



JEMAL NEBEZ

# THE KURDS

## HISTORY AND CULTURE

**Western Kurdistan Association**

*publications*

**Jemal Nebez**

# **THE KURDS**

## **History and Kulture**

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## **PREFACE**

On the occasion of the inauguration of the Kurdish community-house in Berlin, Germany in September 1997, the well-known Kurdologist Dr. Jemal Nebez held a warmly received speech under the title: The Kurds – their history and culture.

This speech was not only of great importance because of its contents and coverage, but also because it was based on precise data and historic scientific evidence. In his speech Dr. Nebez covered various subjects, e.g. pre-Christian ancient history and the mythology of the Kurds, the cultural height and depth of the Kurdish people in the shadow of the numerous expeditions by alien peoples through Kurdistan, the astounding variety of religions in Kurdistan, with special stress on syncretism as the most striking feature of the Kurdish religious culture, delineating syncretism as inherently different from mixed religions.

As an analytically thinking scientist (physicist) the speaker did not get stuck in the past, nor was his speech

an archaeological presentation, but an Archigenesis, which in fluent transition reaches from past epochs to the present situation of the Kurdish people.

The above-mentioned aspects are described in chronological sequence with scientific underpinnings. One can say with a fair amount of certainty that this presentation will be of use to all inquiring and truth searching minds, whatever nationality or political-religious Weltanschauung they may hold.

Apart from the fact that the speaker has been active in the field of Kurdology for nearly half a century, and has published a great number of scientific works in several languages on varying subjects and fields, he is one of the few Kurds in Germany (the traditional homeland of Kurdology), who revived here the interest in Kurdology after it had been practically non-existent following the second world war. It was largely due to him that a department of „Kurdology“ was established in the Institut für Iranische Philologie at the FU-Free University/Berlin where he worked as a researcher and academic teacher for 12 years.

Through decades of tiresome investigations and careful analyses of documents faked by the oppressors of the

Kurdish people, Dr. Nebez was able to bring many concealed facts back to light and made an important contribution documenting the cultural history of the Kurdish people. Already in the 1950's Dr. Nebez was in the public eye because of his often misunderstood yet courageous presentation of the Kurds as a nation and their national question. He has since then not only asked for uncompromising Kurdish thinkers to come to the fore but has himself been one. He has presented a concept of Kurdishness, i.e. of the Kurdish Nation, where everything else that has been or is said about it has become somewhat banal. The heart of this philosophy, a type of Kurdish Magna Charta, is a national way of thinking and the founding of Kurdishness in healthy symbiosis with the neighbouring peoples. What Dante said about Zoroaster „his word is made of stone, his work is a building“ could also be said about Nebez.

In his speech Dr. Nebez offered a precise etymological and ethnographic analysis of a variety of witnesses of Kurdish history: „Words, terms, objects and any appearances of former social life“, which for centuries have been assigned as „non-Kurdish“ by those who have occupied Kurdistan, and have been thoughtlessly taken on by unsuspecting and uncritical Kurds.

This reveals that Dr. Nebez is not a conventional historian, but has himself made history, being someone who embodies cultural criticism and social philosophical principles.

Besides the conviction of the right of the Kurdish people to a united homeland, without needing the permission of other powers but as an inherent right, there are mainly two principles, which basically characterize Nebez: Eternal search for historical proofs and uncompromising articulation of the facts, as expressed clearly in this speech.

**Priv. Doz. Dr. Med. Hasan Mohamed Ali,**  
Director of the Board of the Kurdish Community House  
in Berlin, Germany

**Honoured guests and participants,**

**Good evening and a warm welcome,**

Our subject is the **history and culture of the Kurds**. I would like to say beforehand, that the Kurds do not only have a very long history, but also a very moving and complicated one as well as a correspondingly rich culture. Therefore, I ask you to be understanding as I can do no more in one hour than give you a brief outline.

