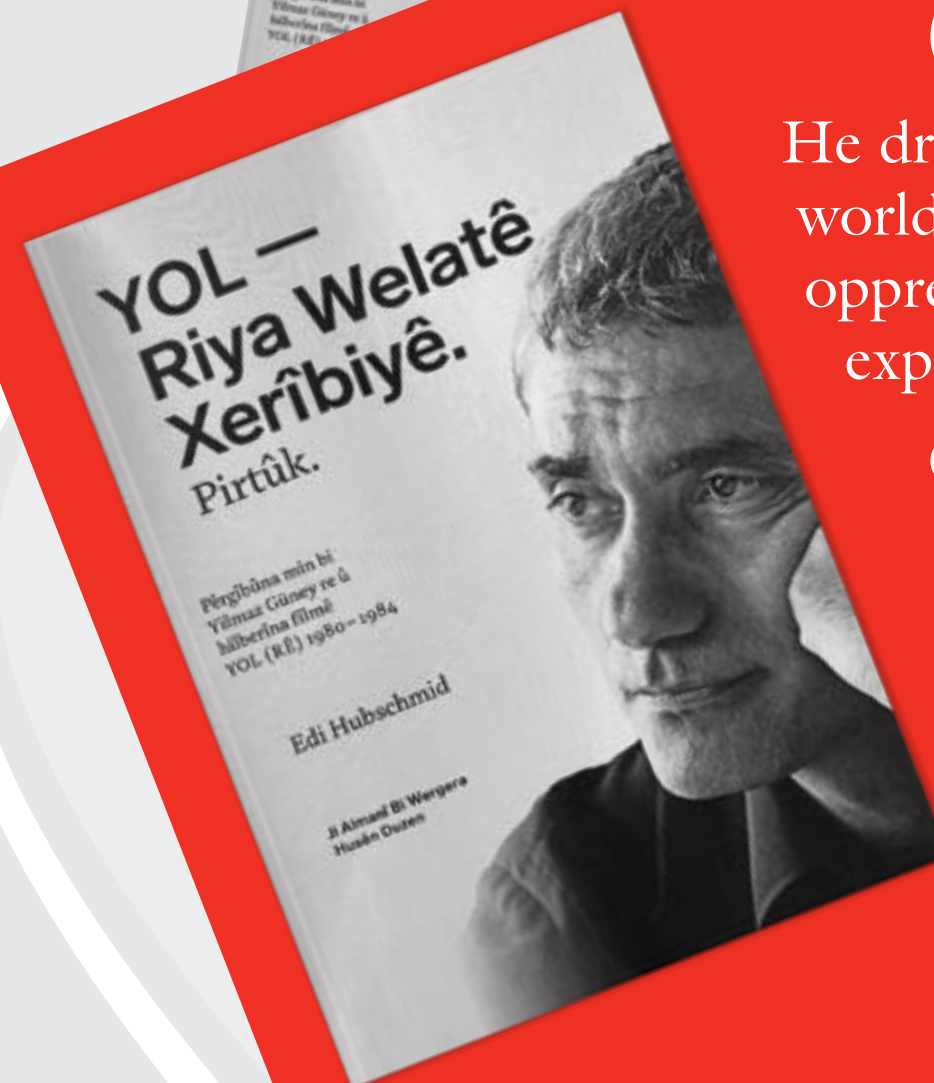
During my childhood, I often heard the name of the city Adana and, when I was around eleven years old, I finally visited it. There, my eyes caught sight of the novel *They Died Bowed Down* in a bookstore. I immediately bought it, spending all the money that I had in my pocket. The book spoke about injustices, and its warm narrative deeply influenced me. Later, I would eagerly watch many films by the author of this novel, experiencing the same warmth.

Later, in the mid-1970s, I was a student at a Boarding Teacher High School in the Dağkapı neighborhood in Diyarbakır. It was a time when conservative forces held power in Türkiye, and the ruling Nationalist Front (MC*) government, which included the MHP* party, aimed to place its supporters in teacher training schools where they would attack Kurdish and leftist students daily. I remember spending many nights at the coffee shops around the school. To momentarily forget this situation, we would often go to the cinema.

The film *Arkadaş* had just been released and so one weekend afternoon, I went to see

it. I had seen some of Yılmaz Güney's films before, but this one had a special impact on me. I discovered a courageous and truth-speaking protagonist with a slender figure from whom I had much to learn about resisting and stand-

“Wherever Yılmaz went, he carried books with him, recommending or gifting them”



“He dreamed of a world free from oppression and exploitation”

ing up to the fascist pressures at school. With the strength I gained from the film, I started resisting these pressures, at least for a while. It didn't last long, and I was exiled to Balıkesir in western Türkiye.

Later, I arrived in Germany before the military coup on September 12, 1980. After the junta, there wasn't a day when I didn't hear news of a friend being captured or killed in Türkiye, as the military brutally attacking Kurdish freedom movement members and leftists with all its might.

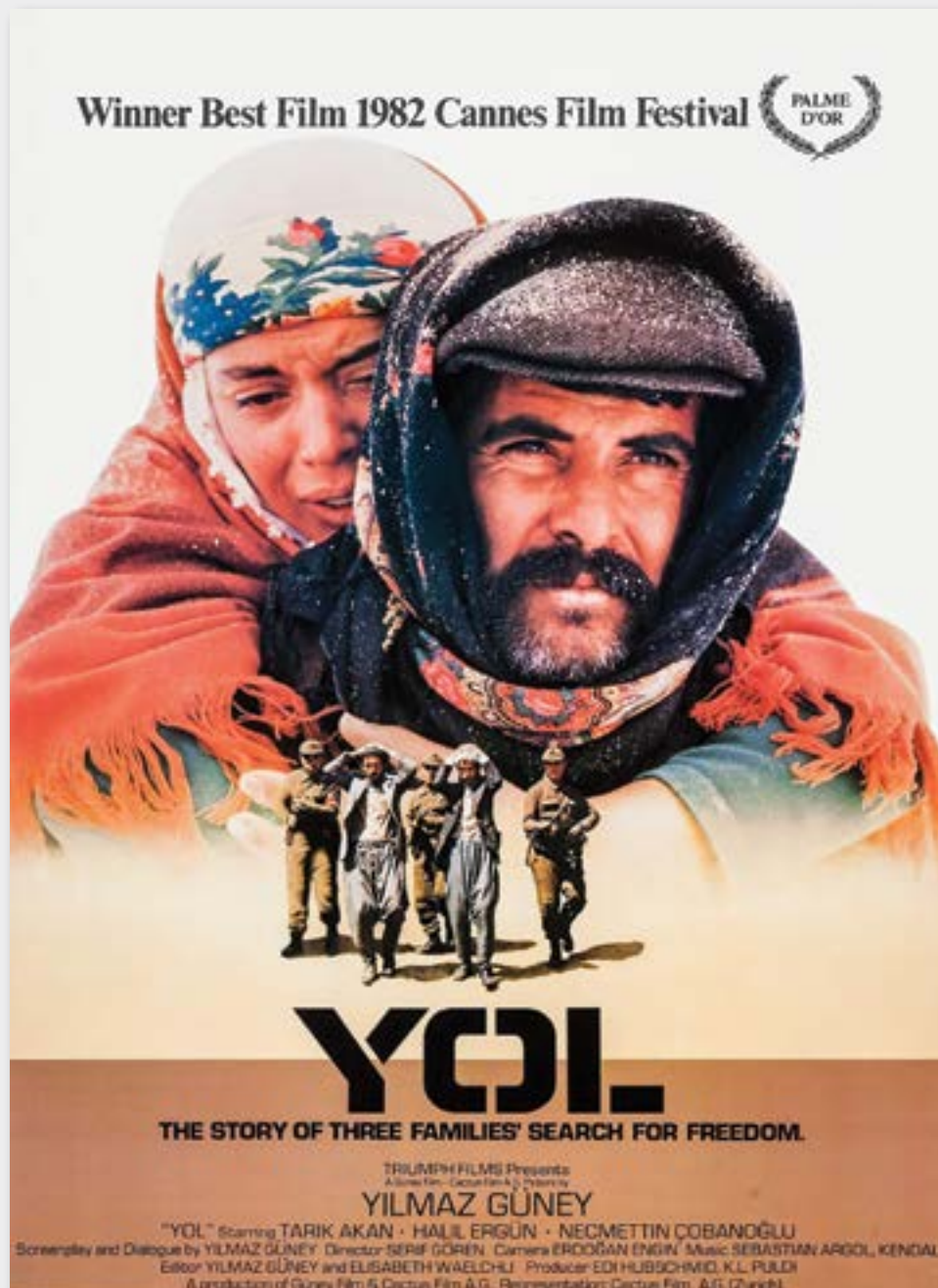
They were intervening in all aspects of life.

Escape

In exile, we monitored the situation in Türkiye from afar. Those were very dark years. Blood was being shed on the streets and in the dungeons of my country. Our means of solidarity were limited. Many in exile didn't speak the language of the country they lived in and faced difficulties in resolving their personal problems.

Suddenly, news spread that Yılmaz Güney had escaped from prison and from Türkiye altogether. How could this be? How had he managed to break through the prison gate with his slender figure? How had he managed to leave Türkiye under strict military control?

