

Lurs (Faylis) Are Not Kurds

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Since the rise of the Kurdish national movement in the early 20th century, Kurdish nationalists have tried very hard to present themselves as a large and unified ethnic group. To achieve this, they began to claim that many of, if not all, the nomads of western Persian Zogros Mountains (such as Lurs, Bakhtiari, Laks, etc.) and the tribes of eastern Turkiye, such as Zaza, were Kurds.¹ Next, they began to claim that they descended from the prehistoric Halaf and Ubaid periods and later added the Medes, Gutians, Mitanni, Hurrians, and—more recently—Sumerians and others as their ancestors. Reputable scholars in general ignore these claims; however, many laypeople are reading and spreading these fabricated narratives.

I have refuted many such claims. Consider my articles challenging that the Kurds were Medes² or Sumerians³. I have also refuted the Kurdish writers' assertions that ancient words such as Kardû, Kardukh, Corduene meant "Kurd," because scholars and linguists have proven that the word Kurd is not a linguistic form of these ancient terms.⁴ We are told that when millennia-long intervals separate two peoples' names that merely look similar but lack any other historical reference, source, epigraphic evidence, or the like, the two names are almost certainly unrelated. All this serves to denounce the academically irrelevant and entirely inconsistent references to an ancient Kurdish history found in partial articles like those on Wikipedia.⁵

Today, I felt it necessary to challenge the claimed relationship between Lurs and Kurds. Kurdish nationalists assert that the people known as Fayli were Kurds. However, many historians and authors have insisted that the Fayli are not Kurds but rather one of several types of Lurs—hence "Fayli Lurs," a term used in multiple entries in the authoritative Encyclopaedia of Islam. **The distinction between Kurd and Lur is not primarily linguistic but also has geographical and political dimensions.** Also, the 1597 book *Sharafnameh*⁶, or the history of Kurdish emirates and chiefdoms, includes in addition a list of the chiefdoms of Greater and Lesser Luristan⁷ (*Lur-i Buzurg and Lur-i Kuchik*) in it, but suggests they are somewhat different from the emirates of Kurdistan proper. Kurdistan and Luristan have since then remained distinct regions with different political histories...⁸

¹ Garnik Asatrian. *Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds*. In *Iran and the Caucasus* 13 (2009) 1-58. Brill. 2009.

² <https://www.fredaprim.com/pdfs/2024/Kurds%20Are%20Not%20Related%20to%20Medes.pdf>

³ <https://www.fredaprim.com/pdfs/2024/Kurds%20are%20not%20Sumerians.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.fredaprim.com/pdfs/2024/Kurd%20and%20Ancient%20words.pdf>

⁵ Accessed 4/24/2025. Prof. Muhammad Shamsaddin Megalommatis. There cannot be an independent Kurdistan. https://www.academia.edu/24271487/There_cannot_be_an_independent_Kurdistan_by_Prof_Muhammad_Shamsaddin_Megalommatis

⁶ *Sharafnama* by Sharaf al-Din Bitlisi was interestingly published in Persian and not Kurdish. It was translated to Kurmanji in 1868 and into Sorani in 1972.