Today the Kurds are about **40 million**. Their homeland is called **Kurdistan**, which means “**country of the Kurds**”. Kurdistan is not the name of a country or state, but rather, a land which in the 20th century was obligatorily divided among **five states (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Soviet Union)**. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990`s, the **Soviet part of Kurdistan (“red Kurdistan”)** became a part of **Azerbaijan** and **Armenia**. The Kurds are today the largest **stateless** territorial nation in the world.

**Kurdistan extends from the Caucasus to the Mediterranean Sea and from there to the Gulf**. A part of it lies in **Mesopotamia**, which is regarded as the

**“cradle of humanity”**. In this region, high cultures such as **Mithraism** or the **Sun Cult** already existed **thousands of years ago**. There was **Buddhism**; there was **Mazdaism**, the religion of the **Zoroastrians** which dedicated itself to the relation between **good and evil** as a **dualism** of the nature of life. There was also the religion of **Mani** or Manichaeus, i.e. **Manichaeism**, which symbolically transmitted the dualism of nature into the existence of **light** and **darkness**. There was (and still is today) **Judaism**, **Christianity**, and also **Islam** in Kurdistan. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were also many Kurds who converted to the **Bahai-religion**.

The origin of this religion comes from Babism, which was established by the Persian Shiite priest Ali Mohammadi Shirazi (1819 – 1850). Shirazi was also called Bab, which takes its reference from the Arabic word for “door “(bab) and from the fact that Shirazi understood himself as the **“door between God and the humans”**. Through **Bahaollah** (1817 – 1892) Babism later became the **Bahai-Religion**. World peace and distance from politics are the basis of this, in the Islamic world, often disputed religion.

Enough concerning the religions. What about the **peoples** who lived in this “cradle of humanity”? Here I

name only for example the **Elamites, Hittites, Hurrites, Medes, Mittanis, Karduchoi, Corduenes, Sassanides, Assyrians, Greeks**, peoples who either originated in that outstanding part of the world or invaded it. The autochthon Kurds shared these cultures and the wealth of their culture is essentially founded thereupon, as will be shown here.

We can divide the history of Kurdistan into two periods, into **pre-Islamic** time and that **after the advent of Islam. The arrival of Islam in Kurdistan and in Iran in the 7<sup>th</sup> century** after Christ was a **world-changing event** for the region. Consider this for a moment: **Islam came to this region** in the 7<sup>th</sup> century after Christ, and six centuries after that, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century to be exact – there was another important event, the **Mongol-Turkish invasion**, occurring **throughout Kurdistan down to Baghdad**. The Mongol-Turkish invaders, when they came, took over Islam en bloc, and – what is quite important – they also took on Arabic and Persian as a religious and ruling means of communication. Apart from there being a new Islamic ruling class, supplied by the ethnic newcomers to the region, in the cultural-religious sense there were no major changes following the Mongol-Turkish invasion. And so, despite the Mongol-Turkish invasion, it is reasonable to assume that **the**

**cultural-religious development of the Kurds on all levels splits in two segments, the time before the arrival of Islam and the time after that.**

In **pre-Islamic time**, there were the already mentioned variety of religious ideas; **Mithraism or Sun Cult, Buddhism, Mazdaism and Manichaeism**, Judaism and **Christianity**, whereby Mazdaism and Manichaeism carried the most weight at the time of the arrival of Islam.

There was **Mithraism** all over the world in the early times of humanity, and relics of this sun cult tradition are correspondingly found everywhere. When people ask God to fulfil a wish, they turn their head subconsciously towards the sky in the direction of **the sun**. It is this way everywhere. In the Kurdish culture, these relics of Mithraism are undoubtedly very clear. The **Kurdish flag**, which became the official flag of Kurdistan when the Republic of Kurdistan was established in its capital Mehabad in 1946, **carries the sun in its middle**, a contemporary example of how significant the sun is to the Kurds. Worth mentioning as well, is that the colours red/yellow/green together represent the national colours of the Kurds.