These questions nagged at me. Ap-



parently, the power of the dictatorship wasn't enough to control everything. There wasn't a day when the Turkish media didn't publish a lie about Güney's escape. At the time, I was a subscriber to the alternative left-wing newspaper Taz (die Tageszeitung). My days always started with it, and one morning, I opened the paper to find a whole page dedicated to Güney and his success in Cannes. At that moment, Güney's letter to his wife Fatoş while incarcerated came to mind: "My body is in prison, not my mind. We will make

films that will be talked about all over the world."

Undoubtedly, the success of the film *Yol* at Cannes, a significant part of which belongs to the author of this book, was not only the realization of Güney's words. It also, at that time, gave power to those who had been forced to flee, had been deprived of their citizenship, and were living in exile. So, being in exile was not a defeat. By receiving the Golden Palm, Güney had conveyed this message to those in exile.



Forever an inspiration

Yılmaz Güney is one of the few people who made me love books from an early age. In *Arkadaş*, he gives Ahmet Arif's poem, "I Wore Out Shackles from Longing," as a gift to the young girl Melike, who played the lead role. After watching the film, I went and bought that book of poems, even though I knew it could lead to my capture and exile or expulsion from school.

Wherever Yılmaz went, he carried books with him, recommending or gifting them. He was not just a reader and seeker of knowledge; he was also a distributor of knowledge. In her book, his daughter Elif mentions how he would frequently ask her questions about various subjects, such as "What is socialism?" or "What is Kurdistan?"

When asked to translate this book, I was hesitant. I already had a novel translation in hand, and the demands of my medical profession were quite intense. However, when I saw the photo narrative of this great personality being rescued from the clutches of a dictatorial regime, I changed my mind. A courageous Swiss man had clandestinely smuggled Güney out of Türkiye under the harsh conditions of the Kenan Evren junta. Now, he had written his memories from that time. Thus, Güney became the person who empowered me to undertake the translation of *The Ballad of Exiles*.

Edi Hubschmid has written the story of *Yol*, from Isparta Prison to the Cannes Film Festival, with the care of a film producer. He has tried to keep the narrative limited to the events he witnessed as much as possible. Nevertheless, the warmth of the friendship between two

men from different cultures, the experiences of *Yol* and of many other filmmakers, becomes apparent.

Yılmaz Güney wanted to accomplish much more. Unfortunately, passing most of his 47 years of life in captivity and exile didn't allow him to realize all his projects. He dreamed of a world free from oppression and exploitation. In his final years, he was occupied with the idea of making an epic film called "The Birth of a Nation." According to the information provided by Kendal Nezan, the president of the Paris Kurdish Institute, the film would be about Kurdish history and the Kurdish freedom movement in the style of D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*.

Unfortunately, his untimely death prevented this as well. ●

Take Me to the Mehdi Zana Street

This intriguing article takes readers on a captivating journey through the streets of Diyarbakir, a Kurdish city in Eastern Türkiye also known as Amed. Delving into the intricate interplay of history, culture, politics, and identity, the author paints a vivid picture of this remarkable place. The city's old town, enveloped by ancient Roman fortress walls, exudes an air of enchanting beauty and enigma. However, as the author ventures into the newer parts of Diyarbakir, they bear witness to a profound transformation characterized by the emergence of numerical street names and an ever-widening divide between the privileged and marginalized areas.

As the author continues his exploration, a quest marked by ambiguity, he strives to illuminate the harsh realities faced by the Kurds in modern Türkiye. He notes with dismay that the streets of present-day Diyarbakir bear the names of politicians and writers who hold no connection to the city, while the names of celebrated Kurdish individuals from Diyarbakir remain absent. In a symbolic gesture, the author imagines naming a street after Mehdi Zana, a Kurdish author, politician, prominent Kurdish political activist and former mayor of Diyarbakir expressing his hope that this act of imagination will one day become a reality.



Ciwanmerd Kulek

Ciwanmerd Kulek is a writer and translator based in Diyarbakir. He has a degree in English Language Teaching. He is the author of several novels and short story books in Kurdish, and has translated a dozen of works from the world literature into Kurdish.

The old town is crammed between the huge, black-stoned walls of a wide ancient fortress. Finding it on the map, one encounters a miscellany of names flowering the short lines of its narrow alleys, which seem to punctuate the flat belly of a turbot fish.

Moving out from the high walls of the fortress towards the sprawling settlements that constitute its new heartland and render the old town a more marginal place, one perhaps only for curious tourists, one begins to see a gradual numeric table dotting the streets. While numbers swarm in the short lanes of blocks, replacing the words of the old town's experimental poetry, some blocks look blank in the less wrinkled face of the City, as if they are still unsure if they are ready to exist.

Going further, full names of people denominate the long lines that are the streets and recently built popular boulevards. Ranging from presidents and prime ministers of the Turkish Republic to famous Turkish poets and writers and, surprisingly, a few well-known Kurdish figures like Musa Anter, a list of names leaves encyclopedic footnotes along the long lines of the City's main arteries. Some names make no impression on me. I don't know who they are. I know the places, however. I have been to many streets. And I know more than the map shows, no matter how much I zoom it in.

Yet, it is all kind of strange. I feel strange.

Getting further away from the old town, one gets closer to higher buildings, more spacious apartments, more luxurious entertainment spaces, and better designed parks and streets. Diary shops, kebab and lahmacun restaurants, dessert shops, doner shops, nuts-and-seeds shops, and cafes



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I remember a survey in which the City topped 80 other cities for being the most unhappy one

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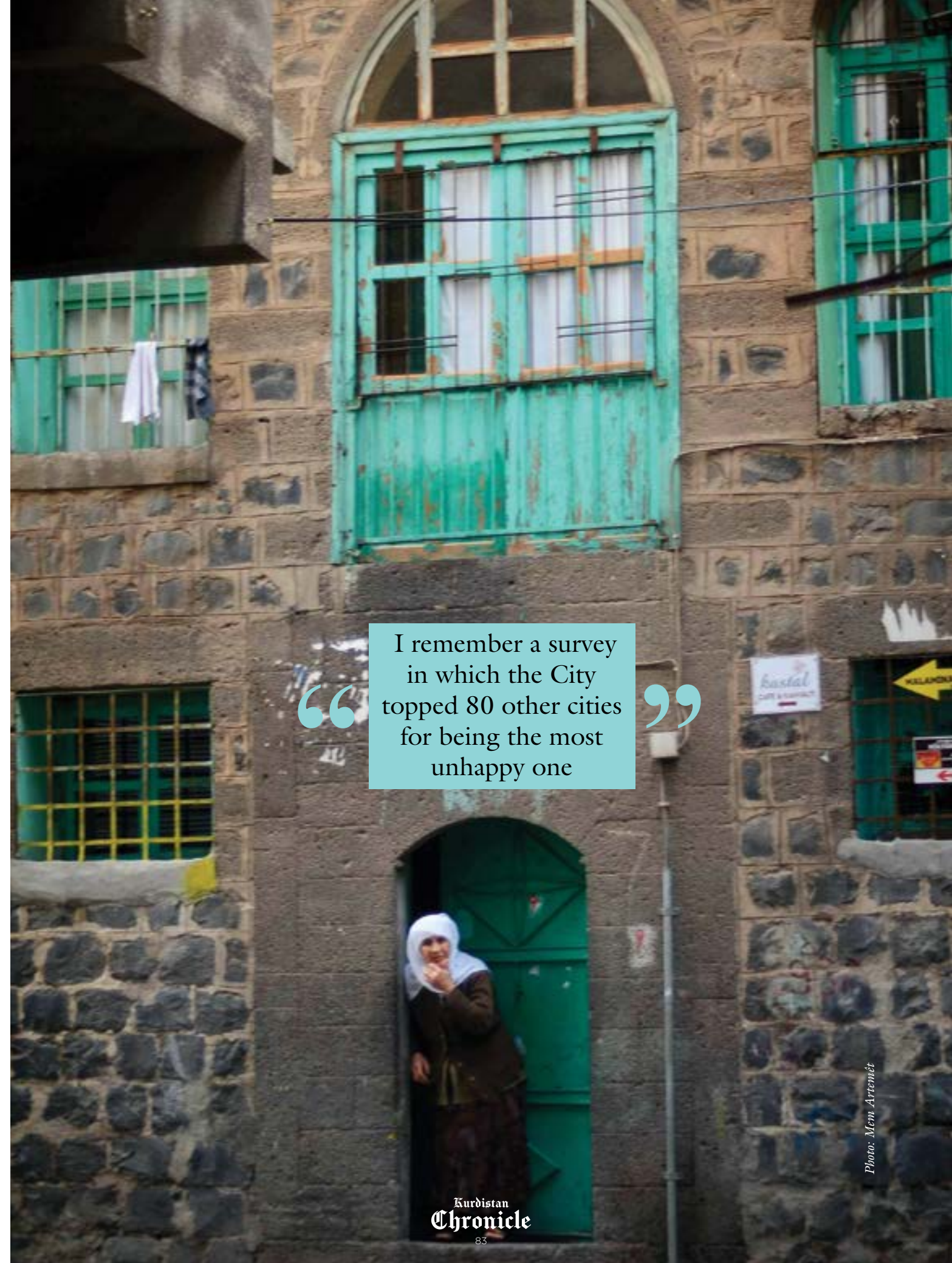


Photo: Mem Aramêr

appear in an infinite line of recurrence along the pretty straight lines of the boulevards. I get the weird Napoleonic impression that all the armies move on their bellies. The pandemic and the recent devastating earthquake might have made people's struggle for finding food more visible to me. I don't know. Yet, I can't help but develop a sense of frustration. I remember a survey in which the City topped 80 other cities for being the most unhappy one. Another statistic showed that it also lagged far behind others on the cultural development index. And I usually come across someone who nonchalantly spits on the ground. I try to forget. I try not to see. I live the city. I leave the city.

