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CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE KURDISH LANDS IN EUROPEAN AND OTTOMAN SOURCES

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ABSTRACT

Scholarship on Kurdish history discusses the boundaries of Kurdistan in terms of its geographical limits and the political frontier. Be it geographical or political, most of these works present the limits of Kurdish lands more or less the same. While almost every modern study on the region elaborates on the boundaries of Kurdistan, the scholarship is silent about different versions of the name as well as the changing geographical boundaries and the center of Kurdistan throughout of centuries. In this article I shall not discuss where Kurdistan is and what the borders of the region are since numerous sources and maps already give enough information about this question. The question I am interested in here is what and where the Ottoman (not only the Turks but also the other ethnic groups lived inside of the Empire's borders) and European sources meant when they were referring to "Kurdistan" during the early modern period.

Keywords: Kurdistan, Perception, Border, Ottoman, Europe

ÖZ

Kürt Bölgelerine Bakışta Avrupa ve Osmanlı Kaynaklarında Değişim ve Süreklilik

Osmanlı dönemi Kürt tarihi üzerine yapılan çalışmalar Kürdistan'dan bahsederken daha ziyade coğrafi ve siyasi sınırlarına odaklanmaktadır. Coğrafi ya da siyasi olsun, bu çalışmalar Kürt bölgelerini ele alırken benzer sınırlar sunmaktadırlar. Modern çalışmaların hemen hepsi sınırlara önem atfederken, bunlar yüzyıllar içinde "Kürdistan" isminin

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farklı versiyonları ve de coğrafi sınırlarla merkezin değişkenliği meselesi üzerinde fazla durmamaktadırlar. Bu çalışmada Kürdistan'ın nerede olduğundan ve sınırlarının nereden geçtiği sorusuna odaklanmayacağız. Bu hususa değinen yeteri kadar kaynak ve harita mevcuttur. Burada, Batılı ve Osmanlı (Türkçe olanlarının yanı sıra aynı zamanda imparatorluk sınırları içinde diğer dillerde yazılan) kaynaklarının “Kürdistan”dan bahsederken neye ve nereye işaret ettiklerini sorunsallaştırmaya çalışacağız.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı, Avrupa, Kürdistan, Algı, Sınır

KURTE

Nîrxandîna Herêmên Kurdan di Çavkaniyên Ewropayî û Osmaniyan de

Xebatên li ser tarîxa Kurdan, sînorên Kurdistanê di çarçoveya sînorên erdnîgarî û siyasî de nîqaş dikin. Çi erdnîgarî çi siyasî, pîraniya van lêkolînan sînorên erdê kurdan kêm zêde wekî hev pêşkêş dikin. Her çiqas ew lêkolînên nûjen ku li ser vê herêmê hatine kirin behsa sînorên Kurdistanê bikin jî, hem derbarê versiyonên cuda yên navê Kurdistanê, hem jî derbarê guherbariya domdirêj ya navend û tixûbên wê yên erdnîgarî de bédeng dimînin. Em ê di vê xebatê de, ji sînoran zêdetir, li ser ferasetê bisekinin û hewl bidin ku bersiva vê pirsê bidin; Gelo beriya dewra nûjen, gava ku osmanî û ewropayî digotin “Kurdistan”, mebesta wan çi û ku der bû?

Termên serekî: Kurdistan, Tesewur, Sînor, Osmanî, Ewropa

INTRODUCTION¹

Studies on Kurdish history discuss the boundaries of Kurdistan in terms of its geographical limits and the political frontier. Be it geographical or political, the majority of these studies present the limits of Kurdish lands more or less the same. While almost every modern study on the region elaborates on the boundaries of Kurdistan, the scholarship is mostly silent concerning different versions of the name as well as the changing geographical boundaries and the center of Kurdistan throughout the centuries. The focus of this paper is socially construed political geography based on historical sources from a diachronic perspective. My concern here is more on the perception and less on the boundaries themselves. To this end, I use historical maps and accounts, which give vague – and sometimes more specific – descriptions of Kurdish frontiers. I will attempt to find an answer to what and where the Ottomans and Europeans meant when they were referring to Kurdistan during the modern period. Since it will take lots of effort to seek the answer I will try to apply these questions to a more specific place, Süleymaniye or Baban Sancak as it was known in the nineteenth century literature.

From very early on the Ottomans positioned themselves vis-à-vis the Iranians (*Acem*) and the Europeans (*Frenk*). Adopting the Roman image through the Byzantines, they expanded this image for their self-portrayal as *Rum* or *Romans* and compared it with images and portrayals from Iranian literature, politics and geography.² The gentilics *Rumi* and *Acem* were both paired together and used in binary opposition in times of competition and comparison. This happened predominantly through poetry, but also in texts directly concerning religion and politics. Consequently in the early Ottoman mindset there were two separate but at the same time bordered worlds positioned in geography and the cultural world. However, reading between the lines one sees that there is a disagreement as to where these boundaries started. The majority of the land between the Ottomans and the Safavids was populated by Kurds and other ethnic and religious groups. Because of the discrepancy regarding the frontiers between these two states, which was referred to as *Serhad* by both the Ottomans and Iranians, this area remained a *terrae incognitae* or as “unknown lands” from sixteenth until nineteenth century.

