

The Kurds: Name, History, Homeland, Language and Other Facts

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THE KURDS

Most scholars, including Dr. Khazal al-Majidi (expert on civilizations and religions) and Prof. Garnik Asatrian (expert on Kurds) assert that the history of the Kurds begins simultaneously with the birth of Islam in the 7th Century. Before that, there is little reliable evidence of the presence of people known as Kurds.

The origin of the word Kurd comes from “KWRT”, a Persian that means “tent-dweller”. However, the word Kurd could mean different things in different places and also there are many words that sound similar to Kurd, such as Kord, Qordi, Kordo, Curduni, but that does not link the modern Kurds ethnically to such terms. Asatrian for example writes, Kord (kurd) in the South Caspian area seems to denote exclusively "shepherd of small cattle" in semantic opposition to gales, "shepherd of neat cattle", a fact, which is emphasized almost by all native observers. Meanwhile, the term Kurd had a rather indiscriminate use in the early mediaeval Arabo-Persian historiography and literature, with an explicit social connotation, meaning "nomad, tent-dweller, shepherd" as well as "robber, highwayman, oppressor of the weak and treacherer".

See:

A) Garnik Asatrian. “Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds”, Iran and the Caucasus Vol 13, No. 1. Yerevan State University. Brill, 2009. page 82.

B) Dr. Khazal al-Majidi. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9HayJo6nx4>

Homeland (KURDISTAN)

Kurdi-stan is a compound word consisting of “Kurd” and “iStan”. iStan means land; thus Kurdistan means “the land of Kurds”, which is similar to Afghanistan (land of Afghan), Tajikistan (land of Tajiks), Uzbekistan (land of Uzbeks), etc. etc. This region was mainly associated with the Zagros Mountains that extends along the western borders of modern Iran. This mountain range extends from around central Iran and all the way to the Turkish-Iranian borders in the north. This range also makes the Iran -Iraq central and northern geographical frontiers.

It is argued that the word Kurdistan appeared in an Armenian document in the 12th Century. However, the term Kurdistan or the other illusive descriptions of west Kurdistan, north Kurdistan, south Kurdistan and east Kurdistan are not real. The name was superimposed on the Middle East maps by some travelers and explorers who visited the region and encountered nomad Kurds and wanted simply to show where these people lived. These new geographical terms (east, west, north and south Kurdistan) have been propagated by Kurdish nationalists and some non-Kurds in the 20th Century who have been paid by Kurdish institutions to spread such misleading narratives and wrong terms. **The undisputed fact is that Kurdistan never existed as a politically recognized country or state.**

However, the Kurds had established scattered semi-independent emirates during the Ottoman Empire controlled by certain of their most powerful tribe leaders. Also, the Kurds established the Mahabad

Republic (not Kurdistan) in western Iran that was declared independent by the Kurds, but it was crushed by the Iranian Army after it lasted 11 months only (January 1946 — December 1946). Many of the Kurdish leaders were hanged or imprisoned. One of the Kurdish leaders, Mustafa Barzani, fled to Russia and from there ended up in northern Iraq where he started his troubles in Iraq in 1961.

Even today, The northern Iraq's two Kurdish separate regions (Sulaimaniya and Arbil) or the united autonomous Kurdish region are not recognized as states. Structurally, these actors are operating as proto-states, that is each controls a specific territory, regulates the population residing there, enjoys the monopoly of force to tax the population, and deploys the taxed resources for its protection from challengers—thus, according to Wagner's (2000) definition of a state, both Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) are unrecognized states. Given that both sides still keep their standing armies ("peshmerga"), the end of the armed conflict between them resembles that of an interstate war rather than a civil conflict, in which one side is expected to disarm. Thus, the findings from this case study could apply to weak states that are not regional powers and, thus, are susceptible to influence by outside actors. (See Asatryan)

The two Kurdish tribal groups of Barzani and Talabani that rule northern Iraq will do anything to protect their own interest and not the interest of the Kurdish people.