Based upon a years-long scientific preoccupation with Kurdish mythology, I can say that the **sun, moon and stars** have a special value in **Kurdish mythology**. In this context, we can see also that Kurds engaged in **astronomy** as well as **mathematics** and science quite early.

There were several moon and star observatories in Kurdistan. The best known was located on the **mountain Gilazarda** in the vicinity of **Sulaimani**. Those interested can read an article about this observatory in the periodical of the German Morgenländische Gesellschaft (no. 122 of the year 1972) which I wrote together with the well known German astronomer Professor Wolfhard Schlosser.

**Mazdaism and Buddhism emerged at about the same time, around 6 centuries before Christ.** Since Zoroaster was an **Iranian** (if not a **Kurd**), Mazdaism could easily spread in Kurdistan. The many temples and monuments in numerous places (especially in the region of **Kirmashan** in **East Kurdistan**) give witness to this until today.

The **religion of Zoroaster is based on a Trinity: "Think positively, talk positively, and act well"**. To be

able to identify with this Trinity, a person must reject “**lies and deception**”<sup>1</sup>. According to Zoroaster, there are two powers in the world, **the power of good** and **the power of evil**, and it is never clear which power will win in the struggle between them. If the people stand on the side of good, or are part of the “**army of the righteous**”, the **good** will be successful. The case will be the opposite and the power of evil will succeed if people stand on the side of evil. **Kurdish-Iranian dualism** is unlike **Semitic dualism**. In the **Semitic religions**, in **Christianity, Judaism and Islam**, God himself created **evil** (the **power of evil**); and God (or **good**) will always win in the end. This is not so with **Zoroaster**. It depends rather on how people behave. If people stand on the side of good, God (**Ahura-Mazda**, or **Hurmiz** with the Kurds) will win. The contrary will happen if people choose evil, then evil (**Ahriman**, or **Harmin** with the Kurds) will rule.

The **Buddhist religion** began in Asia in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and thereafter soon came to Kurdistan. The religious leader **Sadr Harta**, with the surname “**Buddha**” (560 – 480 B.C.) was raised in a very wealthy and influential family in a city near Nepal. He left his family early and gave up wealth and power. He

proclaimed the renouncement of the world, including **avoidance of alcohol and savoury meals, and indecency**. Buddha propagated the **love of all living beings**. He forbid the killing of any animals or birds. It should be noted here that the Kurds today still do not regard **birds as animals**. In my opinion, this has an ancient religious connection. In Kurdish mythology, the highest being at the beginning of creation is represented in the shape of a bird, and the bird as a symbol for the supernatural is in many different ways still anchored in the Kurds today.

Buddha not only forbade the killing of any living being, including animals and birds, influenced by **Zoroastrism** and/or **Mazdaism**, he also told people **not to lie, to be honest**. Theft belonged among the greater sins. Influenced by **Hinduism**, Buddha believed in the **transmigration of the souls**. The interpretation of Buddhists that **Buddha “son of God”** was born perfectly pure, as Jesus Christ through Mary, shows the influence that Buddhism had on the later Christian religion, but also on many **Kurdish-syncretist religions**, like **Ahl-i Haqq**, which later, through a concrete example, I will bring to light.

**Zoroaster** lived six centuries before Christ. **Mazdaism** was therefore already a rather old religion when the prophet **Mani** developed **Manichaeism**. Mani was initially **Christian** with religious intuition and declared himself as a prophet in the year 242 A. D. Unlike Zoroaster and Mazdaism, Mani **did not speak about good or bad**, but rather of **light and darkness**. Light is the **soul**, and is **pure**. **Darkness** is **matter**, and is **dirty**. When a living being dies, its soul goes into the **sky**, and the matter – which is bad – into the **earth**. In the being of each person, there are two strains, the **pure** and the **unclean**. For people to cleanse themselves, they must die, and when people die, eventually there will be no one on earth; there will be only souls and they will be pure. **Therefore Mani was against the institution of marriage and of children being born**. So that mankind will end and in this way cleanse itself.