¹ A shorter version of this article was presented at the conference of “ the Outside Looking in: a Kurdish Studies Conference ” at the University of Central Florida on 27 January 2015 and a Kurdish translation of it was published with the title of “Tesewura Kurdistanê ji Nezereke Tarîxî ve: Muqayeseya Çavkaniyên Osmanî û Ewropayî” in *Derwaze*, May 2017, 1/1, 38-50. The English version of the article has been revised, some parts are expanded, and some new works have been added. I would like to thank Selim Adalı for his valuable comments and Clive Campbell for carefully editing of this version.

² For more information on the Ottoman identity of Rum see this excellent article: Cemal Kafadar, “A Rome of One’s Own: Reflections on Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum,” *Muqarnas*, Vol. 24, (2007), 7-25; For a more extensive discussion on this topic also see the same writer’s *Kendine Ait Bir Roma* (Istanbul: Metis, 2017).

Targeted by “arrows of calamity”: Kurds in poetry

These *terrae incognitae* extended into the Kurdish lands between Mosul and Aleppo and further up in the Northwest until Malatya. Cemal Kafadar states that this was a “grey area or zone of transition where Turcoman tribes mixed freely with Arab and Kurdish tribes of northern Mesopotamia.”³ The boundaries between Turk, Persian and Arab lands were vague, as most of these boundaries were dominated by the Kurds, Turcomans as well as non-Muslim groups such as the Armenians, Assyrians, Jews and Chaldeans.

This was the case for Fuzuli, a well known poet of Ottoman and Azeri Turkish literature from Kirkuk, who imagined the vague boundary between “Baghdad and Rum” (or Arabs and Turks) somewhere between southeast Anatolia and north of Iraq.⁴ On the other hand Melayê Cizîrî (1570-1640), a well-known Kurdish poet and mystic, includes Van and its surrounding region to Kurdistan and compares with Shiraz and Isfahan.⁵ He states in a couplet:

Not only Kurdistan, but also Shiraz, Jeng and Van give tax
They happily pay their toll, and so Isfahan.⁶

The boundaries of his perception of the Ottomans and the Safavids are not shaped by the land in between but rather by political symbols, cultural differences, and characters. Cizîrî builds his geographical perception of Kurdistan on the work of Yaqut al-Hamawi. An Arab biographer and geographer of the thirteenth century, Yaqut ibn-‘Abdullah al-Rumi al-Hamawi (1179–1229), who, in his encyclopedic work on the Muslim world, *Mu’jam al-Buldan* (dictionary of countries), gives many references to the Kurdish lands. He frequently refers to Mesopotamia and Northwestern Iran as Kurdish lands and classifies it as the *iqlim al-rabi’* (the fourth region). Both Cizîrî and the later seventeenth century poet Ahmedê Xanî (1650-1707) praise the Kurdish notables as the rulers of this “fourth region”. In the couplets below Xanî places Kurdistan between the lands of the Rum, Acem, Arab and the Georgians:

Each lord of them is Hatam-like in munificence
Each man of them is Rostam-like in combat
See from the Arabs to Georgians
The Kurdish lands have become like towers

³ Kafadar, “A Rome of One’s Own,” 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Ferhad Shakely, “The Kurdish Qasida,” in *Qasida poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa* ed. Stefan Sperl, C. Shackleton, Nicholas Awde, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 327-338. I would like to thank Ayhan Geveri and Ergin Öpengin for helping me translating Melayê Cizîrî and Ahmedê Xanî’s couplets.

⁶ Melayê Cizîrî, *Dîwan/Divan* (Trans: Osman Tunç; Ed. and notation: Ayhan Tek). (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2012), 72. The original version of the couplet:

Tenha ne Kurdistan didin Şîraz û Yeng û Wan didin
Her yek li ser çavan didin hem ji Espehan têtin xerac.

Those Turks and Iranians are surrounded by them
The Kurds are scattered in all four corners
On both sides the Kurdish tribes
Have become targets for the arrows of calamity.⁷

In some other couplets Xanî compares the Kurds with the surrounding nations and treats the Kurds as leader of all.

Had we set our unity
Had we relied on each other

The Turks, Arabs and Iranians entirely
Would all be but serving us

We would have perfected the religion and state
We would have attained the sciences and wisdom.⁸

The Ottomans and the Kurds

The lack of clarity regarding the borders and boundaries of the Kurdish lands continued as late as the mid-nineteenth century. The Second Treaty of Erzurum (1847) saw the Ottomans, Iran, the United Kingdom and Russia come together to attempt to solve the boundary disputes between the Ottoman and Iran and produce a “definitive and binding settlement of their territorial dispute and to narrow the frontier zone into a mappable line.”⁹ Both the Iranians and the

⁷ Ehmedê Xanî, *Mem û Zîn*, trans. Namık Açığöz, ed. Ayhan Tek (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2010), 21. Here is the original of the couplets by Xanî:

Her mîrekî wan bi bezlê Hatem
Her mîrekî wan bi rezmê Ristem

Bi'fikir ji Erab heta ve Gurcan
Kurmançîye bûye şîbhê bircan

Ev Rûm û Ecem bi wan hesar in
Kurmanc hemî li çar kenar in

Herdu terefan qebîlê Kurmanc
Bo tîrê qeza kirine amanc

⁸ Xanî, *Mem û Zîn*, 21-22. The original is as follows:

Ger dê hebûya me ittifaqek
Vêk ra bikira me inqiyadek

Rûm û 'ereb û 'ecem temamî
Hemiyar ji me ra dikir xulamî

Tekmîl dikir me dîn û dewlet
Tehsîl dikir me 'ilm û hikmet

⁹ Richard Schofield “Narrowing the frontier: mid-nineteenth century efforts to delimit and map the Perso-Ottoman border” in *War and peace in Qajar Persia: implications past and present*, ed. Roxane Farmanfarman (New York:Routledge, 2008), 152.

Ottomans used old *fermans*, maps and travel accounts, such as Katib Çelebi's seventeenth century geographical account *Cihannüma*, in order to prove their claim to certain territories, particularly Muhammere (today's Khorramshahr), Zohab, and Süleymaniye.¹⁰ Besides, by showing Katib Çelebi's account as evidence since it bore the seal of the sultan, Iran claimed the districts of Ahiska, Van, Kars and Bayezid as well as recognition of their rights to the district of Süleymaniye.¹¹ As well as Katib Çelebi's account, the Ottoman delegate Enveri Efendi presented *Düstur'ul İnşa* - which contained many documents from previous correspondence and treaties with Iran and was collected by Reisü'l-Küttab in 1643 - and Mustafa Naima Efendi's *Tarih-i Naima* as well as Feraiz-zade's *Gülşen-i Maarif* to the delegates at Erzurum as evidence that Süleymaniye had been part of the Ottoman Empire for the centuries.¹²

Cihannüma was used not only by the Ottomans and the Iranians as a testimony to claim for territories, but was also widely cited by Europeans. Joseph von Hammer, an Austrian orientalist of the nineteenth century, used Katib Çelebi's account extensively. In fact, before completing his ten-volume encyclopedia on Ottoman history in 1830s von Hammer translated *Cihannüma*'s sections on the Balkan regions of the Ottoman Empire.¹³ His maps were used extensively by later historians and geographers in Europe until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when French and British diplomats, travelers and cartographers visited the region and produced their own. However, the British and French maps remained less detailed than Çelebi's own earlier version. Although it was a mid-seventeenth century account, *Cihannüma* shaped much of the geographical perception of the Ottoman lands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Despite the level of detail in his work, Katib Çelebi does not show Kurdistan on any maps. What can be seen in his work is an unknown territory that is predominantly populated by Kurds and Armenians. However, reading through his account, the picture becomes clearer with the definitions and details of the region he provide. After describing several Kurdish populated areas such as Van, Adilcevaz, Bitlis, Muş, Erzurum, Hakkari, Mosul, Siirt, Diyarbekir and few other places in the east of Ottoman Empire he begins to discuss Kurdistan. He shortly describes the origins of the Kurds and gets into the discussions on the speculations as to whether the Kurds were Arabs. He expands the Kurdish populated lands into Maraş and Malatya. According to his account, the Kurdish

¹⁰ İbrahim Aykun, "Erzurum Konferansı (1843-1847) ve Osmanlı-İran Hudut Antlaşması" (Unpublished PhD diss. Atatürk University, 1995), 117-18.

¹¹ Sabri Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 97.

¹² Aykun, Erzurum Konferansı, 118.

¹³ İlber Ortaylı, "Hammer-Purgstall, Joseph Freiherr von," *DİA*.

lands were made up of eighteen *vilayets*. After making some generalizations the character of the Kurds he emphasizes that they were *Şafi'i* and *ehl-i Sünne*.¹⁴



Figure 1: A reversed map of Anatolia from Katib Çelebi's *Cihannüma*. On the up right corner the note states "the map of İçil, Karaman, Anadolu and Sivas provinces" (*Şekl-i Eyalet-i İçil ve Karaman ve Anadolu ve Sivas*).

Source: The British Library,

Link: <http://www.bl.uk/collections/images/mapasiaminorlge.jpg> (accessed on 9 January 2018)

In Katib Çelebi's account the center of Kurdistan appears to be in Cizre as Çelebi places more emphasis on this area than elsewhere. Around the same period that Katib Çelebi completed his magnum opus *Cihannüma*, Evliya Çelebi travelled through Diyarbakir, Mardin, Bitlis, Van and some nearby cities where he referred to "Kurdistan". In comparison to Katib Çelebi, Evliya Çelebi is much more specific in when outlining the Kurdish lands. He refers to Diyarbakir and all immediately surrounding lands as "the province of Diyarbakir of Kurdistan" (*Eyalet-i Diyarbekr-i Kürdistan*).¹⁵ Evliya utilizes "province of Kurdistan" (*Eyalet-i Kurdistan*) when he more specifically refers to Diyarbakir, whereas he uses "The land of Kurdistan" (*Diyar-ı Kürdistan*) when referring to a broader region as far as Northern Iraq and North Western Iran.¹⁶ In fact he uses

¹⁴ Katib Çelebi, *Cihannüma*, Vol. I. ed. Fikri Sarıcaoğlu (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2007), 448-50.