In 1994 Kurdish civil war began and it was basically about controlling resources. In 1996, Masoud Barzani, president of the KDP, asked for help from Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi Republican Guards to help him. Talabani was in control of Arbil at the time. Saddam Hussein send his army and together with the Barzani forces attacked Arbil, killed thousands of Kurds and forced the Talabani to retreat to his headquarters in Sulaimaniya.

HOW DID THE KURDS EXPAND FROM THEIR ORIGINAL HOMELAND IN THE ZAGROS MOUNTAINS?

As I stated, the original homeland of the Kurds or Kurdistan is the Zagros Mountains in western Persia (Iran). After the birth of nationalism, Kurdish nationalists began to use this superimposed map as a political map. They did not stop there, but began to enlarge this virtual region to where it covered almost half of Turkey, one-third of Iraq and parts of Syria, Armenia and Iran.

But when did the Kurds start to spread out from the Zagros Mountains.

The uncomfortable truth is that Kurds have never established a political entity i.e a state in lands they claim as Kurdistan. Kurdistan as a regional entity expanded northwest into Armenia and south into northern Iraq because of the Turks. In eastern Turkey and Anatolia, the Turks conquered the Armenian Highlands and allowed Kurds to migrate and settle there in huge numbers. This was even a policy of the Ottoman Empire.

Nicholas Adontz, an Armenian historian, specializing in Byzantine and Armenian studies writes in his important piece (Adonz 1922: 5):

"The Kurds had not existed in Armenia from immemorial times, but were driven there by the Turkish authorities. The Turks took possession of Armenia after the battle of Chaldiran in the year 1514, defeating the troops of Shah Isma'il of Persia thanks to their artillery, which was employed for the first time. The Persians and the Turks continued to contend for Armenia, but in the end, the frontiers remained the same as they are today. Mullah Idris, a Kurd from Bitlis, who as a native of the country was well-acquainted with the local conditions, took an active part in the military operations of Sultan Selim... (He) supported the interests of the petty chiefs of the Kurdish tribes".

The 1514 Battle of Chaldiran between the Sunni Ottoman Turks and Shia Safavid Persians was perhaps the stage in history where the Kurds began to infiltrate into Eastern and southeast Turkey and northern Iraq and expand their presence. For sectarian reasons, the Kurds, being Sunni, aligned with the Sunni Ottomans and together won the final decisive battle and pushed the Persians back deep into Persian territories.

Here, the Ottomans began to gift lands of the indigenous Armenians and Assyrians to Kurdish tribal aristocracy and created the buffer zone the Ottomans needed to create between themselves and the Persians and in time it led to total Kurdisation of eastern Turkey and Anatolia and finally resulting in the extermination of the entire indigenous population of the area at the end of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century.

LANGUAGE

Kurmanji, Sorani, and Pelawani are only a few of the many dialects the Kurds use. While these dialects are bunched under the Kurdish language; however, they reflect notable differences in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and the writing script. Some dialects, such as Kurmanji, use Latin script (this is recent) while others, such as Sorani, use Arabic script. A few letters in both these scripts have been modified to accommodate some of the unusual sounds in their corresponding Kurdish dialects. These various dialects makes it very hard for Kurds from various regions or states to understand each other. For example, Kurds within Iraq and within the Kurdish region in northern Iraq do not understand each other. Kurds in Sulaimaniya, for example, do not understand the Kurds from Duhok and both are part of the self-ruled Kurdish region. Of course, there are some common vocabulary between these various dialects.

Since Kurds lived as nomads in and around the Zagros Mountains, their language was natural to remain simple. It is not surprising that Kurdish literature is very limited compared to the rich literature of the people around them such as the Arabs, Persians, Assyrians, and Armenians.

IMPORTANT FACTS & REFERENCES

Most Kurds are not educated truthfully about their history. Kurdish nationalists have controlled the history, including more recent history, that is taught in schools. That version of history is corrupted, untruthful and misleading. Many Kurds get immediately offensive when they are informed about the true history. Instead of getting angry at their own politicians and nationalists for misleading them, they begin attacking those who provide them with genuine history narratives that do not match what they were taught at schools or at home.