When **Mani** started to spread his religion in **Kurdistan**, **Christianity** already existed there. Mani lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century after Christ. When his religion came to Kurdistan there were many Kurds who were Christians. This is confirmed by the old Aramaic sources, among them **Mar Mari** who was a monk in **Urfa** and who died in 226 A.D. His memoirs were even translated into the German language in the second part of the last century.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, Judaism existed in Kurdistan at that time, in the sense that many banished Jews came to Kurdistan. In historic documents (among them the **old testament**) reference is made to the country of the **Medes**. The Medes are regarded as the ancestors of the Kurds and the praise you find in the old testament to the Medes can also be regarded as one for the Kurds.

It is interesting that there are numerous hypotheses about the **origin of the Kurds**. They extend from **mythical beliefs** (i.e that the Kurds came forth from a mythical connection between spirits and the servants of **King Salomon**) to **a range of politically bound opinions** (i.e that the Kurds origins are Arabic or Turkish). If one earnestly wants to understand the genealogy of a people one must study its **language, history and all the archaeological remnants** of this people. The strongest hypothesis for the Kurds' origins leads back to the **Medes**. The most outstanding proponent of this theory was the internationally renowned Russian orientalist and Kurdish expert **Vladimir Minorsky** (1877 – 1966). My own linguistic researches, which I published in Germany in the 1970`s in Kurdish and in German, came to the same conclusion, namely that there is undoubtedly a connection between the Medes and the Kurds. The same connection is

witnessed to this day by old traditional names referring to ancient geographical sites in Kurdistan, for example **Amed** (the original name of the city **Diyarbakir**), **Amedi**, **Amoude**. It is to be noted that the letter A in this case refers to **Ava**, **Avah(y)i** (place, house, settlement). And if the Kurds are not the descendants of the Medes but are the descendants of the old **Hurrites** (as some scientists think, namely **Egon von Eickstedt** and, nowadays, **Mehrdad R. Izady**), they nevertheless lived together with the Jews in the empire of the Medes, in a land which the Jews had turned to for protection and which - after the Medes had vanished - was referred to as Kurdistan. And not only in ancient times did Jews live in this region. Many still lived there in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, before the foundation of Israel, where they then migrated to. They are the so called Kurdish Jews as they tend to settle together, sometimes in quite large numbers. Even today these persons of Jewish belief and citizens of Israel culturally identify themselves with the Kurds and even say of themselves; "Ana Kurdi" (Hebrew, meaning "I am a Kurd").

### **Honoured guests, dear participants,**

When **Islam** came to **Kurdistan** there were already a lot of religions not yet mentioned, notably the **Kurdish**

**syncretistic religion.** They are religions that combine very old **mythical ideas** with **elements of the before mentioned religions.** These **Kurdish syncretistic religions differ** from each other concerning some of their **content** and **rites.** What they have in common is that they logically connect and arrange a varying **host** of old beliefs **yet do not fuse them.** This is what is meant when we talk about syncretism. You can't talk of mixed religions in this case because in a mixed religion the elements are much more intertwined, so that they can only be recognised with difficulty, if at all. As a comparison to a syncretistic religion we can take this **bunch of flowers** here. There is a yellow blossom, one is red, one is white, and there are the green leaves. Each component is special, but altogether they **form a bouquet.** The bouquet is what is syncretistically new. If one separated the blossoms and the leaves from each other and even tore them apart and then accumulated these components, that would be a mixture. The degree of a mixture can differ. One may be able to recognise some of the original components, otherwise one can not speak of a mixture. Nevertheless, the difference between what syncretism is, and what a mixed religion is, is still more basic and more substantial.