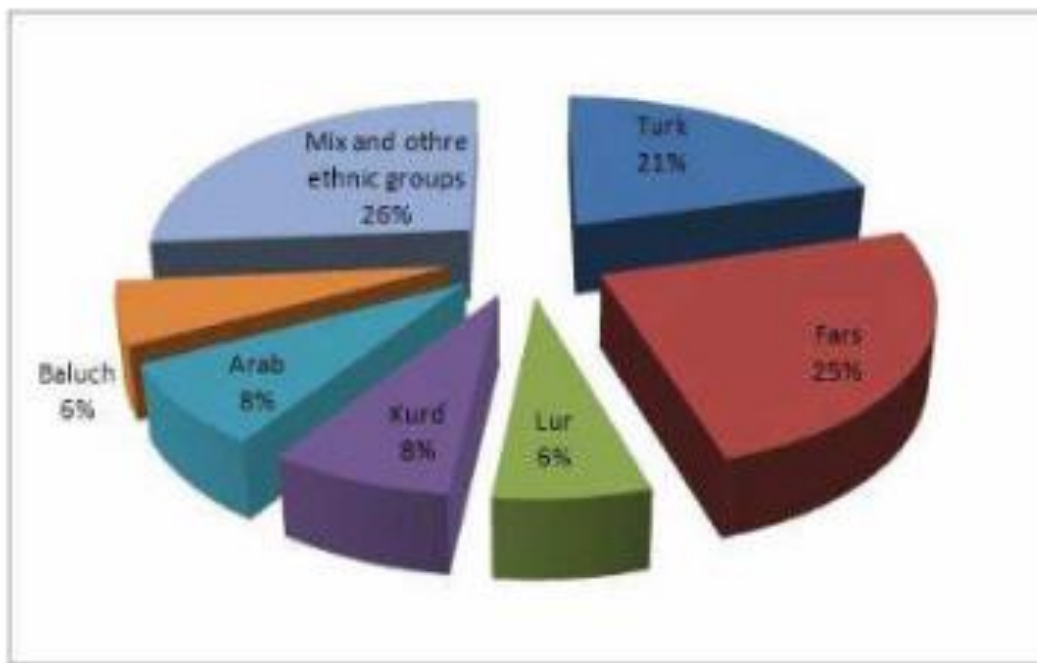
⁷ Luristan represents the word Lur and the suffix -stan, that means land; thus (Land of Lur) and Afghanistan (Land of Afghan), Balochistan (Land of Baloch), Turkmenistan (Land of Turkmen), Uzbekistan (Land of Uzbek), etc.

⁸ Martin van Bruinessen. *Faylis, Kurds and Lurs: Ambiguity on the frontier of Iran and Iraq*. An overview of the literature. Paper Presented at the Third International Conference on Faylee Kurds, Brussels, European Parliament, 12 April 2018

Many believe that the Lurs are a mixture of Iranian tribes originating from Central Asia, Eastern Europe, Northern India, Eastern Iran, and the pre-Iranian tribes of western Iran, such as the Kassites and Gutians. They live mostly in southwest Iran. The Lurs are divided into two major groups: *Lur-i Buzurg*, residing today in Khuzestan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, parts of Luristan, and parts of Isfahan and *Lur-i Kuchik*, which can be found in Luristan.

Many others also believe that the Lurs' origins date back to the time before the Indo-European migration to Iran, when groups such as the Kassites and Elamites inhabited the region. The Kassites are said to have been native to Luristan. Their language was neither Semitic nor Indo-European, and it differed from Elamite. History records that the Kassites overthrew Babylon in 1595 BC and extended their lands to the borders of Egypt and Anatolia. Their last king was defeated by the Elamites in 1155 BC.⁹ Farjadian & Ghaderi inform us that the remnant Kassite subpopulation, having maintained their identity, retreated to the high mountains of Luristan, where they became part of the Elamites and eventually the Persian Empire—though they remained independent during the eras of the Medes and Achaemenids.¹⁰

In all major ethnic studies on Iran, the Lurs are treated and identified separately from the Kurds. See chart below:¹¹



⁹ Accessed 4/24/2025 <https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/the-middle-babylonian-kassite-period-ca-1595-1155-b-c-in-mesopotamia>

¹⁰ Shirin Farjadian & Abbas Ghaderi. Iranian Lurs Genetic Diversity: An Anthropological View Based on HLA Class II Profiles. 2006.

¹¹ Maryam Cheheltani, Nurdeng Deuraseh, Zaid Ahmad & MS Sabran. Estimating Ethnic Identities' Importance among Iranian Tribes. Asian Social Science; Vol. 8, No. 11; 2012.

Also, the 1971 US Government Area Handbook for Iraq mentions the Fayli in the chapter on ethnic groups, not among the Kurds but in the section ‘Persians and Lurs,’ noting that these are often lumped together because of their common Shi’ism and because most Lurs live in Iran. The Handbook notes that ‘Kurdish nationalists have sometimes claimed the Iraqi and Iranian Lurs as “Fayliya” Kurds, but the Lurs do not seem to have accepted this designation and regard themselves as a separate people... the Handbook also insists that in Iraq, Iranians and Lurs are in fact quite different communities. We read, ‘the Lurs are a tribal people, and their role in Iraq is substantially different from that of ethnic Persians,’ it notes. On the Fayli’s numbers and geographical distribution the Handbook has this to say: ‘Lurs alone may constitute from 0.5 to 1 percent of all Iraqis; Persians may be somewhat larger group – from 1.5 percent to 2 percent.’ ‘Most Lurs are concentrated in east Iraq, south of the Kurdish highlands, chiefly in and around Mandali, but there are others in towns and villages on the Tigris river and the Gharraf Canal (south from Kut), and a number are to be found in Baghdad and Basra. In Iraq they are often village and town laborers, and many of them act as heavy porters in the larger cities” ... Another important indication “can be found in Oskar Mann’s observations on the dialects spoken in Luristan. Mann, who carried out linguistic field research in the region in the early twentieth century, makes a strict distinction between Luri dialects such as Fayli and the various forms of Kurdish.”¹²