Consider the followings:

Example 1: Kurdish leader Bedr Khan massacred tens of thousands of Assyrians (1842–1847), massacred tens of thousands of Yezidis (1844), massacred Armenians (1894-1895), but he is presented as a national hero.

Example 2: Kurdish leader Simko invited the Assyrian Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun to his own headquarters in Salamas region in northeast Iran to talk about peace. As the meeting concluded and the Assyrian patriarch left the house and attempted to ride his carriage, Kurds from the roof of the compound and from all over the headquarters started firing at the patriarch and his carriage, murdering the patriarch and many who were part of his entourage. Simko is presented as Kurdish national hero in northern Iraq Kurdish region history curriculum and that adds insult to injury for the Assyrians.

Example 3: Kurdistan is presented in Kurdish schools as an ancient kingdom. That is a myth, because **Kurdistan never existed as a politically recognized country at any time in modern history, let alone ancient history.** Kurdistan was always a virtual region superimposed on the Middle East maps and which kept expanding by Kurdish nationalists.

Example 4: The Kurds are presented in Kurdish schools as an ancient people linked to several ancient groups such as the Mesopotamian Halaf dynasty, Sumerians, Hurrians, Mitanni, Gutian, Hittites, Medes, Sassanid, and the list keeps growing. Kurdish nationalists and politicians have tried to link their history to all the above ancient people hoping that one claim will find a general acceptance among scholars. These claims have been ridiculed by the scholarly world. The fact is that the Kurds are nomad Persians who settled originally the Zagros Mountains of West and northwest Persia but expanded their regions as they massacred their Christian (Assyrians and Armenians) and Yezidi neighbors and seized their lands.

Example 5: The Kurdish narrative about what happened in Halabja are not completely true. The US has manipulated the facts about the tragedy in Halabja to serve its own agenda. In his book, US intelligence officer Stephen Pelletier explains that Iraq did not gas the Kurds in Halabja per se.

Iraq and Iran were at war (1980–1988). Both countries have chemical weapons and both countries wanted to control Halabja. The Kurds sided with the Iranians and allowed the Iranian army into Iraqi territories. So Iraq had to protect its territories and force the Iranians out. There is possibility that Iraq used its brand of chemical weapons, the mustard gas. As the Iranians withdrew from Halabja, they bombed the town, but in this case, the Iranians used the Cyanide gas. This gas caused the greatest damage. The US officials investigated the tragedy that befell on the Kurdish civilian population in the summer of 1988 as the war was winding down. They found out that most of the killed had their extremities colored bluish. The blue color comes from the Cyanide gas (Iranian) and not mustard gas (Iraqi). That is a known fact. So Iran caused the tragedy in Halabja and not the Iraqi army.

Example 6:

Assyrian Genocides of the 19th Century

In October, 1829 the Kurdish leader Rwandez initiated a pogrom against Assyrians of the Syrian Orthodox Church in North Iraq and Syria. The first village that was attacked was Bit-Zabda, where 200 men were killed. Subsequently, the Kurds stormed the Asfas village, first slaying the leader, Deacon Rais Arabo, and then Reverend Aziz. Eighty children fleeing to a nearby valley were attacked and murdered by the pursuing Kurds. The young girls of the village were unclothed. The girls were enslaved while the others were shot on-site. The attackers then moved to Nisibin, on the border of Turkey and Syria, and repeated similar atrocities.²⁸⁵In 1842 Badr Khan Beg, A Hakkari (southeast Turkey) Kurdish Amir, combined with other Kurdish forces led by Nurallah, attacked the Assyrians, intending to burn, kill, destroy, and, if possible, exterminate the Assyrians from the mountains. The Kurds destroyed and burned whatever came within their reach. An indiscriminate massacre took place. The women were brought before the Amir and murdered in cold blood. The aged mother of Mar Shimun, the Patriarch of the Church of the East, was seized by them, and after having practiced on her the most abominable atrocities, they cut her body into two parts and threw it into the river Zab, exclaiming, "go and carry to your accursed son the intelligence that the same fate awaits him." Nearly ten thousand Assyrians were massacred, and as large a number of woman and children were taken captive, most of whom were sent to Jezirah to be sold as slaves, to be bestowed as presents upon the influential Muslims.²⁸⁶On Monday, January 1, 1895 Kurdish soldiers initiated a genocide in the city of Urfa (ancient Urhai), Ottoman Turkey. The attackers were indiscriminate, slaughtering Assyrians of all