Pacing a once quite busy street named after an old mayor of the city, Dr. Ahmet Bilgin, I realize that currently the only elected officials left in the City are *mukhtars*, i.e. neighborhood representatives who barely hold any author-

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One of the biggest
worries among those
who opposed the
current government
in Türkiye before last
elections was whether
the ruling party would
peacefully leave power
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ity but are usually the most fierce and furious ones during election campaigns and have the most uncompromising

stances against accepting election results if their side loses.

I gather democracy is not the art of winning, but the art of losing. And it is always undermined by those who can't bear a loss. Citing 1950s Türkiye, which held the first free and fair elections and during which a peaceful transition of power was implemented for the first time in the history of the Middle East, famous historian Bernard Lewis remarked that “the electoral defeat of C.H.P. was its greatest achievement.”

One of the biggest worries among those who opposed the current government in Türkiye before last elections was whether the ruling party would peacefully leave power. That assumption depended on the fact that the opposition would win the elections, but since this didn't occur, we will never know if their worries were well placed.

The current post-election mess in politics makes it clearer that many things outlast governments and power changes. And the promised heaven is postponed until the next call, not because some can't win enough but because some can't lose enough.

There is always something bizarre lingering behind the dark blue bubbles of demagoguery and propaganda. They never let one grasp the full truth. That's what I feel when I turn right from a crossroads on the widest boulevard of the City, which is named Mahabad, to the Nazım Hikmet Boulevard.

Hikmet was a famous Turkish poet born in Salonica with a Polish-Turkish lineage. He was jailed for a dozen of years after being charged for making communist propaganda and then passed away in Moscow in exile in 1963. Paying tribute to his memory, the recently opened street was named after him by the former city council, which was governed by the pro-Kurdish Party. A Kurdish poet living at the same time as Hikmet in Türkiye would undoubtedly have been jailed simply for claiming that he is a Kurd or trying to speak and write in his native language, a charge that not a single Turkish author would ever be tried for. And his or her name would never ever be shining on the big blue signboards labelling the streets of a Turkish city.

Suddenly, I want to get in a taxi and tell the driver: “Take me to the Mehdi Zana Street.”

A brilliant charismatic young man working for a tailor, Zana had run for mayor in 1977. It was the first time in the City's history that one representing Kurds dared to run for the office. He drew huge support from people and, conversely, severe backlash from Turkish authorities. He was detained and tortured but didn't relent. He rejected to testify in the courts in any language other than Kurdish, and, winning the election, managed to sit in the mayor's seat with the pains and stains of the heavy tortures that had been inflicted on him and been meant to deter him from running and gaining the post.

I dream about a wide, bustling, luminous street with lots of cultural spaces under the canopy of a large oak with plane trees on both sides. And perhaps a proud and glorious statue of his resistant soul at an intersection, beaming his sincere Kurdish smile from there. I am sure Nazım Hikmet, whose poetry I admire, would also be more than willing to see his name replaced by Zana's on the street. Yet, I can't bring myself to ask any driver to take me there. There is no Mehdi Zana Street in the City. And no language to complain about its non-existence. Maybe one day there will be. And maps could look fairer and sweeter. ●



Photo: Mem Arteni



Photo: Mem Arteni

Anfal Survivor Speaks Through Art



Qassim Khidhir

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

Situated within the picturesque mountains of Kurdistan is the extraordinary gallery of Kivan Barzani, a unique and expressive artist. His canvases portray the tragedies that have befallen the Kurdish people over the decades – tales of genocide, oppression, and the painful expulsion from their ancestral homes. However, amidst the sorrow, one element stands strong in his artwork: the prominence of women, symbolizing the

“One element stands strong in his artwork: the prominence of women, symbolizing the indomitable strength he has witnessed in them”

indomitable strength he has witnessed in them.

Kivan Maho Smail, is from the Pirmam district in Erbil. His art genre is motif, and his style is the mesmerizing Dot Art, a technique using dotted paint instead of traditional brushstrokes. Notably, he is the only artist in the region who has mastered this captivating style. For 26 years, Kivan has relied on his trusty German-made Rotring

calligraphy pen, lending a unique touch to his creations.

Each day, Kivan dedicates countless hours to perfecting his art. He meticulously draws on imported Swedish wood, a sustainable material that preserves his masterpieces for generations to come. A testament to his dedication, some of his works can take an entire year to complete.

Childhood sufferings

His paintings are not mere reflections of his imagination; they also mirror the pain and hardships he experienced from an early age. Born in 1971 in the village of Hostan in Barzan area, Kivan's family was tragically uprooted when he was just four years old, forced to seek refuge in a camp in Diwaniya in southern Iraq alongside other Kurdish families. The conditions were unbearable, with sickness and hunger plaguing their every day.

“Death was a constant companion; I remember there was a cemetery opposite our camp that was always crowded,” Kivan said, a haunting reminder of the pain they endured.

A twist of fate led them to Qushtapa camp on the outskirts of Erbil, where a chilling experience awaited them. As the Iran-Iraq War erupted in 1980, a warplane bombed their camp, claiming the lives of 22 innocent souls. The memories of that fateful day still linger, as Kivan believes that it was an Iraqi plane, not an Iranian one, which intentionally bombed their camp and blamed on the Iranian.

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Kivan's family was tragically uprooted when he was just four years old

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The atrocities of the Saddam Hussein regime escalated further with the Anfal genocide campaign, which aimed to eradicate the Kurdish people. Kivan's camp, Qushtapa, became surrounded, and horrors unfolded as males aged 13 and above were systematically arrested, among them Kivan's father.

“The Iraqi army sealed our camp – not even a chicken could escape – and began arresting all males over the age of 13, including my father,” Kivan explained.



Photo: Safin Hamid



Photo: Safin Hamid



“

Kivan found solace in art from his early days, drawing mountains and chukar partridge birds, symbols of Kurdish resistance and beauty

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A few of his 250 portraits are now housed in the Barzani National Memorial Museum

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Kivan, then just 12 years old, narrowly escaped capture, his small stature concealing his true age. Tragically, those who were apprehended never returned, succumbing to the desolate deserts of southern Iraq.

The loss of his father thrust Kivan's mother into the role of resilient matriarch, a symbol of strength that resonates deeply within Kivan's artwork.

Remembering tragedies, instilling hope

Kivan found solace in art from his early days, drawing mountains and chukar partridge birds, symbols of Kurdish resistance and beauty.

Amidst hardship, Kivan's artistic talent flourished, and children from the camp would gather around him, captivated by his paintings. This passion endured and evolved, becoming his medium for voicing the sufferings and mayhem faced by the Kurdish people. He dedicated some of his most moving works to inspire Kurdish unity, firmly believing that a united front holds the key to a brighter future for the generations to come.

Today, Kivan is occupied in portraying influential Kurdish figures, intellectuals, religious leaders of various faiths, and politicians, not only from the Kurdistan region but from Kurdish communities worldwide.

He even commemorates those who supported the Kurdish cause, regardless of their ethnicity, such as Iraqi poet Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, Turkish philosopher İsmail Beşikçi, and Danielle Mitterrand, the wife of French President François Mitterrand. A few of his 250 portraits are now housed in the Barzani National Memorial Museum, which opened this year.

Kivan's dream transcends the bounds of his artistic skill. Through his mesmerizing artwork, Kivan implores the world to remember the tragedies of the Kurdish people while instilling hope for a united and resilient future.

“My dream,” Kivan confides, “is for my children and their children not to endure the same sufferings I experienced as a child.” ●

3,660 Days in Saddam's Prisons

Memoirs of a Christian *Peshmerga*

Throughout the 20th century, Kurdish Christians in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq – including Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, and Armenians – were part of the Kurdistan liberation movement, with a large number of Christian fighting in the ranks of the Kurdish peshmerga.

This story is about a young Christian fighter from the Kurdistan Region who spent 10 years and eight days in the dark and terrible prisons of Saddam Hussein's regime because of his participation in the Kurdish people's liberation movement.



Barham Ali

Barham Ali is a seasoned journalist within the Kurdistan Region and holds the esteemed position of editor-in-chief at Bas News.

Revolutionary spark

In the mid-1980s, when Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime ruled the whole of Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region, the Kurdish people were tortured, oppressed, imprisoned, and executed by the security agencies of Hussein's regime. They were executed and forcibly enlisted to fight in the Iran-Iraq War. Only a year had passed since the genocidal Anfal campaign against the Kurdish people in the Barzan area, during which more than 8,000 people were massacred. Masoud Barzani also led the Gulan Revolution against the Iraqi Ba'ath regime to liberate Kurdistan.