¹⁵ Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, Vol. 4, eds. Seyit Ali Kahraman, Yücel Dağlı (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2005), 199a.

¹⁶ Evliya, *Seyahatname*, IV; 217b; For a seminal work on Diyarbakir as a religious and cultural zone in Kurdistan see Yavuz Aykan, *Rendre la justice à Amid* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), particularly the prolog.

the term “Kurdistan” for Van (*Kürdistan-ı Van*), Soran (East and North of Erbil) and Bitlis too. Besides, Evliya also makes a distinction between the Kurdistan region in Ottoman and Safavid lands as “Kurdistan of Iran” (*Kürdistan-ı Acemistan*).¹⁷

In one place Evliya gives what he believes to be the broader geographical boundaries of Kurdistan:

Named as Kurdistan and Sengistan (Rocky lands), this is a great land, which includes seventy different settlements. One corner of it starts from the northern side of the land of Erzurum and Van to the land of Hakkari, Cizre, İmadiyye, Mosul, Şehrizul, Harir, Ardalán, Baghdad, Derne, Derteng and Basra. Located in between Iraq and Anatolia (*Irâk-ı Arab ile Âl-i Osmân mâbeyninde*) six thousand Kurdish tribes and clans dwell on these highlands, where the nation of Acem would easily capture the Ottoman lands (*Diyar-ı Rum*) if they [the Kurds] did not become a stronghold (*seddi sedid*).¹⁸

After drawing the boundaries of Kurdistan, Evliya finally prays for the land to stay between two states forever.¹⁹ Similar to Katib Çelebi he adds that the majority of the Kurds are from Şafi‘i school of law.²⁰ With emphasis on their religious identity Evliya considered the Kurds as part of the Sunni world of Ottoman Empire.

Naima, an Ottoman court historian, wrote his historical account almost half a century after Evliya’s travelogue, but did not present an account as informative as the latter. Still, Naima makes many references to Kurdish lands. In one account he mentions a Naqshbandi sheikh who was well received by all the *memalik-i Kurdistan* (regions of Kurdistan), specified as Erzurum, Mosul, Ruha (Urfa) and Van.²¹ Diyarbakir is mentioned separately in his account as 8 out of the 19 *sancaks* (an administrative subdivision of *vilayet* or province) were administered by a Kurdish ruler there. Thus, several of these *sancaks* were subject to tax payment. He discusses not just those Kurds inhabiting the region referred to as Kurdistan, but also those living outside of that region, such as those living in Sivas, Çorum and Yozgat. He adds a far greater level of detail to his accounts when referring to events within those provinces above. Concerning one occasion, which happened in Sivas, Naima records that many Turks, Kurds

¹⁷ Ibid. 326b.

¹⁸ Ibid. 219a.

¹⁹ “İnkırâzu’ d-devrân Âl i Osmân ile şâh ı Acem mâbeyninde memâlik-i Kürdîstân mü’ebbed ola, âmîn, yâ Mu’în.” Ibid. 200a.

²⁰ “Kürdîstân olup cümle halkı Şâfi’iyyü’l-mezheb olmağile Şâfi’î müftisi iştihardadır.” Ibid. Vol. VI, 200a.

²¹ Mustafa Naima, *Tarih-i Naima*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli, Vol. II. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2007), 899.

and Turcomans and other ethnic groups gathered from among Ottoman soldiers and walked against the head of the region.²²

As time passes, particularly with Evliya Çelebi's travelogue, historians, bureaucrats, poets, and religious scholars in the Ottoman domain become more aware of Kurdistan as well as Kurdish groups scattered across Anatolia, Iraq and the Levant. From sixteenth until nineteenth century, in the course of time number of references given to the Kurds increases and the general references are eventually replaced with more specific ones. One needs to make clear, on the other hand, that these references become more frequent when there is a rebellion or an incident in which the ruling government may be interested. During this period, especially the eighteenth century, we see no equal work to Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname* on the Kurdish territories.

The Baban Emirate: a Kurdistan of the nineteenth century²³

Many scholars have discussed the boundaries of Kurdistan in terms of its geographical limits and the limits they present are more or less the same. Therefore, we shall not discuss where Kurdistan is and what the borders of the region were since numerous sources and maps already give enough information pertaining to question. The questions of interest in this article are what and where Ottomans and Europeans indicate when they were referring to Kurdistan, particularly "the Kurdistan" in the first half of the nineteenth century. While almost every modern study on the region elaborates on the boundaries of Kurdistan, the scholarship remains silent concerning different versions of the name. Drouville draws our attention to different versions of "Kurdistan", or "Kourdistan." He emphasizes the difference between "Kurdistan" and its Persian namesake "Kourdistan." He describes "Kurdistan" as the "the country inhabited by the Kurds" including the lands both in Iran and the Ottoman Empire, whereas "Kourdistan" refers to "the government of Muhammad Ali Mirza."²⁴ In other words, it resembles a political entity, or a province, located in western Iran.

During the period under Ottoman administration Kurdistan was generally used to refer to the geographical limits of those lands that are predominantly inhabited by Kurds. However, for a short period between 1847 and 1867, the

²² Naima, *Tarih-i Naima*, Vol. II, 550.