In Syncretism the variety remains but something new emerges as well. This is in contrast to what happens when a mixed religion emerges. In that case the variety invariably decreases. A feature of the **Kurdish religions** is that they are **syncretistic**, and that is one reason why **the Kurdish culture** is so **rich**, why the **Kurdish culture** is **inherently a pluralistic culture**.

Islam since it came to Kurdistan in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. has undoubtedly formed and enriched the Kurdish syncretistic religions in varying manners. Here are some examples. The “**Yazidis**” (**Ezidis**) are often called “**devil worshippers**” by outsiders. But that is a **malicious discounting**. Actually it is a syncretistic religion that has preserved many elements of **Mithraism** and **Manichaeism**. When Yazidis perform their religious service they turn themselves in the direction of the **sun**. That is a mithraistic tradition. **Yazidis** say that each person is “**his own dark shadow (devil)**”, which **corresponds** to **Manichaeism** and the idea that every living being consists of a light, pure soul (“good”), as well as of unclean matter (“bad”). When the **Yazidis** celebrate **Good Friday**, which they do – and which can be witnessed by any scholar of religion – they follow a **Christian tradition**. When **Yazidis** organise like **Kurdish dervishes** and perform their well-known **trance**

**dances** then they perform what can be called a **Kurdish Islamic cult**. Little to no credit has been given to the Kurds and their culture thus far. As the riches of this culture are seen now, the sad amount of past discounting and discrimination becomes clear.

The **Alevis** are considered to be **followers of Ali**, who was a **Muslim caliph** and yet this is an incorrect interpretation. Following a similar logic, the **Yazidis** became followers of the **Yazid**, who was a son of the Muslim caliph **Muawiyah**. This is a folk etymology, which is only based upon the resemblance in sound. Using this same logic some Arabs think "**Shakespeare**" was originally an Arab and was called "**Shaikh Zubair**".

As a matter of fact, the **Yazidis** call themselves **Ezidi** (and not Yazidi), and this should be taken seriously. "**Ezd**" means "**God**" (or angel) in Kurdish and "**Ezdi**" correspondingly means believer in **God** (and not devil-worshipper). In my seminar titled "**The Yazidis Are No 'Devil-Worshippers'**" which I held at the University of Bremen in May 1990, I explained in detail how the phonetic resemblance between the Kurdish expression "**Sha-tan**" and the originally Semitic word "**Shaitan**" (in Hebrew meaning "satan") led to another grave misunderstanding. The **Kurdish "Sha-tan"** means "with

the **body of an angel**” and has nothing to do with the devil. Another confusion emerged concerning the name of the **Yazidis**’ most holy figure “**Taus-e Malak**”, which was translated literally, by taking **the present day** meaning of “**Taus**” in the Kurdish language, i. e. “**peacock**”. Most probably the word “**Taus**” is derived from the Greek and is related to the word **Zeus** and **Theos**, alluding to the meaning God. Accordingly **Taus-e Malak** is **God’s Angel**. And this is how the **Yazidis** themselves see **Taus-e Malak**.

How the **Yazidis/Ezidis** reacted to the twisting of their religious beliefs by onlookers, how they adjusted to that and reinterpreted that in turn, cannot be observed here and now. Instead, we must consider the similar circumstances of the **Alevis**. Due to total ignorance or because of politically obscure motivations, the Alevis are sometimes interpreted as descendants of **Ali**, the fourth Islamic caliph. At other times they are interpreted as “**pseudomuslims**”. And sometimes they are linked to the racist ideology of **Mustafa Kemal** (“Atatürk”). I saw an “essay” expounding that view from the Ethnological Institute of the FU – Berlin. Miserable science! It is astonishing that the level of **Kurdology in Germany** which was the **homeland of Kurdology** until the Second World War has sunk to the point where such

pseudo-science is possible. Many **masters** and **doctoral dissertations** at German universities are so **tendentious** that one knows when reading them, where and/or in which organisational contexts the authors have posts or will have posts, often at the “**German Orient-Institute**” in Hamburg.