Starting in 1983, a 15-year-old Kurdish youth from a patriotic Assyrian Christian family living in the Sarchnar neighborhood of Sulaymaniyah, one of the most important cities in Iraqi Kurdistan, became passionate about revolutionary work and decided to join the Kurdistan revolution.

Born in 1969, the young man named Sherzad Farman Yaqo came to be known as Sherzad Masihi ("Sherzad the Christian") in his neighborhood. With the encouragement of two of his friends, Nizar Nuri and Salar Mohammed Abdulkarim, Sherzad joined the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Masoud Barzani. From then on, he began his political and revolutionary career.

"I remember when I was six or seven years old, the Iraqi government decided to conduct a national census. An Arab population

official came to our house to fill out a census form asking what nation we were."

"We are Assyrians," my father responded. The Arab employee said: "We cannot write Assyrian. You are Arabs, so I will write Arabs."

“
My brother, we are not
Arabs, we are Assyrians. If
you want to change our
nationality, then please
change it to Kurdish. Why
are you making us Arabs?
”

My father said angrily: "My brother, we are not Arabs, we are Assyrians. If you want to change our nationality, then please change it to Kurdish. Why are you making us Arabs?"

The employee said: 'Don't say that, it is bad for you and me. Every Christian in Iraq is written as an Arab. This is the order of the state, and no one can disobey it!'

"That conversation between my father and the census officer – and all the oppression that was committed against the people of the Kurdistan Region by the Iraqi Ba'ath regime at that time – made me want to join



Sherzad Farman, the protagonist of the memoir

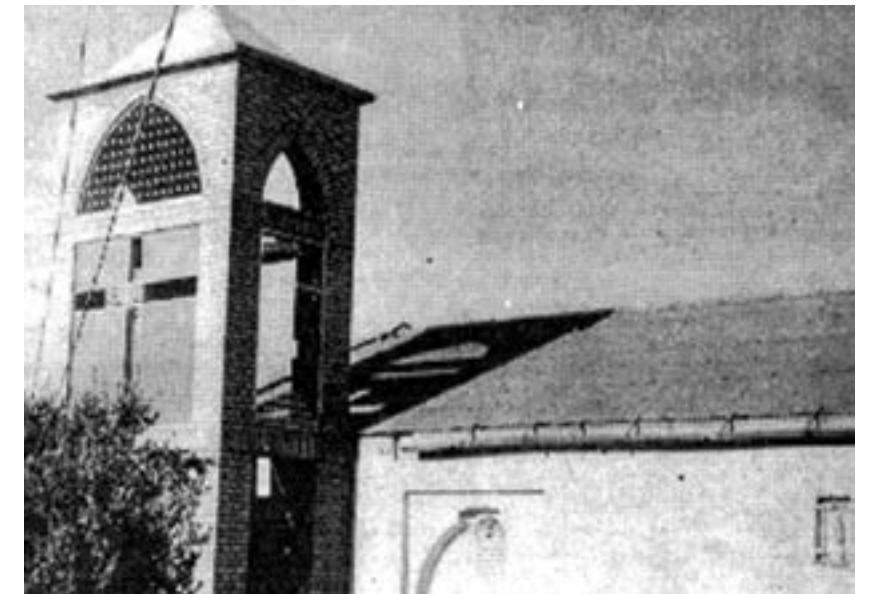
the ranks of the peshmerga and the Kurdish revolutionaries," Sherzad said.

Becoming peshmerga

The secret political activities of Sherzad and his friends in Sulaymaniyah in 1984-1985 included: organizing demonstrations in the city against the Ba'ath regime, threatening spies and officials of the regime, monitoring and guiding the peshmerga units coming into the city from the mountains to attack the headquarters of the Ba'ath security agencies, writing political slogans on the walls of public places, and hanging statements and publications of the Kurdish revolutionary leadership in the city at night.



Commanders Abdullah Agha and Othman Qadr Minawar (Known as Khala Afan) captured in a photo in Shler area during the revolution



A view of a church in Sulaymaniyah (1967)

The Kurdistan Revolution had only one radio station called the Voice of Kurdistan Radio to use as a media and communication tool. The Iraqi Ba'ath regime used radar devices to interfere with the radio broadcast so that no one in the Kurdistan Region could hear news of revolutionary activities. Sherzad Masihi and his friends would record the broadcasts on tapes that they threw into the houses of Ba'ath regime officials to intimidate them.

In 1985, after Sherzad and some of his friends participated in a large demonstration in Sulaymaniyah against the Ba'ath regime, they were targeted by the Ba'ath security agency. They fled to the mountains and joined the peshmerga in Sulaymaniyah and became pesh-

merga. Sherzad was only 16 years old at the time, so the peshmerga officials told him: "You should go back to the city and continue your studies because you are still a child. And when you turn 18, you may come back to us if you would like."

"If you don't accept me as peshmerga, I will have to go somewhere else," Sherzad insisted.

In regime prisons

Shortly after Sherzad began his peshmerga service, his parents sent him a letter through a neighbor asking him to return to the city; if he did not, they would come to the mountains as well. Sherzad was forced to return to the city



Sherzad (left) with Uncle Najib, siblings and cousins



Martyr Salar Mohammad Abdulkarim, a Peshmarga comrade and cellmate of Sherzad Farman (1985)



Sherzad Farman at a Mass in Deir Maryama church, Sulaymaniyah (1978)



Sherzad Farman at the age of three, Chwarbagh district, Sulaymaniyah (1971)

and resume political activities until he and a number of his comrades were exposed by some spies. On a summer morning in 1985, a car full of Ba'athist security forces raided Sherzad's father's house and arrested the 16-year-old Sherzad.

This young Christian revolutionary discovered a life of pain and torture that awaited him in Ba'ath prisons. He spent several months in the prisons of both the Sulaymaniyah Security Department and the Chuarbakh Security Department in Sulaymaniyah. Sherzad endured beatings and torture every day. There, the prison guards brought video cameras and forced the prisoners to confess to various crimes.

After months of torture, Sherzad and

his comrades were transferred to Fazailiyah Prison near Baghdad, where they were placed in one hall with 101 other young people from Sulaymaniyah. The rest of the large halls housed thousands of Faily Kurdish men, women, and children. At the time, the Ba'ath regime was expelling the Failis from Baghdad and deporting them to Iran. At great risk to himself, Sherzad delivered a letter from a Faily Kurdish father from the roof of the men's prison to the man's daughter in another section of the prison. He received the daughter's answer in the same way and took it to her father.

Later Sherzad was taken from Fazailiyah to the Revolutionary Court, where he witnessed many Kurds being sentenced to death or life imprisonment. When

Sherzad was put on trial, he took off his shirt in front of the judge, showed him the bruises he received from torture, and shouted: "I have done nothing. What is written and signed under my name was extracted under pressure and torture. Everyone was under pressure from beatings and torture."

Two guards in the court rushed to him and beat him. Then the judge read out the verdict: "Because the accused Sherzad Farman Yaqo belongs to Masoud Barzani's group and participated in destructive events in northern Iraq, the court sentences him to 15 years in prison."

As a young Christian who was in the ranks of the peshmerga and participated in the Kurdistan Revolution, Sher-



(From right to left) Tariq Ghafour, Bayis Socialist, and Hawre Othman, captured in a photo at Badosh prison, Mosul (1991)



Hama Yadgar Siwaily, the Peshmarga who first registered Sherzad as a Peshmarga (1982)

zad was tortured regularly in different prisons. In most prisons, the guards openly asked him: "As a Christian, why did you join the Kurdish Revolution, the peshmerga, and the Barzani group? How can a Christian participate in the Kurdish movement?" Because of his devotion to freedom, Sherzad never gave up his ideals, even though he was imprisoned for more than 10 years.

During Sherzad's decade in prison, dictator Saddam Hussein sometimes granted amnesty to prisoners on special conditions. Sherzad, however, was a Christian and had participated in the Kurdish revolution. When amnesty was issued for Kurdish political prisoners, he was told the following: "This amnesty does not apply to you because you are an Arab, according to your ID card!" When amnesty was issued for Arab political prisoners, he was told: "This amnesty does not apply to you because you have been arrested and sentenced for participating in the Kurdish cause." Out of his 15-year sentence, Sherzad spent about nine years in Abu Ghraib in Baghdad and one year in Badoush for a total of 10 years and eight days.

Memories of a revolutionary

I have known Sherzad Masihi since childhood because we were born in the same neighborhood in Sulaymaniyah. When he was released in 1996, I went to welcome him, and we agreed to write a book about his life and experiences in prison. I have since published the book in both Kurdish and Arabic, and it contains very important documents, the most important of which are about 40 photographs of Sherzad and his friends in prison.

Every night and day of his time in prison contained so many events, tragedies, and deaths that each could be made into a movie. According to Sherzad, the prisons of Saddam's regime held tens of thousands of people of all ages, including Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Turkmens, Chaldeans, Shiite and Sunni Muslims, Christians, Yezidis, Kakais, Sabi'is, Mandais, Baha'is, intellectuals, senior officers, and clergymen.