²³ For following sections I rely on my doctoral thesis "Politics of Alliance and Rivalry on the Ottoman-Iranian Frontier: The Babans (1500-1851)" (Doctoral Thesis, Albert Ludwigs University of Freiburg, 2013), 5-9.

²⁴ Gaspard Drouville, *Voyage en Perse fait en 1812 et 1813. Vol. 2* (Paris: La Librairie Nationale et Etrangère, 1825), 220, 223. Muhammad Ali Mirza was the eldest of Shah of Iran, Fath Ali Shah, and was appointed to the Western frontier region (Kermanshah, Zohab, and Sonqor to Hamadan, Lorestan, Bakhtiari and Kuzestan) as governor-general from 1809 until his death in 1821. Abbas Amanat, "Dawlatšāh, Moḥammad-'alī Mīrzā" *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dawlatshah-mohammad-ali-mirza> (accessed on 14 February 2018); See also Shahab Vali, "Kaçar-Osmanlı Savaşlarında Guran Kürtleri Üzerine Manzum bir Belge: Mīrzayê Kerendî'nin Ceng-name'si" in *Osmanlı Devleti ve Kürtler*, İbrahim Özcoşar and Shahab Vali, eds. (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2017), 263-91.

Sublime Porte created a province named “Kurdistan.”²⁵ The first reported use of the term “Kurdistan” was by the Seljuq Turks in the twelfth century and continued with the Iranians from the Safavid period until today. This part will show that two “Kurdistans” have been referred to: Ottoman Kurdistan and Iranian Kurdistan. When discussing Ottoman Kurdistan, what is being referred to is essentially the Iraqi Kurdistan of today, including the provinces of Hakkari and Şırnak in modern Turkey. Starting from the beginning of the nineteenth century these regions were altogether denoted as “Kurdistan” in the Ottoman sources and, for this reason, is utilized in this article. During the first half of the nineteenth century Ottoman official sources used the term Kurdistan far less frequently for the Kurdish emirates but rather as a term for the Baban territories. Likewise, Kurdistan was the location of the emirates of Bohtan, Hakkari, Bahdinan (Amediye), Soran (Revanduz), and Baban, for European sources. Some continued to add Bitlis to this list after the turn of the nineteenth century. The French traveler Adrien Dupre, who visited “Curdistan” between 1807 and 1809, listed “les principautés Curdes” (the Kurdish principalities) or the Kurdish emirates as “Soran, Baban, Badinan, Tchambo [Hakkari], Bottan and Bitlisi.”²⁶ The region of Kurdistan that was located in Iran was largely used to refer to the Ardalan Principality, and, occasionally included the territories of Mukris west of Lake Urumiya.

86

The early 19th century saw a growing number of Ottoman historians refer to Şehrîzor (roughly corresponding to today’s Kirkuk) and Baban sancak as representative of the region known as Kurdistan. One of these writers, the court historian Şanizade, talks about the *beys* of Kurdistan by referring to the Kurdish emirs in Koy Sancak, Baban and Şehrîzor.²⁷ He is probably the first who emphasized that southern Kurdistan was more dominant in regional politics than any other parts of Kurdistan. The early nineteenth century saw the Babans as the dominant emirate of the region. Şanizade states that the Ottomans requested that Iran cease its occupation of Kurdistan and return any fugitive Baban pashas.²⁸

From the beginning of the sixteenth century until 1784, the Babans were located in Kalaçolan, a village-town in the north of Şehrîzor. After 1784 they moved their capital from Kalaçolan a few miles north to Milkhindi, and named the place Süleymaniye. Since the sixteenth century, and more frequently in the nineteenth century, the borders of the region ruled by the Baban dynasty were under a process of constant change due to repeated conflicts with its neighbours—including the Ardalan in the east on the Iranian side of Kurdistan and the Soran in the north. Following the end of a conflict with its neighbors, the Babans may

²⁵ For a detailed study of the “Kürdistan Eyaleti” of this period see Cemal Ülke, “Kürdistan Eyaleti’nin İdari Yapısı (1847-1867)” (Unpublished Master’s thesis, Mardin Artuklu University, 2014).

²⁶ Adrien Dupré, *Voyage en Perse fait dans les années 1807, 1808 et 1809* (Paris: J.G. Dentu, 1819), 91.

²⁷ Şanizade Mehmet Atallah, *Tarih-i Şanizade*, Vol. I, ed. Ziya Yilmazer (Istanbul: Çamlıca, 2008), 754-55.