As mentioned by van Bruinessen earlier, the language of the Kurds and Lurs are different. Asatrian writes, “the language spoken by the Kurds belongs to the North-Western group of Iranian dialects. The languages of the Zazas in Dersim (Tunceli) and adjoining areas in Turkey, as well as those of Gurans, Awromans, and Bajalanis (dialects of Gurani) in Iran, are separate linguistic units. The same can be said about the Luri dialects (Luri, Bakhtiari, Mamasani, etc.), which, unlike Kurdish, Zaza, and Gurani, belong to another branch of New West Iranian, the South-Western group.”¹³

Furthermore, accounts of travelers such as George N. Curzon, later Viceroy of India, whose two-volume narrative on Persia was the authoritative British account, are important. Curzon classifies Persia’s groups on linguistic and cultural grounds into four: Turki, Arab, Baluch, and a large group speaking Iranian languages—sometimes subsumed under “Leks” but more commonly referred to as Kurds and Lurs. All nomadic groups contained a large settled population, although among Kurds and Lurs this remained a minority.¹⁴

Erik Anonby, a linguist and professor, laments “that Luri has not received its due share of attention, for it is the language of a people numbering over 4 million with a rich culture and a complex linguistic and sociolinguistic situation. Perhaps it has been unjustly overshadowed by research on its neighbors Farsi and Kurdish, since speakers of those languages have published from a wide spectrum of universities, including those in the West.” He adds that western researchers, and more recently a small body of Iranian scholars, have worked on Luri varieties

¹² Martin van Bruinessen. Faylis, Kurds and Lurs: Ambiguity on the frontier of Iran and Iraq. An overview of the literature. Paper Presented at the Third International Conference on Faylee Kurds, Brussels, European Parliament, 12 April 2018

¹³ Garnik Asatrian. Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds. In *Iran and the Caucasus* 13 (2009) 1-58. Brill. 2009.

¹⁴ Curzon, George N. *Persia and the Persian question*. Vol II, London: Longmans Green, 1892.

over the past century. There remains a widely held perception among Farsi-speaking Iranians that Luri is simply an “accent” or “dialect” of Farsi. However, linguistic and sociolinguistic research demonstrates that Luri is indeed a language in its own right. Luri differs from Farsi in phonology, morphology, grammatical and semantic structure, and lexicon—and speakers themselves are aware of this distinctness. Furthermore, the two varieties are not inherently mutually intelligible. He also explains that the Lurs are members of an Iranian (Indo-European) ethnic family which is a loosely-connected group of several more cohesive subgroups. The best-known of these groups are the Feyli (Lur-i Kuchik), Bakhtiari, Boyerahmadi, Kohgiluyeh and Mamasani (the latter four groups being Lur-i Buzurg). Feyli is further divided into Posht-e Kuh and Pish-e Kuh. There are a number of other smaller groups of Lurs.

Anonby states that “scholars consider that it is likely that the Lurs are descended from the group of Aryan tribes that made their way from Central Asia, passing north of the Caspian Sea through the Caucasus and into what is known today as Iran. Other Indo-Iranian groups such as Persians and Kurds are also descendants of such migrants. Lurs, like many other Iranians, have been part of a massive integration with other groups: both the early inhabitants of Iran such as the Elamites, and later Indo-Iranian invaders. He then informs the reader that the authors of “Peoples of Iran” and others recognize the existence of distinct languages in the Luri language cluster.”¹⁵



The map above shows Luristan clearly distinct from the land of Kurds in northwestern Iran.

¹⁵ Erik Anonby. Update on Luri: How many languages? JRAS, Series 3, 13, 2 (2003), pp. 171–197.