After Sherzad was released from prison,



he returned to Kurdistan to rejoin the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Since 2001, he has served as a security officer in the Kurdistan Region. He is

currently in charge of a security base in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region. He is married and is the father of three sons and a daughter. ●

INTERVIEW

Arya Atti Art, Migration, and Self-Discovery

In this interview, Arya Atti, a Kurdish gallerist and painter from Kobani, Syrian Kurdistan, shares her remarkable journey as an artist seeking refuge in Germany amidst the turmoil of war in her homeland. Having participated in 40 exhibitions across Europe and the Middle East, Arya discusses how art played a pivotal role in her integration process in a new country. She delves into the challenges of finding her artistic identity and the profound influence of renowned artists like Frida Kahlo on her work. Through her paintings, which incorporate unique Kurdish fabrics, Arya showcases her deep cultural connection and endeavors to foster unity and understanding through art. The interview also explores the essence of Kurdish art, a medium reflecting just causes and political messages, embodying the resilience and diversity of Kurdish identity through the ages.

Kurdistan Chronicle

Kurdistan Chronicle (KC): What caught my attention in one of your conversations is when you said, "I arrived in Europe barefoot." Let's start from this point. What was your motivation to migrate from your country? We understand the conditions of war, but the reasons for an artist's migration differ from those for an ordinary person. Do you regret migrating?

Arya Atti (AA): My primary motivation was the search for safety, as we were cut off from the means of living in Syria due to the conditions of war. Art didn't play any role in my decision to migrate, and I don't regret the decision. Instead, I feel that it was my destiny and that I was born in the wrong place, where nothing in my country resembles me, and my society could not accept me as a female artist.

KC: In Germany, your country of asylum, how were you able to integrate so quickly? Did art help you in that process, or did German state institutions play a bigger role? If you weren't a creative artist, would you have integrated into German society as quickly?

AA: I have several paintings where I depict myself, and on my features, you can see the

cultural shock that I experienced here in Germany, despite being an open-minded person towards others with a heart capable of loving people with their differences. I found that the differences are significant, not only in terms of language, food, and other customs, but even in the way people express their emotions and connect with others. All these curious blue eyes around me astonished me. They would gaze into my eyes with intense focus during every conversation. Some-





times, I felt they loved me, and other times, I felt they didn't know me at all. It was very perplexing because, based on my psychological makeup, I strongly needed others in order to see myself.

Here in Germany, I couldn't find the classical realistic art that I had learned

at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Aleppo. There was a moment when I realized that everything I had learned and drawn before had no place in this country. I didn't seek integration as a person so much as I strove to achieve artistic integration or find a common language with my new surroundings.

That's why I am currently working on a project to help refugee artists find their own identity here and provide them with a platform to meet art collectors and those interested in drawing. I offer them the necessary legal guidance and information and introduce them to the press to generate publicity. Several Ger-

man state entities do provide support to art and artists to a certain degree, but one has to drown in a sea of paperwork and bureaucracy to register future art projects, which is quite challenging.

I continue drawing relentlessly and have an audience that plays the most significant role in my integration and success. I like to refer to this artistic audience as my army. They are my strength and greatest support. Since my first year here until now, I have found many people around me who are very much like angels. They provide me with the necessary emotional security to grow and prosper.

KC: Do you experience anxiety in your creative projects? Put another way, are you still searching for Arya Atti the artist in your paintings? I noticed that many of your exhibited artworks feature portraits that embody you. Can we say that your ego is at its highest level?

AA: The process of creating a painting is a search for self-discovery. I have existential anxiety, and drawing gives me certainty and sometimes directs me towards a place from which I can embark on broader worlds. Through my artwork, I express and convey the emotions that I experience as a human being, influenced by my life experiences of being a refugee and experiencing war, racism, marriage, motherhood, and divorce. These paintings document and represent the state of many women like me who have gone through similar experiences. In Europe, my paintings have received significant responses from European women.

I always try to break out of my emotional and psychological circle to engage in side projects such as collecting Kurdish myths or documenting children's group games in villages, but I always return to my own worlds, as if I was alone on this earth. As for the ego, I can say that I have a troubled personality and lack the ability to appreciate myself. I only feel my existence when others love me, when I draw, or when I see smiles from those who view my paintings. I have become addicted to these moments, the moments of the viewer's encounter with my artwork. I don't wait for people's comments or praises, but the astonishment of the viewers creates a special pleasure within me.

The search for identity does not mean being selfish and revolving solely around our-



Photo: Ahmad Abdalla



selves. The "self" is a stage in the process of creation, and I am still searching for my own identity. Every artwork is a field for exploration. There are paintings in which I have not discovered anything technically or personally. These paintings do not mean anything to me and will likely never see the light of day. Meanwhile, there are paintings that I hold dear to my heart, pricing them exorbitantly so that they won't sell quickly and will remain close to me for as long as possible.

KC: *How deeply were you influenced by international artist Frida Kahlo? How do you evaluate her unique school of art?*

AA: We didn't have good educational staff or models at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Aleppo, and simply by drawing every day for four years, one learns the craft. I didn't have sufficient artistic knowledge or internet access, and artistic questions multiplied in my mind for which I couldn't find suitable answers.

One time, I found a book about the paintings of Gustav Klimt, Vincent van Gogh, and Frida Kahlo in the college library. I considered it a great event, like a tremendous explosion happening in my imagination. I found the answers that I had



Photo: Nada Znidi



long sought through contemplating the paintings of those great masters. I started to paint their works in my imagination and was greatly influenced by them. I can say that the colors of my paintings carry the impression and color wheel analysis of Van Gogh, while in the compositions of my paintings, you can find Gustav Klimt's figures. In presenting my subjects, we can talk about the influence of Frida Kahlo, who lived through similar circumstances as I. These are the teachers who have influenced my art, and I engage in long imaginary dialogues with them.

KC: *Where is the man in your paintings? Why do you exclude him from your artistic worlds? Are you seeking revenge against men in your artwork?*

AA: I have two experiments where I depicted a man without features in one, and in the other, I covered the entire

form of the man with silver color. I can say that I have started to doubt my abilities in drawing because I don't know how to draw a man as I should. Yes, there is anger within me towards men. I have witnessed nothing but disappointment from them, but I am making a conscious effort with myself to resolve this crisis!

KC: *Where did the idea of using Kurdish fabric in your paintings come from? What is the impression of the German audience when they see these paintings that blend high artistic skill with the unique Kurdish colors?*

AA: I was in a refugee camp and didn't have enough tools and colors for painting, so I used bed sheets, curtains, and all available fabrics to paint on and use them as collages to provide color. Kurdish patterned fabrics have always fascinated me, so I decided to incorpo-

rate them into my paintings and develop this technique with a contemporary artistic style that approaches pop art and abstraction. We Kurds have a colorful and rich identity, which enriches my experience and gives it a unique identity. The war has separated us from our country and from each other, but our culture, music, food, and stories bring us together once again. We want to positively share this diversity with other cultures. Differences can be positive, and we can utilize them to build bridges and exchange ideas, rather than for making war and bloodshed. Culture and art are our tools against war.

KC: *You participated in a global exhibition in Poland with Kurdish artists. How familiar are you with the progress of Kurdish art in Kurdistan?*

AA: Yes, I had the privilege of meeting a large group of Kurdish artists, who were prominent figures in Kurdish art, at the Bydgoszcz City Museum in Poland, which received great interest from Europeans. It is evident that Kurdish art carries within it a just cause, revolution, message, anger, and sorrow. Sometimes I feel that Kurdish art is somewhat harsh for Europeans. If we compare Kurdish art to European art, we find that Europeans tend to use art as a means to alleviate the harshness of life. For example, you may find an artist hosting an exhibition about their relationship with their bicycle, abstract ideas, or even an interactive art exhibition.

Kurdish visual art is a serious and vibrant art form that has been passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. It evolves naturally due to the ever rebellious and restless nature of the Kurdish people, as well as the migration of Kurdish artists to many countries around the world. Through influence and inspiration, we have a tremendous diversity in artistic identities, but the existential issue and political message always weigh heavily on these identities. Thus, they are framed, confined, and packaged. In my opinion, art should be liberated from these burdens, allowing the artist's imagination to create unique human aesthetic concepts. ●

Kurdish Composer Shines at Canada Day Celebrations

Kurdistan Chronicle

For the first time, music by a Kurdish composer has taken centre stage during Canada Day celebrations in Toronto. On 1 July this year, Nauroz Tanya's *Kurdish Dance* delighted patrons at the renowned Harbourfront Centre, following the Canadian National Anthem. Performed by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in a dazzling free outdoor concert, it offered listeners a taste of authentic and cutting-edge Kurdish artistry, and Tanya the chance to showcase his culture to the Canadian public.

For Tanya, this kind of cultural exchange has always been significant in his practice. Having taken music lessons since the age of 6, he moved from Kurdistan to Gothenburg to train at the Academy of Music and Drama, and then on to Ontario to complete bachelor's and master's degrees. It was there, at Wilfrid Laurier University, that he specialised in composition, and the themes of migration and the diasporic experience that are now synonymous with his work found voice.