²⁸ Şanizade, *Tarih-i Şanizade*, Vol. I, 831.

on occasion incorporate new lands into its own domain, as was the case with the incorporation of Kirkuk, Koy Sancak, Harir, Şehribazar, and Pijder. For instance, during the leadership of Khanah Pasha (r. 1721-1730) he occupied the Ardalani territories and with this the “influence of the family stretched now with varying force from Kirkuk to Hamadan.”²⁹ When the Catholic father Campanile visited the area around 1810, he stated that the Baban domains included “Karatcholan, Kara-Dar, Baziyan, Margu, Emar Menden, Hedjiler, Surdach, Kerabe, Korrok-Khoy, Serspi as well as Arbil, Kirkuk and Khoy-Sindjaq.”³⁰ At other times, the Baban domain was strictly confined to Süleymaniye. Particularly during the period from 1823 onward, when the First Treaty of Erzurum was signed, until the last Baban emir was removed from Süleymaniye in 1851, the Babans were unable to expand their realm beyond their capital and some surrounding villages. This was due, in part, to the presence of Persian and Turkish garrisons in their town, but also to the rise of Mirê Kor in northern neighborhood of Revanduz.³¹

The Ottoman official correspondence on the Iranian Kurdistan distinguished it from the Ottoman Kurdistan each time they discussed a matter on it. This was the case if the letter was written in Baghdad and intended for Istanbul. However, when those official documents refer to Ottoman Kurdistan, they utilize the term “Kurdistan” without indicating its boundaries or geographical borders. Despite the general reference to the Kurdish emirates, the Ottoman sources essentially used the term Kurdistan in reference to the Babans. On occasion the Ottomans utilized “Kürdistan maddesi” (the matter of Kurdistan), particularly when disputes arose with the Iranians, which indicated more to the Baban territories and in official documents it was used in exchange with the “Baban maddesi” (the matter of Baban). A letter from Davud Pasha, governor of Baghdad, to the commander-in-chief (*serasker*) Rauf Pasha, dated 20 March, 1824 (19 Receb, 1239), states that “the matters related with the issue of Kurdistan are sorted out,” (*Kürdistan umurundan maâda olan mesâlih halledilmiş*) except “the problem of the pashas of Kurdistan”, who were still allying with the Iranians. In the aforementioned passage, when discussing “the issue of Kurdistan” Davud Pasha is referring to the Baban sancak and “the pashas of Kurdistan” refers to the Baban leaders.³²

The leaders of the Baban emirate aside from being known as the pasha or *mutasarrıf* (used after Tanzimat for leader of *sancak*) of Baban – and later Sulaimaniya – were also known by the names “Kürdistan mutasarrıfı” and

²⁹ Stephen H. Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*, (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 2002, first published by Oxford University, 1925), 159.

³⁰ R.P. Giuseppe Campanile, *Historie du Kurdistan*, (first pub.1818 in Italian, trans. in French by R.P. Thomas Bois in 1953), (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004), 40.

³¹ Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 247, 249, 287.

³² HAT #36617-A (19.B.1239/ 20 March 1924).

“Kürdistan Paşası.”³³ The other regions of Ottoman Kurdistan were referred to by the name of each governorship or emirate such as “Van vilayeti,” “Hakkari Sancağı,” “Bayezid Sancağı,” etc. The lands populated by the Kurds in the north, such as Erzurum, Van, Kars, Muş, and Bayezid were collectively known as “serhadd” referring to their northward and their frontier position. Both the Ottomans and Iranians utilized the term *serhadd* to refer to the lands under their control that bordered one another. Cities in this region, such as Erzurum, were referred to as “serhad şehri” (the frontier city).³⁴

Despite the abundance of references in Ottoman correspondence with the Babans as the leaders of the region, there are few documents referring to Bedir Khan when Kurdistan is mentioned. Rather, the documents discuss the “kaymakam of Jizra, Bedir Khan Beg” (*Cizre Kaymakamı Bedirhan Bey*)³⁵ or “the mütesellim of Jizra, Bedir Khan Beg” (*Cizre Mütesellimi Bedirhan Bey*)³⁶ as a later document refers to him. The same case is true for Mîrê Kor or “Muhammed Beg of Revanduz” (*Revanduz Beyi Mehmed Bey*) as he is referred to in Ottoman documents. Some documents on Mîrê Kor discuss that the “Revanduz Beyi Mehmed Bey” was from *Şafi’i* school of law and therefore he had always been on the side of the Ottomans in the war against Iran.³⁷ Another letter from Ali Pasha, who was responsible removing the governor of Baghdad, gives an account of “Revanduzlu Mehmed Bey”’s help on this matter as the latter moved on Baghdad with his forces together with “the mutasarrıf of Baban.”³⁸

Kurdish lands in European sources

Beyond Ottoman sources many European (particularly British, Italian and French) sources also intend to refer to the Baban territories when they discuss Kurdistan. Two earlier Italian accounts pay special attention to the Babans. A Catholic father from the Vatican, Maurizio Garzoni, who was in Amediye around the 1770s, counts “five great Muslim principalities” of Kurdistan, outlined as “Bitlis,” “Jazira” (Bohtan), “Amadia” (Bahdinan), “Julamerg” (Hakkari), and “Karacholan” (Baban). After providing this information Garzoni states that the Baban principality is the “the greatest and most powerful” especially after “it had annexed the principality of Koi Sanjak (Soran).”³⁹ Besides giving the names of five principalities Garzoni gives the overall size of

³³ See the Ottoman document for “Kürdistan Mutasarrıfı” HAT # 36750-i (17.L.1239/ 15 June 1824).

³⁴ Ateş, Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands, 18-20, 28.

³⁵ C.NF (Cevdet Nafia) #959, Folio:20, (8.Ca.1259/ 7 June 1843).