Whoever wants to understand the belief of the Alevis, must see it in the context of the other syncretistic religions in Kurdistan. **Alevi has as little to do with Ali as the Ezidis (Yazidis) have to do with Yazid.** According to extensive research, the term Alevi refers to the **power of the fire** which is a **symbol of light** in the Kurdish culture. The **Kurdish word “halav/hilav”** means “**steam of cooking water**” or “**tip of the fireflame**”. The **Alevis** have little to do with Ali and all the more with halav/hilav as the **Alevis** regard **fire as holy**, as do other Kurds, who in general, highly value the sight of fire. It is their custom not to extinguish a fire or candle without naming God and/or to apologise.

By the way, it was the Kurdish word “halav/hilav” that as “alev” became part of the Turkish language, and not the other way round as Turks, of course, would have it. Even the original meaning of the Kurdish “hilav/halev”

(tip of the fireflame) remained after it had been taken into the Turkish language.

There are also some misunderstandings regarding the **Ahl i-Haqq** (people of the truth), also called **Kakayi** or **Yarsan**. It is said, that they are “**Aliollahi**” (Ali-worshippers), and as such are classified as pseudomuslims. The fact is that the **God** of the Ahl i-Haqq is not **Ali** but **Sultan Sahak**. It is said that he was given birth by a **Kurdish maiden** and as in the case of **Mary** it had been an immaculate conception. Once while sleeping under a **pomegranate tree**, a kernel of fruit fell into her mouth, because a **bird** had nibbled the fruit directly over her and had made the kernel fall.

In many ways we can see that these religions, which until today exist in Kurdistan – the **Ezidis**, the **Alevis**, **Shabak**, **Haqqa**, the **Ahli-Haqq** (or **Kakayi** or **Yarsan**) – all consist of various elements and have established new beliefs, as well as having various basic similarities among them. They all regard **God as the Creator**, who alone rules. He is **monotheistic** and **omnipresent**. Nevertheless this God **does not rule directly**, but rather through his seven **assistants**, who are responsible for different regions or departments. There is a **super assistant** or super angel who commands the other

**angels** among whom is a **female angel**. In all these religions, the existence of a devil is denied and the human himself is regarded as his or her own “devil”.

In addition, **the Buddhist idea of the transmigration of souls** is part of the Kurdish syncretistic religions, in as much as the divine being from time to time appears through the **incarnation of its souls**. Moreover, all mythical representations of these religions are connected with **certain places in Kurdistan**. Last but not least: **song** and **music** belong to all the ceremonial traditions in these religions. They have a place in all religious events in all of the Kurdish syncretistic religions, and what is also very important, along with song and music, **both women and men** participate in these events. Especially on the part of oriental Christians and Muslims, these various religious events became discredited as **“orgiastic meetings”** because both sexes participate.

In comparison to Islam, which stresses the value of **praying** and **fasting**, all Kurdish syncretistic religions regard the **relations between people** and helping fellow man as more important than fasting and praying.

All Kurdish syncretistic religions have, to a certain extent, that kernel of Kurdish culture in common which we have just described, and all confronted Islam in the seventh century. Islam came with the sword and through **battle**. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Kurdistan was part of the **Sassanidic Empire**, a powerful empire, which stood in opposition to the **Roman Empire**. When the Islamic Arabs came out of the desert, they had no other weapons than the **sword**. The **Sassanidic army** had **bows and arrows**. Although the Arabs were fewer in number and on unfamiliar ground, they could not be beaten. The Arabs were able to bring the **Sassanidic Empire** to a fall. They were able to occupy the capital of the empire, **Tisafoun** (near **Baghdad**), and therefore to enter **Kurdistan**. Until today, the boundary of Kurdistan is near Baghdad. By the way, the name **Baghdad** is **not Arabic** but rather a **Kurdish-Iranian** word. It is derived from "**Bagadata**", which means town "given by God". "**Bag**" means **God** (as in **Russian** which is also an Indo-European language). The first two syllables of the word "Bagadata" relate to God, the third (data) refers to the Kurdo-Iranian root "**dan**", which makes **Bagadata/Baghdad** to a "**place given by God**". The **Turks** have also taken the word "bag" into their language, but they changed it to "**bey**" with the meaning of "**gentleman**" or "**master**".