In the intervening years, Tanya has been recognised for his contribution to Canadian musical life. He has been recipient of The Cynthia Johnston Award and Meta Voss Music Award, and in 2019 became the first Kurdish composer to be performed at the prestigious Roy Thompson Hall. *Kurdish Dance* was also performed by the San Francisco Symphony in 2020 and his first piano concerto, *Per Te*, was premiered by the Wilfrid Laurier Symphony Orchestra.

Recently, Tanya has been collaborating with major institutions on scores for ballet and film. In 2021 his piano piece *Vicino Alla Costa* was recorded with the Hollywood Scoring Orchestra at Warner Bros, and in 2022 he produced a full-length contemporary ballet with the Wenn wir nu rein Leben Hätten in Zurich. Since then he has composed on a number of films variously showcased at the Academy Awards and Cannes Film Festival.

Beyond composing, Tanya is a current PHD candidate in Community Music and experienced teacher, but has also worked as a volunteer. It was on one such trip with Doctors Without Borders, that he helped save the life of a young boy on the Aegean Sea and this experience inevitably found its way into his art when he composed a piece inspired by children fleeing war. His is the practice of a brave and conscientious artist, using their music to deepen consciousness of world issues and little understood cultures. ●

TANYA





Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

Parang Jihani Illuminating the Path of Yoga

Kurdistan Chronicle

In a serene sports hall nestled within Erbil's Sami Abdulrahman Park, a poised and radiant woman captures the essence of tranquility. Draped in a vibrant, floral scarf, she balances a candle in one hand and cradles a bowl of fresh fruit in the other. This is Parang Jihani, a yoga instructor dedicated to sharing the transformative power of yoga in the Kurdistan Region.

With 15 years of personal practice, Parang obtained her yoga teaching license in Iran in 2008. Since 2014, she has been spreading its teachings across Erbil, conducting classes at various cen-

ters and gyms. Presently, she guides her students at two gyms, with an average of 16 participants in each session.

Yoga has become Parang's life's work, to which she dedicates around two hours every day to her personal practice, in addition to the time she devotes to her students. While her husband also engages in yoga, albeit less frequently, he holds great respect for Parang's dedication and serves as a source of encouragement.

Knowing thyself

Parang explains that yoga, with its eight stages, encompasses a comprehensive science—an enlightening philosophical journey that transcends mere physical movements. While many countries focus predominantly on the physical aspects of yoga, labelling it as a sport, its true essence lies in guiding individuals towards a holistic way of life. It teaches self-awareness, providing a deeper understanding of oneself. Only by knowing oneself can one cultivate a purposeful existence.

"Yoga reveals the boundless energy within us and remains an ongoing process in life—one that demands commitment," Parang expresses. "Above all, yoga brings tranquility, fostering inner calm and independence. I could never abandon yoga. From my personal experience, I have found tremendous men-

tal solace through this practice."

"Yoga imparts profound life lessons," she continues. "There are individuals who seemingly have it all, leading seemingly perfect lives, yet they sense a void within themselves. When they discover yoga, they find solace within their own beings. Practitioners of yoga must refrain from falsehoods, slander, consuming animal meat, and causing harm to others. Through yoga, we experience a universal soul that unites all beings in the vastness of the universe. In yoga, we connect and merge with the divine spirit. The Kurdish people have long been acquainted with yoga."

Parang explains that yoga serves as a guide for life, liberating individuals from anxiety, particularly in the modern era where busyness prevails. Those distanced from yoga struggle to grasp its true essence. Through yoga, one reconnects with one's roots, discovering that everything one seeks to achieve lies within oneself. This realization unveils the immense strength and power within, surpassing the distractions of everyday life, be they material possessions or worldly desires.

"While yoga may not guarantee complete healing of ailments, it undoubtedly contributes to their alleviation. After adopting yoga, those around you will notice the gentleness and kindness that radiate from within. Yoga reconnects us with our origin," she adds.

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Yoga has
become her
life’s work
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Growing acceptance of yoga

In recent years, under the guidance of both foreigners and local instructors like Parang, the number of those who practice yoga in the Kurdistan Region has steadily increased. Yoga has garnered wider acceptance, dispelling misconceptions that previously hindered its growth.

Parang highlights that yoga is not in conflict with Islam, as some may have misunderstood in the past. Instead, yoga offers peace, a sentiment echoed across many religions. Consequently, both religious and non-religious individuals seek solace in yoga centers. Parang emphasizes the spiritual aspect of yoga, pointing out that many devoutly religious women, including herself, wear veils during sessions and incorporate prayer.

In the Kurdistan Region, World Yoga Day is celebrated on June 21 each year, attracting numerous yoga enthusiasts.

The term "yoga" finds its origins in ancient writings, with its roots tracing back 5,000 years to India. Yoga has been known in the Kurdistan Region for many years, leading to the establishment of the Yoga Association in 1999.

Parang observes the shifting attitudes towards yoga, as more individuals warmly embrace it, making it an integral part of their lives. She envisions a

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In the Kurdistan Region, World Yoga Day is celebrated on June 21 each year, attracting numerous yoga enthusiasts
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Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi



Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi



Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

future where a substantial portion of the Kurdistan Region's population will practice yoga, acknowledging that it offers an experience beyond words—an experience that must be personally undertaken to truly understand and appreciate its joys.

While yoga is utilized as a therapeutic practice in many countries, Parang also hopes for the opportunity to establish similar treatment centers in her homeland. The Kurdistan Region's breathtaking landscapes, with their mountains and natural beauty, provide an ideal environment for practicing yoga in harmony with one's soul.

Parang Jihani's unwavering dedication and passion for yoga is illuminating the path for countless individuals in the Kurdistan Region, fostering a sense of peace, self-discovery, and unity. As yoga continues to flourish, it serves as a bridge between cultures, connecting hearts and minds and harmonizing diverse communities in a shared journey towards inner fulfillment. ●

Museum of Cultural Artifacts

Seyda Goyan, a retired civil servant and researcher who lives in the Uludere district of Şırnak, wants to protect antique cultural items from his village and childhood home. To gather, protect, and present these cultural traces of the past for others to view, the Kurdish writer and researcher opened a museum of Kurdish cultural items in his home.

Goyan's ethnographic museum houses hundreds of ancient works of Kurdish culture and art from the four Kurdistan regions, although most of the items belong to Turkish Kurdistan and the Şırnak region. While explaining the reason for his collection, the folklorist says that he wants Kurdish culture to always remain alive and be preserved and passed down from generation to generation.



Sevda Kaplan

Sevda Kaplan is a Dicle University Physical Education graduate who has been a journalist since 1993. With a background in presenting and TV reporting, she notably held a six-year term as vice president of the Journalists Association. Alongside her ongoing journalism career, she has authored two novels in the Kurdish language.



Researcher becomes curator

Goyan's two-roomed museum hold thousands of items that were on the verge of being lost or discarded. Starting out with a water jug, the collection has grown to include traditional clothes, rugs, carpets, doors, weapons, eating and drinking utensils, key chains, wool clipping tools, agricultural tools, dough troughs that are no longer used, sieves, jugs, granaries, baskets, and oil lamps, all of which are presented for the public to view.

Some of the items are over 500 years old, and Goyan provides information about them in seven different languages, including Kurdish, English, French, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, German and Turkish.

For years, Goyan traveled from village to village and city to city, collecting hundreds of Kurdish artifacts himself, purchasing many of them with his own means, taking them secretly or openly from acquaintances, or finding them in the garbage. While villagers made fun





of him at first, after seeing the museum, they were amazed and quickly changed their minds.

Researcher and writer Seyda Goyan has thus created a museum that reflects Kurdish culture and customs. Housed in an old house on an old street where he was born, Goyan says he is ready to move the museum to another city in

Kurdistan to allow more tourists and locals alike to visit and explore the past.

About Goyan

Seyda Goyan was born in 1965 in the Uludere district of Şırnak. He studied in Uludere from primary school through high school. He started his

career as a civil servant in 1990 and retired in 2017. He made nearly twenty documentary films by transforming folkloric songs, epics, nursery rhymes, riddles, children's games, adult games, and the subject of nomadic life into an archive of photography, video, and text. Goyan also wrote five folkloric books. He is married and has four children. ●

Heroic Kurdish Bear WWII's Paws of Valor



Baker Shwani

Baker Shwani is a Kurdish writer and translator based in Germany. He has translated several acclaimed novels into Kurdish. Shwani 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.

In the annals of history, tales of courage and valor have often been woven around extraordinary men and women. Yet there are rare instances where an unexpected hero emerges from the most unlikely of places, and in the case of Wojtek the soldier bear, this hero hailed from the peaks of the rugged mountains of Kurdistan.

Born in 1942 amidst the turmoil of World War II, Wojtek's story transcends borders and speaks to the unbreakable bonds that can form between man and beast. In the early days of the war, when Germany's re-

lentless aggression spread across Europe, hope flickered in the darkness, as Poland found an ally in Britain and a leader in Władysław Anders. Together, they forged the Polish Army's Second Corps, seeking to defy the Nazi onslaught.