³⁶ A.MKT (Sadaret-Mektubi Kalemi Ervaki)# 86, Folio: 9 (19.S.1260/ 9 March 1844); Also another document talks about the effect that the Sheikhs of Khalidiyya order had on the removal of threatening forces belong to “Mütesellim of Jizra, Bedir Khan Beg.” A.MKT.MHM (Sadaret Mektubi Kalemi Mühimme Kalemi Evrakı) #61, Folio: 2, (17.C.1263/ 1 June 1847).

³⁷ HAT #36750-M (07.L 1239/ 5 June 1824).

³⁸ HAT # 20815 (08.L.1246/ 23 March 1831).

³⁹ P. Maurizio Garzoni, *Grammatica e vocabolario della lingua kurda* (Roma, 1787), 3-5.

Kurdistan at the time of his travels in the region. He states “this country in itself has an extent of around twenty five days [of travel] by length and ten days by breadth.”⁴⁰

Another Catholic father, Campanile, who arrived among the Kurds thirty years after Garzoni, makes a similar observation about the Baban principality: “the most extensive, most powerful and most pleasant” emirate of all Kurdistan. Campanile adds two further Kurdish principalities to those already listed by Garzoni: “Soran” “and Baba(n).”⁴¹ Garzoni did not indicate a capital city for the whole of the Kurdistan region but Campanile names Bitlis as the center of Kurdistan because of its commercial importance and relative beauty. In any case, Campanile states that “some like to name it [Bitlis] as the capital of all Kurdistan.”⁴²

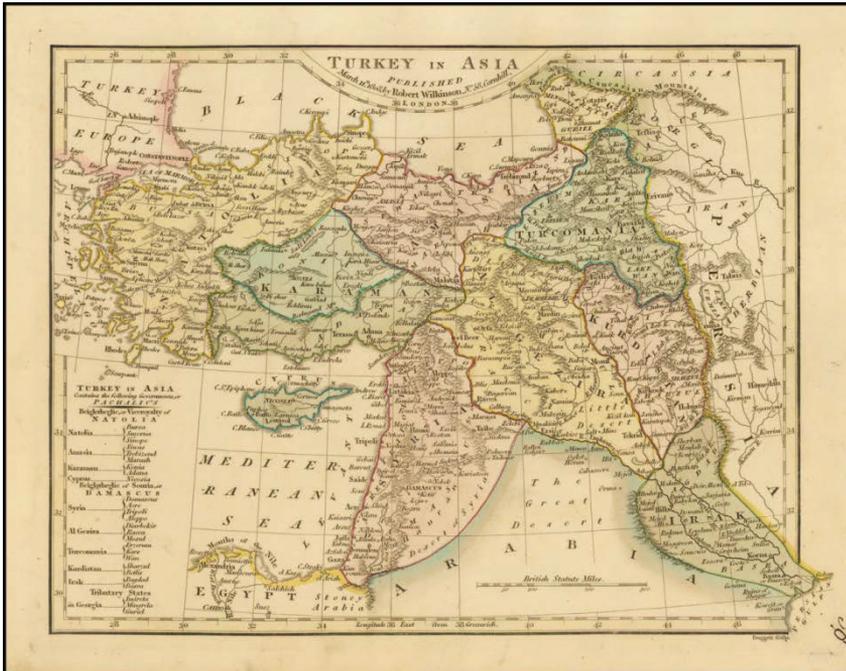


Figure 2: A cartographic publisher from London, Robert Wilkinson (c. 1768 - 1825) drew a map of “Turkey in Asia” in 1808 and placed Kurdistan between Betlis (Bitlis) in the north and Sharzul (Şehrızor) in the south.

Source: Robert Wilkinson, *Wilkinson's General Atlas of the World*, London, 1809. **Link:** <https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/45551/turkey-in-asia-shows-cyprus-wilkinson> (accessed on 8 January 2018)

⁴⁰ Despite Campanile mentions the Baban emirate he adds “Karatcholan” to the list as well. Campanile, *Historie du Kurdistan*, 11.

⁴¹ Campanile, *Histoire du Kurdistan*, 12.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Beyond the information presented by these two Italian fathers, the most comprehensive source written about the Babans is James C. Rich's *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*. The "Koordistan" Rich is referring to is the region located in the south east of the Ottoman Empire, today's Northern Iraq, where the Baban territories centered in Süleymaniye.⁴³ In the end of the first volume of his aforementioned book, Rich gives the details of a scroll, which is titled "dates and facts connected with the history of Koordistan," that he claims to have received from the Baban pashas. The list mostly recounts facts about the Baban family but it refers to the other Kurdish pashas, as well as Ottoman and Iranian rulers, to the extent that they were associated with the Babans.⁴⁴ Rich also uses the terms "Turkish Koordistan," "Bebbeh Koordistan," and "Southern Koordistan" when referring to Baban territories. In an article from 7 December 1824 reporting on the hostility of the Iranians towards Baghdad, the periodical *Christian Secretary* announced that the Iranian governor Muhammad Ali Mirza "got possession of Sulimania, residence of Pacha of Kurdistan."⁴⁵ In referring to the Baban territories as Kurdistan in these sources, the capital of the region was given as Süleymaniye, others, however, referred to the town as the "capital of lower Kurdistan."⁴⁶ The British traveler William Heude notes underneath a drawing of Süleymaniye at the beginning of his book, *A Voyage up the Persian Gulf and a Journey Overland from India to England in 1817*, as "Sulimaney, the Capital of Kurdistan."⁴⁷