denominations. One soldier, Sheik Hassan, boasted that he alone killed 40 Assyrians during that day. The Kurdish soldiers besieged the city to prevent Christians from escaping, and slowly entered the village and murdered every Assyrian in site. Assyrian population centers were attacked in the following order:

1. Village of Soyirkah
2. City of Bila Jokah
3. City of Amid [Diyar Bekir]
4. Village of Mlatiya
5. Mar'ash and Siwas, and all their surrounding villages.

100,000 Assyrians were killed in 2 days.

(<https://davidalton.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/paper-on-current-assyrian-genocide.pdf>)

Real scholars accept the below records as the true origin of Kurds and who they really are. Other narratives that have been constructed more recently as the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq began to pay writers and some wannabe historians to construct a new Kurdish history by patching an event from here and another from there and inserting the word Kurds in the middle to make a new narrative in the process. But, if we are seeking real history, the below is what is accepted truthful scholarly:

1. Vladimir F Minorsky, Russian academic, historian, and scholar of Oriental studies, best known for his contributions to the study of history of Iran and the Iranian peoples such as Persians, Laz people, Lurs, and Kurds, writes that *the history of the Kurds is mysterious and vague.*
2. Bernard Lewis, British American historian specialized in Oriental studies. He was the Cleveland E. Dodge Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University, said that *Kurds belong to the Persian tribes.*
3. P. M. Holt, Prof of Arab History in the University of London and publisher of the 1970 "The Cambridge History of Islam" states that *the Kurds are nomad Persian.*
4. Michael Morony in his 1983 book, "Iraq After the Muslim Conquest", writes *that the word Kurd is synonymous with bandits.*
5. David McDowall in his book "A Modern History of the Kurds", states that *the word Kurd does not refer to an ethnic group, rather mercenaries, outlaws and fleeing robbers that lived in and around the Zagros Mountains.*
6. Prof. Garnik Asatrian in his study "Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds", Iran and the Caucasus Vol 13, No. 1. Yerevan State University. Brill, 2009, page 82, writes: "*The documented history of the term Kurd, as was shown above, starts from the 6th-7th Centuries AD. Before that period, there is little reliable evidence of its earlier forms.*" He adds later, *Kurd is an obscurity.* He later writes, the word Kurd comes from the original Kwrt, a Persian term which means Tent-Dwellers.
7. Prof. Khazal al-Majidi, who is expert on religions and civilizations, says that *Kurds are Kurds, they have no link to ancient groups and that they appeared in history with the emergence of Islam in the 7th Century.*

8. Basile Nikitine Book, "Les Kurdes" (The Kurds), says, "**the word Kurdish is not a linguistic form of the word Kardu**". This book was written 1943 but was not able to publish it until 1956 with help of French writers including Louis Massignon and the French National Center for Scientific Research. **So there is no link between the current word Kurd and other forms that sound similar in pronunciation.**

9. Basile Nikitine Book, "Les Kurdes" (The Kurds), 1956. Page 20. The most important document that reflects the opinion of the Kurds about their origin is Sharaf-Nama's book, which was written in Persian by Prince Sharafkhan Bidlisi in 1596.

The author tells the story of the ruthless Iranian King Zahak who contracted a weird disease of growing a snake on each of his shoulders. The doctors were unable to cure him. Satan advised him that he needed to use an ointment that is extracted from the brain of young boys and that he needed to sacrifice two boys daily for that purpose. The executioner who killed the boys, felt sorry for killing two boys daily, so he began to kill one boy and use the brain of a sheep as a replacement for the brain of the second boy. The boys that he saved daily were sent to a distance mountainous area where they were safe. These boys grew up, multiplied and became the Kurds.