Finding Wojtek

As fate would have it, the path of the Polish Army led them to the Kurdish city of Hamadan in western Iran, which is part of *Rojhilat*, Kurdish for Eastern Kurdistan. In this remote corner of the world, a touching



Wojtek



encounter unfolded between a group of Polish soldiers and a small bear cub. The Kurdish child who offered this gift could hardly have foreseen the profound impact the bear would have on the course of history.

The soldiers embraced the cub with open arms, affectionately naming him “Wojtek,” a Polish moniker for a happy warrior. The camaraderie between Wojtek and his newfound comrades knew no bounds. Nurtured on a diet of milk and honey, he was later introduced to fruit, marmalade, honey, and syrup, often receiving beer as a reward, which soon became his favorite beverage.

“
In Poland, Britain, and Italy,
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contribution to history
”

Additionally, he developed a surprising affinity for smoking (or consuming) cigarettes and relished sipping coffee in the mornings. With his endearing habits and playful antics, Wojtek's presence amidst the troops became a powerful symbol of unity and hope, bringing moments of respite and joy

amidst the chaos of war.

Becoming a soldier

When the decision to move from Egypt to southern Italy was made, Wojtek faced a challenge: military regulations prohibited animals from boarding the ships. Determined not to



Unveiling of the statue of Wojtek "the Soldier Bear" and his keeper by the Wojtek Memorial Trust in Edinburgh on November 7, 2015

leave their loyal companion behind, the Polish soldiers made an unprecedented move: they officially enlisted Wojtek as a soldier, granting him the rank of private and later promoting him to corporal. Thus, the legend of Wojtek, the soldier bear, was forever etched into history.

Throughout the war, Wojtek's endearing spirit and intelligence shone through. He endeared himself to all he encountered, imitating soldiers and assisting in moving crates of ammunition during the fierce Battle of Monte Cassino in Italy. His unwavering dedication earned him the admiration of visiting Allied generals and statesmen, turning him into a celebrity on the battlefield.

Retirement in Scotland

When the war finally drew to a close, Wojtek's journey took an unexpected turn. He was mustered out of the Polish Army, bidding farewell to his com-

rades in arms. However, his story did not end there. In a testament to the deep affection he had inspired, Wojtek

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”

found a new home at the Edinburgh Zoo in Scotland. Though distant from the battlegrounds of Europe, he remained in the hearts of those who had fought alongside him.

Years passed, and in December 1963, Wojtek departed this world, leaving behind a legacy that surpassed his bear-sized frame. At the age of 21, he had grown to nearly 500 kg and stood over 1.8 meters tall, a living testament to the strength of spirit that defies boundaries. The impact of Wojtek's incredible journey extended far beyond his lifetime. The 22nd Artillery Supply Company of the Polish Army, forever moved by his courage, changed their artillery logo to depict a bear carrying a shell, a poignant tribute to their beloved companion.

In the years that followed, Wojtek's memory continued to be cherished. In Poland, Britain, and Italy, sculptures, statues, and plaques were unveiled in honor of the Kurdish bear's remarkable contribution to history. His story became a symbol of unity, a testament to the bonds that form between individuals, regardless of species or origin.

Decades may have passed since Wojtek's journey began, yet his tale endures as a

reminder that the unlikely of friendships can flourish in times of turmoil. Through his courage, loyalty, and unwavering spirit, Wojtek remains an indelible thread in the rich tapestry of World War II history. As long as his memory lives on, so too does the message of hope and unity that he embodied, a message that will forever resonate with generations to come.

In the end, it was not only the Polish soldiers who found solace and inspiration in Wojtek's presence; it was the world. And so, we honor the memory of this extraordinary Kurdish bear who became a symbol of resilience and camaraderie, forever etched in the annals of time.

Wojtek's enduring legacy

- Numerous tributes honor the soldier bear, with a plaque gracing the Imperial War Museum in London, a sculpture crafted by David Harding at the Sikorski Museum in London, and a wooden sculpture nestled in Weelsby Woods, Grimsby, UK.



- In 2013, the Kraków city council granted permission for a statue of Wojtek to be erected in Jordan Park, Kraków. On the momentous occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Monte Cassino on May 18, 2014, the statue was unveiled and served as a poignant symbol of remembrance.
- In 2013, the City of Edinburgh Council also approved the creation of a bronze statue of Wojtek that was skillfully sculpted by Alan Beattie Herriot and situated in West Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh. Depicting the soldier bear walking alongside a fellow Polish Army soldier, the statue was unveiled in 2015. An accompanying relief tells the tale of Wojtek's remarkable journey from Egypt to Scotland alongside the Polish Army.
- In 2016, a touching tribute was unveiled in Duns, Scottish Borders, where Wojtek had once been stationed at Winfield Camp in 1946, alongside Polish troops. This statue, gifted by the Polish town of Zagań, Duns' twin town, was revealed on April 26, 2016, exactly 72 years after the significant Battle of

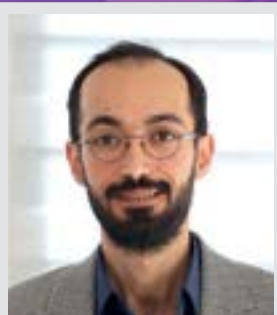


Monte Cassino, in which Wojtek and Polish forces played a vital role.

- In 2017, Poznań, Poland, bestowed a heartfelt honor by naming a street after Wojtek. Now known as ulica Kaprala Wojtka (Corporal Wojtek Street), this thoroughfare leads to the Poznań New Zoo, a place that holds a special significance for Wojtek's memory.
- September 2018 marked the unveiling of a wooden statue dedicated to Wojtek at the Poznań New Zoo, made possible by the generous funding of Krystyna Wieczorek, the author of a notable Polish book chronicling Wojtek's life.
- Lastly, in May 2019, a majestic marble statue of Wojtek was unveiled in Cassino, Italy, a touching tribute to the profound impact he had on the lives of those who fought alongside him during the war. ●



Championing American Football Through Kurdish Grit and Passion



Sardar Sattar

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 world, is well educated about his homeland, his people, and what it takes to be a Kurd. Mr. Ali, Alan's father, took it upon himself to instill the Kurdish spirit, culture, and history in his son and raise him in a way so that, later in life, the resilient spirit of his half Kurdish side would help him become one of the most outstanding American football players.

From Texas to the NFL

Alan's passion for American football became evident to his family when he was only seven years old. From that tender age, everyone was certain about his bright future, and he knew he would find his way to excellence. Eighteen years later, in May 2023, Alan joined the NFL after signing a contract with the Minnesota Vikings, a remarkable achievement for any football player.

However, it was not an easy journey. Before reaching the top league, Alan proved his talent in college playing at both Southern Methodist University (SMU) and Texas Christian University (TCU). At the latter, he earned the prestigious honor of First Team All-Big 12, a testament to his skills and hard work. His college football journey included participating in the College Football Playoffs and the National Championship Game, where he played in front of millions of fans, displaying the prowess of a determined athlete.

In an exclusive interview with *Kurdistan Chronicle*, Alan was asked about his plans to introduce American football to Kurdistan. He explained that he planned to visit his homeland again next year and aims to organize a free youth football camp to teach children the ins and outs of the sport.

First time in Kurdistan

Alan visited Kurdistan for the very first time ten years ago. He described the initial moments in his ancestral land as astonishing and unfor-

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Alan Ali's story is all about diversity, dedication, hard work, and a strong connection to Kurdistan

”

ALAN ALI



A patriotic American with proud roots in Kurdistan

Alan Ali's story is all about diversity, dedication, hard work, and a strong connection to Kurdistan. His father, who hails from Halabja, made his way to America in the early 1990s to pursue higher education, where he eventually met and married Alan's American mother. The result of this union is a patriotic American who is proud of his Kurdish roots and misses no chances to highlight his background inside and outside of his professional life.

Alan, like many second-generation Kurdish migrants around

gettable. “I loved every minute of being in Kurdistan. The Kurdish people I met there were some of the kindest and most genuine people I have ever met,” he said.

What stunned him the most, however, was the fact that Ah-madi Gate at the renowned Citadel of Erbil was named after his great-great-grandfather, as his grandmother was originally from Erbil.

Proudly hoisting the Kurdistan flag

Alan’s pride in his Kurdish identity is evident on and off the field. During various games across the United States, he has been seen wrapping the Kurdistan flag around himself to celebrate victories. In this act, as he said, he shows that he is proud of being a Kurd while carrying a message of unity and representation. In a country where many might not recognize the word “Kurdistan,” Alan takes every opportunity to raise awareness about the Kurds, their painful past, and their prosperous future.

“Basically, I want to let people know that I am proud to be a Kurd and that it is an honor to be able to carry that flag,” he explained.

Inspiring the next generation

Being one of the first, if not the very first, Kurd-ish-American football player in the NFL comes with great responsibilities, which Alan well acknowledges. He hopes that he has what it takes to become a source of inspiration for the young generation to follow their dreams relentlessly while remaining proud of their background. He firmly believes that hard work,

self-belief, and a strong connection to one's roots can propel individuals to achieve their dreams, just as they did for him.

Alan Ali's story is more than just a tale of sporting triumph; it is a powerful narrative of bridging cultures and celebrating one's heritage on a global stage. From the plains of Texas to the mountains of Kurdistan, Alan's journey exemplifies the potential for success and recognition that lies within all Kurds worldwide.