When the Arabs came to Kurdistan and Iran their first goal was to spread Islam. They were successful although their weapons were weak. Until today the secret of their success has not been found. A clarification of this question would serve both the Islamic and oriental history. Of course, there are many, more or less satisfying, points of view on how the Arabs were able to overcome an entire army, but until today there is no real explanation. **Today there are 1.2 billion Muslims in the world.**

**Honoured guests, dear participants,**

The Kurds resisted the intrusion of the Muslims in Kurdistan and they also resisted the new religion that was being imposed on them and which affected their social life. The largest Kurdish uprising lasted for 20 years under the leadership of **Papak-i Khorram(din)** and took place in the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. One of the goals of this revolution was the establishment of a society without classes, in which women should have the same rights as men. The Kurds also took part in the uprising of other suppressed people. They militarily supported e. g. the **revolution of the slaves** (known under the name “**Negroes’ revolution**”) in the

southern part of **Iraq**. This lasted from 868 to 883 A.D. The resistance of the Kurds against the Arab/Islamic rule lasted for centuries.

Beyond doubt the Kurds wanted to remain with the ancient religions and with their syncretistic religions. Concerning the ancient religions the majority of Kurds belonged to the Zoroastrian religion or Mazdaism. We have already talked about the Zoroastrian religion, about “**Good**” and “**Bad**” and the **Trinity** of “**Think only good, speak only well, act only well**”. The Kurds in the municipal centres wanted the Zoroastrian religion to exist further. One must know that the **Zoroastrian religion** required nomadic life to be abandoned. When the religion of Zoroaster spread in Kurdistan a large part of the Kurds abandoned the **nomadic life** and dedicated their lives to **agricultural activities**. Hence, two ways of life emerged in Kurdistan; first the “**Kurd**”, i.e. someone who tries to live by hunting and cattle-breeding, as a semi-nomad, and then the “**Goran**”, i.e. someone **who settles** and engages in **agricultural activities**, who is **civilised** and interested in **cultural** and **intellectual endeavours**. The word “Goran” is probably derived from “**Gawr-an**”, the name that was given to the followers of Zoroaster. We see that the Goran in Kurdistan were always people interested in **philosophy, literature** and

with the enhancement of the Kurdish culture. This tradition exists to this day. Even now we find in East-Kurdistan, which in part has been annexed to Iran, **Goran-Kurds** (who no longer profess to Zoroastrism but to the syncretistic religion of “**Ahl i-Haqq**” which means “**people of God**”). Followers of this Ahl i-Haqq religion already tried in the 12<sup>th</sup> century to write in Kurdish, in a special form of Kurdish called “**Gorani**”. Following the Ahl i-Haqq other Kurdish religions, even those Kurds who had become Muslims, actively engaged in religious interpretation. One can say that the Kurds have definitely contributed to world culture through their own religions as well as through their contribution to the Islamic religion.

The famous Muslim scholar, rhetorician and theologian Imam **Mohamad Al-Gazzali** (1058 – 1111 A. D.) wrote that the **Islamic Culture rests on four columns**. He names the **four scholars** who represent these columns. **Three of them are Kurds: Sharazuri, Amedi and Dinawari**. In view of the outstanding importance of **Al-Gazzali** for Islam in general, his judgement is like a **Magna Charta** praising the contribution of the Kurds to the high Islamic culture.