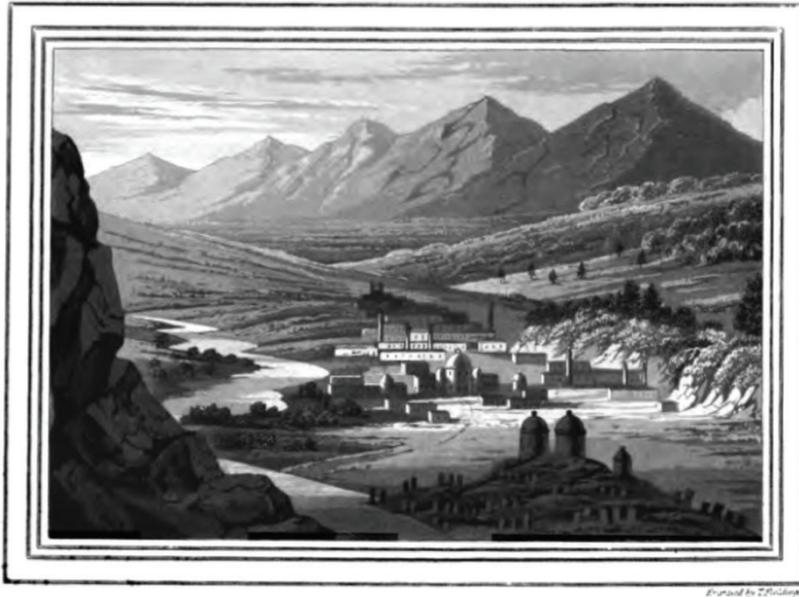
⁴³ See especially the first volume. James C. Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh*, Vol.1 (James Duncan: London, 1836).

⁴⁴ See the details of the scroll, in the Appendix of this thesis. Rich, *Narrative of a Residence*, vol. I, 385-387.

⁴⁵ *Christian Secretary*, (7 December 1824): 1, 45.

⁴⁶ See his entry for "Solymania or Shehrezur" in Richard Brookes, *The General Gazetteer or compendium of Geographical Dictionary* (London: A. Picquot, 1827)

⁴⁷ William Heude, *A Voyage up the Persian Gulf and a Journey Overland from India to England in 1817* (London: Longman, 1817).



Sulimaniye, the Capital of Kurdistan.

Figure 3: “Sulimaniye, the Capital of Kurdistan” in the first quarter of the nineteenth century

Source: William Heude, *A Voyage up the Persian Gulf* (1817)

91

One can see this even in the titles given to each of the Kurdish *mirs* (Kurdish version of emir). For instance most of Kurdish *mirs* would be given the title of “beg/ bey” while Baban leaders were named as “Paşa”. After the Tanzimat (1839) the Baban leaders as well as many other Kurdish *mirs* were named as “mutasarrıf” but many preserved their title of “Paşa”. These titles were bestowed upon these leaders by the sultan or by the governor of the province. The Baban emirs were also referred to as *mir-i miran* (the emir of all emirs or *beglerbegi*) in the nineteenth century Ottoman documents as they were considered the most powerful of the Kurdish *mirs* or a *primus inter pares*. The Baban leader, Süleyman Paşa, was officially given the title of “mirmiran” in 1837. Sultan’s decree states “Baban Mutasarrıfı Süleyman Paşa’ya mirmiran ve oğlu Ahmed Bey’e de kapıcıbaşı nişanlarının itası” (The decoration of emir of emirs to be bestowed upon the Baban leader, Süleyman Paşa, and the decoration of keeper of the palace gate to [be bestowed upon] his son Ahmed Bey).⁴⁸ One of the most influential Baban pashas, Abdurrahman (r.1788-1813) was also referred to as “mirmiran” according to the French sources.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ HAT #23085 (29.Z.1252/ 5 April 1837).

⁴⁹ Correspondance Consulaire et Commerciale (CCC), Basra nr. 2, 058 in Tom Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and society in early modern Iraq: Mamluk Pashas tribal Shayks and local rule between 1802 and 1831* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 42.

CONCLUSION

That said, it must be remembered that geographical boundaries were constantly changing within the region as sources do tell us. What I have tried to present here is that the boundaries and capital of Kurdistan did not stay the same throughout the centuries. If Bitlis or Çemişgezek was the center of the Kurdish culture, politics, and economics in the sixteenth century, these towns were replaced by Süleymaniye with its literary and political power by the nineteenth century.⁵⁰ According to Charmoy, the Russian translator of *Şerefname*, whenever the Kurds referred to Kurdistan in the sixteenth century, they were indicating Çemişgezek. On the other hand, İdris-i Bitlisi refers to Bitlis as the center of government of Kurdistan in the early sixteenth century. Consequently, it would appear that Kurdistan has come to mean a variety of different things geographically through the centuries. To the outside world, be it Ottomans, Iranians, or those from the West, Kurdistan has always been defined by the most powerful Kurdish emirate at any given time in history.

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