As he proudly carries the Kurdish flag on the gridirons of the NFL, Alan Ali proves that no matter how far one may be from their homeland, their heart can still beat strongly for their roots. ●

“
In a country where many might not recognize the word “Kurdistan,” Alan takes every opportunity to raise awareness about the Kurds, their painful past, and their prosperous future
”



Alan Ali proudly posing with the Kurdistan flag at an NFL game

TRADITION

Amedi

The Enchanting 500-Year-Old Tahin Mill



Rojhat Loqman

Rojhat Loqman is a Kurdistan-based journalist. He has 10 years of experience with different media organizations.

“This extraordinary mill has stood the test of time, boasting a rich history that spans over 500 years

”

When one thinks of Kurdish *tahin*, the picturesque region of Amedi immediately comes to mind. Nestled within this captivating landscape lies a place of great renown—a mill known as “Ashe Pra Issa,” which translates to “The Mill of Issa Bridge.” This extraordinary mill has stood the test of time, boasting a rich history that spans over 500 years. Its fame has transcended borders, captivating the hearts and palates of individuals not only across Kurdistan but also in the United States and throughout Europe.

Tahin, also known as tahini or tahina, is a paste made from toasted sesame seeds that is commonly used in Middle Eastern cuisine.

Sulaiman Dashtani, the proud owner of this remarkable mill, shared with *Kurdistan Chronicle* the captivating story of its origin. “Built five centuries ago in the enchanting region of Amedi beneath the city that shares its name, this mill was the brainchild of a man named Issa Delal. It is in honor of his vision and contribution that the mill bears his name, forever intertwining his legacy with the fabric of history. Nestled along the banks of the Amedi River, our mill springs to life when the river flows generously with water. Every October, we prepare the mill to produce tahin through May. Each day, we craft an average of 300 kilograms of this exquisite delicacy.”



Photos: Safin Hamid



Dashtani continued, “However, there are years when the river’s water level wanes, compelling our mill to halt production. We are entirely reliant on the river’s life-giving flow to power our operations.”

Elaborating on the intricate process of

where they are transformed into the delectable tahin that graces countless tables. Our sesame seeds are sourced from local farmers, as we take pride in relying solely on the sesame products of the Kurdistan Region.”

mill. This unique touch bestows upon our tahin a flavor that sets it apart from others produced in conventional factories.”

“However, acquiring our tahin is not always an easy feat. Due to the limit-

“
This mill stands
as a testament
to the enduring
beauty of Amedi
”



tahin production, Sulaiman Dashtani shared that to create their tahin, they embark on a meticulous journey that begins with washing the sesame seeds and then drying them. “From there, the seeds make their way into the mill,

He also noted that their tahin enjoys immense popularity year after year. “The distinctiveness lies in our method of toasting the sesame seeds in front of a crackling fire before they enter the

ed quantity that we produce each day, eager customers must patiently wait in line, longing to savor our tantalizing creation. Unfortunately, our constrained production capacity prevents



us from reaching all the markets across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Occasionally, individuals make the pilgrimage to our mill, where they can personally acquire our cherished tahin,” Dashtani added.

“
Every October, we
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”

This timeless mill has not only enchanted taste buds but has also provided employment opportunities for numerous workers. “We are overjoyed

to have generated job prospects for many young people from our region. Witnessing their growth and prosperity brings us immense satisfaction,” the mill owner remarked.

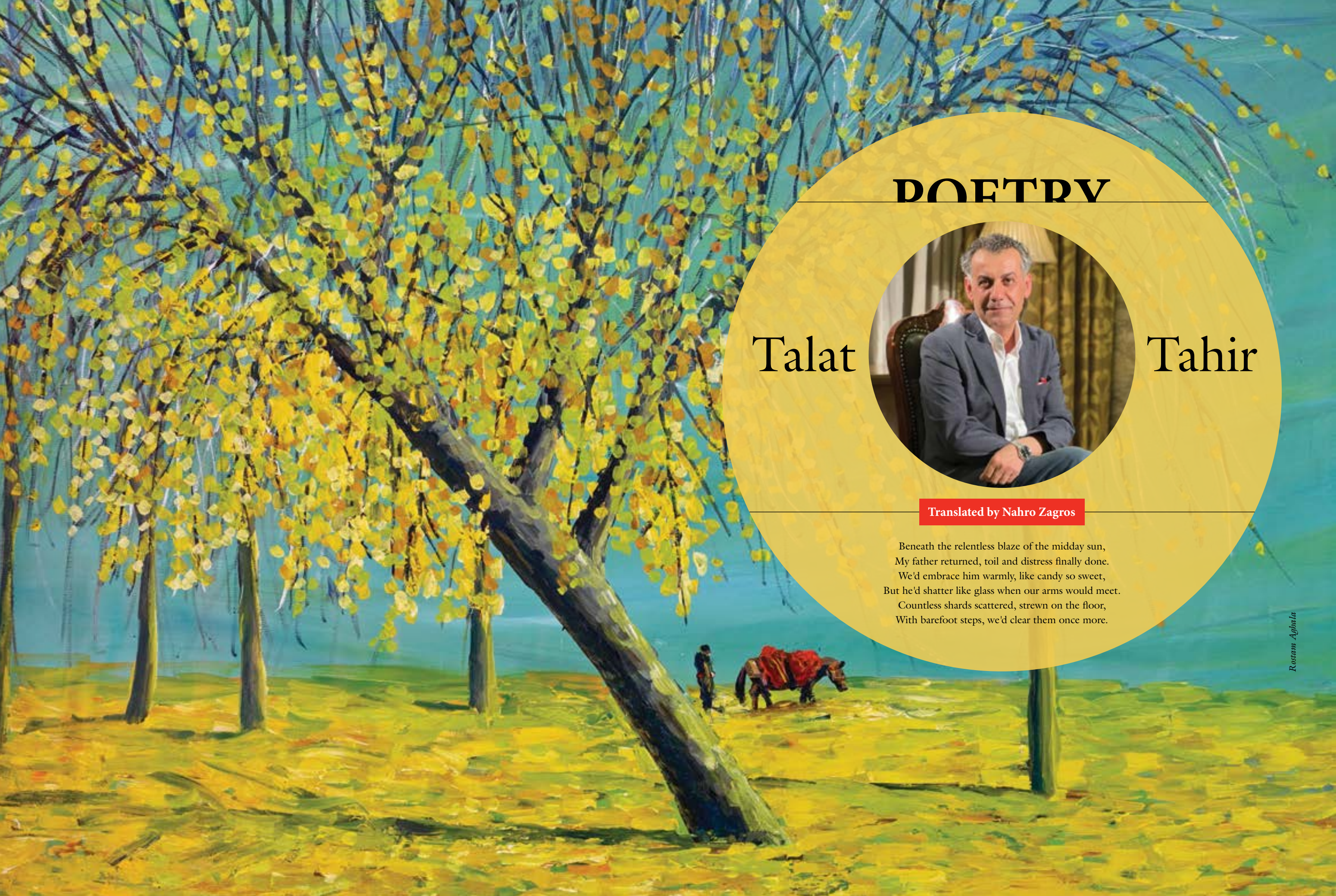
States and numerous European countries,” he proudly proclaimed.

It is worth noting that Tahina Pra Issa holds a place of archaeological significance within the Amedi district, duly



According to Dashtani, demand for their tahin transcends the borders of the Kurdistan Region. “Our tahin has found its way to every corner of Kurdistan and graces the tables of the United

registered by the Kurdistan Region’s archaeological directorate. This mill stands as a testament to the enduring beauty of Amedi, its rich heritage, and the captivating allure of Kurdish tahin.●



POETRY

Talat



Tahir

Translated by Nahro Zagros

Beneath the relentless blaze of the midday sun,
My father returned, toil and distress finally done.
We'd embrace him warmly, like candy so sweet,
But he'd shatter like glass when our arms would meet.
Countless shards scattered, strewn on the floor,
With barefoot steps, we'd clear them once more.

Sabr Dri



In the captivating landscapes of Kurdistan, the echoing call "*Kakaba Kakaba Kakaba*" often graces your ears, a melodious contribution from male chukars (partridge). This auditory delight resonates well, given the abundant presence of wildlife and avian species in these areas.

The chukar partridge (*Alectoris chukar*), a Eurasian upland game bird belonging to the pheasant family Phasianidae, holds its own charm. This rotund bird, measuring 32–35 cm, displays a light brown back, grey breast, and buff belly, with unique variations among populations. Its white face adorned with a black gorget adds to its allure.

Featuring rufous-streaked flanks, red legs, and a coral red bill, this species exhibits slight differences between sexes, with females being smaller and lacking the male's spur. Indigenous to Asia, from Israel and Kurdistan to Nepal, it finds its place within the Galliformes order and the *Alectoris* genus.

- Kingdom: Animalia
- Phylum: Chordata
- Class: Aves
- Order: Galliformes
- Family: Phasianidae
- Genus: *Alectoris*
- Common Name: Chukar Partridge
- Scientific Name: *Alectoris chukar*
- Species: *A. chukar*





#VisitKurdistan

<https://visitkurdistan.krd>