

The Rewriting of Kurdish History Continues

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It is no longer a secret that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), through several institutions, pays shadowy writers and obscure historians generous incentives to rewrite a Kurdish history in a way that serves the Kurdish national agenda. Most of the narratives published by these individuals are not accepted by archaeologists, linguists, or the broader scholarly community.

The latest such publication is authored by Geoff Hann and Tina Townsend-Greaves under the title *Iraq: The Ancient Sites & Iraqi Kurdistan, Edition 3*.

Let us examine one of the main claims that the two authors make on page 10 of that publication, which has also been repeated by Kurdish historians and politicians such as Merdad Izady, Fadhil Mirani, and Soran Hamarash.

Under the section “The Ancient Kurds,” the authors write:

A) “The Kurds have been living in the Zagros Mountains since the beginning of history, when the first written records appeared in the Sumerian city-states in 3000 BC. The land of Karda is mentioned on a Sumerian clay tablet from the 3rd millennium BC.”

RESPONSE: This claim is completely false, misrepresented and fabricated. The Sumerians never referred to any people known as Kurds. The word Karda in the Sumerian text does not mean “Kurd.” This has been shown by many linguists and scholars. Consider the following:

1. G. R. Driver, in his publication *The Name Kurd and its Philological Connexions*, writes: “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 the word ‘nomad,’ if nothing more pejorative.” Professor Minorsky quotes the ninth-century geographer Ibn Eusta, who described the Lombards as “living in the deserts in tents, like the Kurds.”¹

¹ Driver, G. R. (1923). “The Name Kurd and Its Philological Connexions”. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3, 393–404. DOI: 10.1017/S0035869X00067605
Full link: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-royal-asiatic-society/article/abs/name-kurd-and-its-philological-connexions/2B082E676ADF5F4ACEE0351F9F30660E>

2. In *Les Kurdes* (The Kurds), Basil Nikitine writes that linguists such as Hartmann and Weissbach asserted that the name Kurd is not a linguistic form of Cardu (Kardu).²

3. Martin Hartmann (1851–1918), a German orientalist and expert in Semitic and Iranian languages, argued that the ethnonym “Kurd” has no etymological or linguistic connection to ancient forms such as “Kardu” (or variants like Qardu, Kardukh, or Carduni), which appear in Assyrian, Greek (for example, Xenophon’s *Kardouchoi*), and other historical sources.³ Early twentieth-century scholarship often tried to link Kurds to ancient mountain tribes due to overlapping geography in the Zagros-Taurus region. However, Hartmann and his contemporaries rejected this as folk etymology, emphasizing that superficial name similarities do not prove descent. Modern consensus aligns with this view, seeing any link between Kurd and Kardu as uncertain or coincidental.⁴

4. This view was shared by scholars such as Theodor Nöldeke and Franz Heinrich Weissbach. Their analysis showed that the phonetic and morphological development from ancient terms like Kardu or Qardu to “Kurd” is untenable. In his 1898 article *Kardu und Kurden*, Nöldeke examined historical and geographical references to “Kardu,” often associated with the Upper Tigris basin and found in sources like Xenophon’s *Anabasis* and in biblical traditions such as Genesis 8:4, where “the mountains of Ararat” are rendered “Qardu” in Aramaic and Syriac texts. However, Nöldeke rejected any link between these names and “Kurd.”⁵

Nöldeke suggested a possible connection between the Kurds and the Medes, but that view is no longer supported by modern linguistics. Only a few authentic Median words have been documented, too few to establish any concrete linguistic relationship between the two peoples.⁶

5. The term “Kurd” appears in medieval Arabic sources, such as tenth-century works by al-Mas’udi, where it referred to nomadic or pastoralist groups in the region. The word probably derives from Middle Persian *kur* or *kwrt*, meaning “nomad” or “tent-dweller,” or from a related Iranian root. It only became an ethnic-linguistic identifier by the twelfth or

² Nikitine, Basil. *Les Kurdes: Étude Sociologique et Historique*. Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1956.

³ Hartmann, Martin. “Bohtan: Eine topographisch-historische Studie”. Appeared in journal *Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatischen Gesellschaft*. volume 1, no. 2, pages 85–144, with continuation in 1897, no. 1, pages 1–103). 1896.

⁴ Reference for general consensus: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, “Kurds.” Full link: <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/kurds>

⁵ Nöldeke, Theodor. (1898). “Kardu und Kurden”. In *Beiträge zur alten Geschichte und Geographie, Festschrift für Heinrich Kiepert*, 71–82. Full link (archival reference): <https://archive.org/details/NoldekeKarduUndKurden1898>

⁶ Ferdinand Hennenbichler. “The History of Kurds”. Edition Winterwork (Printshop). Germany. 2011

thirteenth century, distinct from any ancient Mesopotamian or Achaemenid references.⁷

6. The word Qardu (or Kardû) was not used by the Assyrians to refer to an ethnic group. In the Assyrian Akkadian language, qardu meant “valiant” or “brave,” from the root qardutu. The Assyrians used qarduti to describe their courageous soldiers, not a separate people.⁸

There is no known ancient text that mentions a people called “Kurds” waging war against the Assyrians, as Hann and Townsend-Greaves suggest. They state, “In alliance with the Babylonian King Nabopolassar, the Medes and the Elamites, they [the Kurds] fought the Assyrian Empire.” This is fiction. Historical sources show that the Medes allied with the Babylonians to defeat the Assyrians. The insertion of “Kurds” into that event is a deliberate fabrication meant to create false legitimacy. There is not a single archaeological or historical text mentioning the term “Kurd” in ancient sources.

B) The rest of the section is mostly factual, describing the sequence from the fall of the Medes to the rise of the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid dynasties, followed by the Islamic conquest. However, the authors repeatedly use the same tactic: they recount verified historical events but insert the word “Kurds” into contexts where it does not belong, creating the illusion that Kurds were part of those ancient dynasties.

The truth is that there is no reference to Kwr̥t before the sixth century, and the term “Kurd” itself does not appear in recorded texts until after the Arab-Islamic conquest of Mesopotamia and Persia in the seventh century.⁹

Publications of this kind are regrettable because they approach history from a narrow ideological perspective and are intended to distort historical facts and mislead readers unfamiliar with the actual linguistic and archaeological evidence.

⁷ Limbert, John. (1968). “The Origins and Appearance of the Kurds in Pre-Islamic Iran”. Available at: <https://www.kavehfarrokh.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/origins-of-kurds-in-preislamic-iran.pdf>

Source: Encyclopaedia Iranica, “Kurds.” <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/kurds>.

See also, El-Mas’udi. *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma’adin al-Jawhar* (The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems).

⁸ Example reference for Akkadian root: The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (CAD), Vol. Q, entries for qardu and qardutu. Full link: <https://oi.uchicago.edu/research/publications/cad/q>

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⁹ Garnik Asatryan. “Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds”, Iran and the Caucasus Vol 13, No. 1. Yerevan State University. Brill, 2009.