Most importantly is the fact that this distinction between Kurd and Lur has been identified since the 13th century. Yaquṭ ibn-ʿAbdullāh al-Rumī al-Ḥamawī was a Muslim scholar, biographer and geographer of Byzantine ancestry active during the late Abbasid period. He is well-known for his *Muʿjam al-Buldan*, a geographical dictionary that includes much biographical, historical, and cultural data, is a primary source in Arabic scholarship. In *Muʿjam al-Buldan*, al-Hawami represents Kurds and Lur in two different entries.¹⁶

Lur Entry

باب اللام والواو وما يليهما ﴿٢٤٢﴾ لوزان — اللوزية
 أعلم .. قلت وعلى ذلك فليس توج من قرى الاهواز هي مدينة بينها وبين شيراز
 نيف وثلاثون فرسخاً وهي من أرض فارس
 [لَوْذَان] * موضع في قول الراعي
 قليلا كلا ولا بلَوْذَان أو ما حَلَّتْ بالكراكر
 [اللورجان] بالضم ثم السكون وراه وجيم وآخره نون ...
 [اللور] بالضم ثم السكون * كورة واسعة بين خوزستان وأصبهان معدودة في
 عمل خوزستان ذكر ذلك أبو علي التنوخي في منشوره والمعروف ان اللور وهم اللُر
 أيضاً جيل يسكنون هذا الموضع وقد ذكر في اللُر .. وذكر الاصطخري قال اللور
 بلد خصيب الغالب عليه الجبال وكان من خوزستان الا إنه أفرد في أعمال الجبل