Thus, according to Kurds themselves, their origin is based on a myth.

Let us be sure that the Kurd's central theme of their history derives from ethnocentricities and nothing is based on academic endeavor.

10. Arshak Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan*, The Harvill Press, 1948, p. 16 and p. 31, writes, *books from the early Islamic era, including those containing legends like the Shahnameh and the Middle Persian Kar-Nmag i Ardashir i Pabagan and other early Islamic sources provide early attestation of the term kurd in the sense of "Iranian nomads".* **The term Kurd in the Middle Persian documents simply means nomad and tent-dweller** and could be attributed to any Iranian ethnic group having similar characteristics.

11. Wladimir Ivanon, "The Gabrdi dialect spoken by the Zoroastrians of Persia", Published by G. Bardim 1940. pg 42, writes, "**The term Kurd in the middle ages was applied to all nomads of Iranian origin**".

12. Martin van Bruinessen, "The ethnic identity of the Kurds", in: *Ethnic groups in the Republic of Turkey*, compiled and edited by Peter Alford Andrews with Rüdiger Benninghaus [=Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Reihe B, Nr.60]. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwisch Reichert, 1989, pp. 613–21, we read: *The ethnic label "Kurd" is first encountered in Arabic sources from the first centuries of the Islamic era; it seemed to refer to a specific variety of pastoral nomadism, and possibly to a set of political units, rather than to a linguistic group: once or twice, "Arabic Kurds" are mentioned. By the 10th century, the term appears to denote nomadic and/or transhumant groups speaking an Iranian language and mainly inhabiting the mountainous areas to the South of Lake Van and Lake Urmia, with some offshoots in the Caucasus...If there was a Kurdish-speaking subjected peasantry at that time, the term was not yet used to include them.*

13. David N. Mackenzie, "The Origin of Kurdish", *Transactions of Philological Society*, 1961, pp 68–86, we read: *If we take a leap forward to the Arab conquest we find that the name Kurd has taken a new meaning becoming practically synonymous with 'nomad', if nothing more pejorative.*

14. The term "Kurds" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2007. Brill Online. Accessed 2007, we read, *We thus find that*

about the period of the Arab conquest a single ethnic term **Kurd (plur. Akrād)** was beginning to be applied to an amalgamation of Iranian or iranicised tribes.

15. In Kurds, Kurdistan. Encyclopedia of Islam. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs, Brill, 2009. Brill OnLine. *The classification of the **Kurds among the Iranian nations is based mainly on linguistic and historical data and does not prejudice the fact there is a complexity of ethnical elements incorporated in them***". We thus find that about the period of the Arab conquest a single ethnic term Kurd (plur. Akrād) was beginning to be applied to an amalgamation of Iranian or iranicised tribes.

Prof. Asatrian asserts, "With the Kurdish conglomeration far from being a homogeneous entity either ethnically, culturally, or linguistically the basic component of the national doctrine of the Kurdish identity-makers has always remained the idea of the unified image of one nation, endowed respectively with one language and one culture. The chimerical idea of this imagined unity has become further the fundament of Kurdish identity-making, resulting in the creation of fantastic ethnic and cultural prehistory, perversion of historical facts, falsification of linguistic data, etc."

But, the West has interest in empowering the Kurds and then use them in their future plans for the region. How far does the West go in their efforts?

Asatrian answers it eloquently and openly and writes: "Hardly any other field of Near Eastern Studies has even been so politicized as the study of the history and culture of the Kurds, having produced an industry of amateurs, with few rivals in other domains of Oriental studies. ... Due to the politicized nature of Kurdological disciplines, many ideological elements of non-Academic provenance, that have become a constant set of stereotypes and clichés." (Garnik Asatrian. "Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds", Iran and the Caucasus Vol 13, No. 1. Yerevan State University. Brill, 2009)