

Mehrdad Izady: Neanderthals Discovered in Arbil Are Kurds

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In the preface of his 1992 book “The Kurds: A Concise Handbook”, Kurdish professor Mehrdad Izady writes: *“it is an astonishing fact, if not an outright embarrassment, that not a single archaeological object has ever been identified as ‘Kurdish’ in any museum anywhere in the world—not even a broken arrowhead, a pottery shard, or a piece of mosaic.”* Prof. Izady’s above statement reflects the truth.

The Neanderthals, the extinct group of archaic humans who lived in Eurasia until about 40,000 years ago, were discovered in the ancient Shanidar Caves within the Arbil governorate in northern Iraq. The [Shanidar Cave Project](#) was established as a collaboration between the University of Cambridge and the Kurdistan Directorate of Antiquities, following an invitation to Prof. Graeme Barker from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq. The excavations since 2015 have focused on the eastern edge of the cave where most of the Neanderthal remains were discovered.

In his book, Izady writes, *“Paleolithic and Neolithic evidence from the caves of Behistan (Mt. Bistun) date back to 10,000 years ago, while remnants from the of Shanidar caves are as ancient as 55,000 years ago. Further significant evidence, including copious archeological proof, indicates that Kurdistan’s mountains were the incubator for the invention of agriculture dating back to approximately 12,000 years ago”*. Izady later states that clay tokens known as “proto-Elamite” appeared around 4,500 years ago and this indicate that the [Kurds resided in the region for tens of thousands of years](#) and that evidence indicates that Kurdistan is one of the earliest literature communities in the world, coming only second to Mesopotamia.



Pix from the University of Cambridge – Dept of Archeology

In his book, Izady insinuates that the Kurds are the descendants of those early Neanderthals since the Shanidar Caves are in Arbil governorate and because the Kurds are there today and have been around the Zagros Mountains that make the Iraq-Iran borders. Izady later blames the nation-states that occupy Kurdistan who, according to him, “*have attempted to stop the growth of the Kurdish people as a distinct and separate national entity. Often they have tried to do away with them altogether.*”



Pix from the University of Cambridge – Dept of Archeology

Izady builds his wild case, like most Kurdish nationalists and historians do, by listing some facts about an ancient geographical region or people and then inserts the word Kurds and/or Kurdistan in between or here and there in an effort to confuse or convince the people, depending who is reading.

This is really strange because Izady has admitted that there were no ancient artifacts labeled Kurdish, yet instead of accepting this reality, he blames this admitted lack of documentation on a modern behavior by the governments of the states where Kurds reside in today. Izady does not stop there. He has devoted the next 30 years of his life to [manipulate history](#) and to fabricate new Kurdish history where he and/or the [other Kurdish nationalists](#) have undermined the Assyrian history and claimed that Kurds are the [descendants of the Medes](#), Mitannis, Gutians, Hurrians, Hittites, and more recently Sumerians. Of course, none of this linkage has been substantiated by the scholarly world. What is interesting to mention is that the Cambridge team that excavated at Shanidar Caves has not recorded anything about Kurds or listed any connection between the Neanderthals and the Kurds. Whether they will manipulate DNA later to construct that match, that is another issue.

The reality is that there never was what Izady calls Kurdistan mountains in ancient times; therefore he cannot link modern Kurds to ancient so-called Kurdistan mountains. In what ancient text does the word Kurdistan mountains appear? [There is none](#). We cannot apply [recent terms on ancient times](#) after the

fact. We cannot claim that the Arabs resided the Atlas Mountains in northern Africa in ancient times simply because the Arabs are there today or invaded the region 1,300 years ago. Izady's construction of chronology of history is flawed and misleading.

The Assyrian people have been oppressed and persecuted by Mongols, Persians, Turks and Kurds since the arrival of Islam 1400 years ago, but that did not affect the fact that the Assyrian archaeological remains continue to be unearthed in the entire northern Mesopotamia region of northern Iraq, [northeast Syria](#) and southeast Turkey. To use victimhood as the reason why Kurdish artifacts are not being discovered in Iran, Iraq, Turkey or [Syria](#) is yet another desperate attempt to justify why nothing has been unearthed as Kurdish in the entire Middle East.

Finally, and most importantly, I was more struck by the strong review of Izady's book that was provided by [Dr. Hawzhin Azeez](#), Director at the Kurdish Center for Studies in the Kurdish region, but that was expected since both are employees of the KRG . Azeez failed to mention that the Neanderthals are different from our current human species (Homo Sapien) as many scientists agree. There are differences in the brain-case, ear bones and pelvis that could be differentiated from fossils of the two groups from 100,000 years ago. This suggests a separate evolutionary history by the two groups. The Neanderthals emerged in Europe and some parts of west Asia as far back as 400,000 years ago. The current theory suggests that the Neanderthals went extinct about 40,000 years ago, not long after Homo Sapiens arrived on the continent from Africa, meaning an inter-lapping perhaps did occur and interest-species breeding could have taken place. That explains why the percentage of Neanderthal DNA in modern humans is only 1 to 2 percent in people of European or certain Asian background.

To suggest or even insinuate that the Kurds as a collective people are related to the Neanderthals based on the proximity of the presence of certain Kurdish tribes from where the Neanderthals were discovered is preposterous. This has been a troubling pattern by Prof. Izady as he tries desperately to mix science and archeology with his national feeling towards his Kurdish people.

I am not sure about you Prof. Izady, but misleading your people with this kind of arguments regarding how ancient they are does not serve them at all.