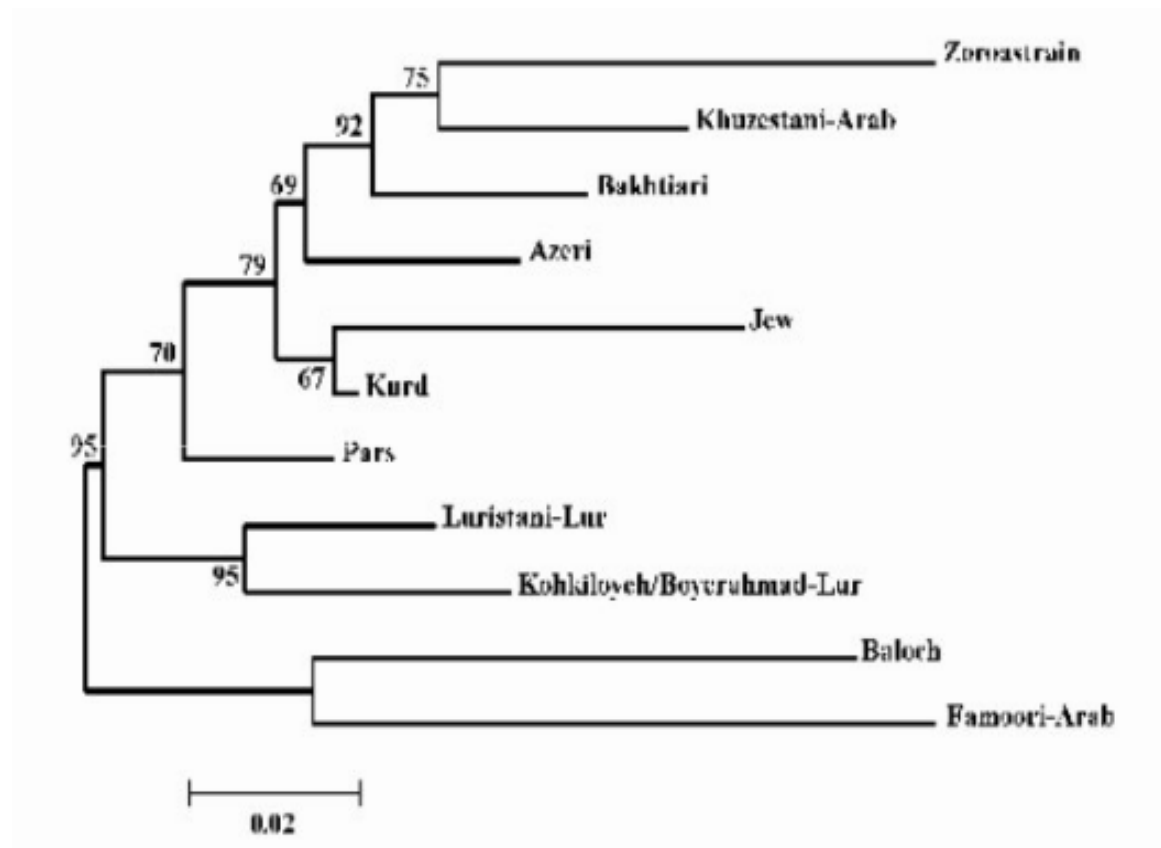
Kurd Entry

[كُرْد] بالضم ثم السكون ودال مهملة بلفظ واحد الأ كراد اسم القبيلة .. قال

باب الكاف والراء وما ياءهما ﴿٢٤٦﴾ كردر — كردفناخسره
 ابن طاهر المقدسي * اسم قرية من قرى البيضاء .. منها شيخنا أبو الحسن علي بن
 الحسين بن عبد الله الكردي حدثنا عن أبي الحسين أحمد بن محمد بن الحسين بن قادشاه
 الأصبهاني عن أبي القاسم الطبراني بكتاب الأديعة من تصنيفه وسألته عن هذه النسبة
 فقال نحن من أهل قرية بيضاء يقال لها كُرْد .. وقال الاصطخري كرد بلدة أكبر

¹⁶ Yaquṭ al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-Buldan*. Egypt. 1906.

A few linguists classify Luri as a continuum between Kurdish and Farsi, but even they admit that it comprises three separate languages: Luristani, Bakhtiari, and Southern Luri. However, genetic studies reveal that Bakhtiaris are genetically distinct from other Lur subpopulations—perhaps due to admixture with other Zagros groups during their nomadic lifestyle.¹⁷



I would like to conclude with final two notes on the Lak and Bakhtiari people mentioned in this article and who the Kurdish nationalists claim to be Kurds as well. We must consider the opinions of real experts on the Laks, such as S. Amanollahi, an anthropologist specializing in Luri culture, and Hamid Izadpanāh, a native Laki speaker. Both independently conclude that Laki speakers' primary ethnic identity is neither Laki nor Kurdish but Luri: "Laki" is solely a linguistic term, whereas "Luri" is both ethnic and linguistic. Their research is well substantiated.¹⁸

On the other hand, Dr. H. Ghanbari, a native Bakhtiari tells us that the Bakhtiari are Lur-i Buzurg (the Greater Lur) and ethnically, linguistically, and culturally belong to the Lur-i Kuchik (the Lesser Lur) in Luristan and Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. Apart from their similarities, Lurs and the Bakhtiari differ not only in their distinct languages, even to an uneducated ear, but

¹⁷ Shirin Farjadian & Abbas Ghaderi. Iranian Lurs Genetic Diversity: An Anthropological View Based on HLA Class II Profiles. 2006.

¹⁸ Erik Anonby. Kurdish or Luri? Laki's disputed identity in the Luristan province of Iran. *Kurdische Studien* 4 + 5 (2004/2005): 7–22

in the solid centralized and hierarchical structures that the Bakhtiari have developed but Lurs never did. Ghanbari addresses an important fact regarding the origination of the term ‘Kurd,’ which means ‘nomadic’ and ‘shepherd,’ as the Zagros peoples share a pastoral nomadic lifestyle and developed linguistic and cultural similarities to their geographical proximity, leading historians to identify them as Kurds until the 20th century. Ghanbari cites Allahyari et al. (2011) who argue that the Lurs and Bakhtiari were considered Kurds only after the Sasanian era and for the first few centuries following the introduction of Islam. Khazani's (2009) study also supports Allahyari et al.'s argument indicating that the current territory of the Bakhtiari and Lurs were historically home to the Elamites and Kassites, two western Iranian peoples.¹⁹

Ghanbari's point is crucial, because since the Middle Persian period (Sassanid), the term *Kwrt* that meant tent-dweller nomad and developed into *Kurt/Kurd* was applied on all the nomads of the Zagros Mountains.²⁰ Meaning, the latter term *Kurd* was never meant to reflect an ethnic designation.

The Middle East countries must find a way to confront the wild historical claims made by the Kurdish nationalists and historians-- such as Mehrdad Izady, Soran Hamarash, Fadhil Mirani. These claims are not only hijacking the region's rich history, but committing cultural genocide against the people of the region while serving questionable political agendas.

¹⁹ Dr. Hossein Ghanbari. *The Bakhtiari: An Analytical-Historical Review of the Origin*. 2021.

²⁰ Garnik Asatrian. *Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds*. In *Iran and the Caucasus* 13 (2009) 1-58. Brill. 2009.