In addition, the Kurds contributed to Islamic culture the distinctively new **Kurdish Islam**. There are several **Dervish-cults**, such as **Naqishbandi-Khalidi**, **Qadiri**, **Nursi**, **Nimatoallahi**, which were not oriented according to the external meaning of the Schariat (Islamic law) as it was determined in scholastic theology in the early time of Islam about 1400 years ago. By way of **interpretations**, or **Ijtihad**, with the help of **Gnosis**, **philosophy** and rhetoric these Dervish cults always tried to find something **new** in the chapters and paragraphs of the **Koran** and **Sunneh** or “**sayings and deeds**” of the **Prophet**. They tried to find these new interpretations to make human relations and social life easier for the population. Until today, **Dervish cults** exist in Kurdistan and recognisably determine certain directions in the Islamic religion. Renunciation of the world and **ascetic abandon** in these Dervish cults most probably draws on **Buddhism**. The most well known Kurdish Dervish cults are those of **Sheikh Abdul Qadiri Geylani** with the name **Ghaws** (1077/8 – 1166), of **Mawlana Khalid** (1776/7 – 1827), and of **Sheikh Marifi Node(h)yi** (1753 – 1838).

What makes the Kurds special is that they have been able to maintain the religious concepts they held before the Islamic invasion. **The cultural achievement of the**

**Kurds lies in having repeatedly been able to create syncretistic religions which, in each case, arrive at new meanings beyond the sub-meanings of their parts.**

**Honoured guests, dear participants,**

It is difficult to talk about something and to order material when that material is not equally well known to everyone. Therefore I'll try another comparison. We have already likened the **bouquet** to the principle of a syncretistic religion. We can also liken a group of **musicians** to this principle. Everyone plays his **instrument**, but together they create something new.

Or let's take a **collection of stones**. Depending on how the stones are placed, the transitions between them must be arranged differently and it will take a lot of effort till everything fits perfectly. **The harmony of the entirety** and its message will be determined by the **recognisable, larger stones** in relation to the **interim spaces**. The existing and preserved differences are as much a prerequisite for determining the harmony of the entirety as are the fitting and the arranging of the parts,

and that is the worthy achievement of the **Kurdish culture** and its main characteristic.

**I maintain that the inclination to syncretism is a distinctive feature of the Kurdish culture.** Translated into **political** language, one could say that Kurdish culture is **pluralistic**.

A society is called pluralistic if it allows several recognisably different directions. For example, if in Germany **different political directions** join to form a **coalition** or even a **government**, they are recognisable as e.g. the SPD, the FDP, etc. Each of them has its own characteristics, but if they all agree on a program, they create **something new**, e. g. a law, which is not identical with any singular idea.

The question remains, why the syncretistic culture of the Kurds, its **pluralism** and its **tolerance**, doesn't come to the fore in **Kurdish politics**. We cannot go into detail now about this question, because we would have to deal with it in a different **frame of reference, namely the reference of "Realpolitik"**. Nevertheless I maintain – even in the face of the **feuding Kurdish parties** in the present and also looking back at the 20th century which has been **a century of separation and tears for the**

**Kurds** – that all those who maintain that disunity is a characteristic of the Kurds understand too little about them.

At the end of this century I'd rather have us positively and constructively ask which characteristics still enabled the Kurds to have room for the old religions which elsewhere had already disappeared; and what prerequisite the Kurds must have had that they were partially able to keep them and to develop their syncretistic religions?

Why were so many old religions and Kurdish syncretistic religions able to remain in Kurdistan despite the Islamic invasion? And why were they not maintained by neighbouring peoples who almost completely adopted Islam? We only have one answer to this question. **It is because the Kurds have an inclination to equivalency.** That presupposes the **ability to bear several equally valid ideas** and to bear the tension resulting from that, in short the gift of **tolerance**. The diversity of the Kurds must be recognised, nurtured and protected. This diversity is, so to say, the key for a life of dignity and equality for the Kurds.

In the heart of Kurdistan, in **Kangawar**, there is the temple of **Anahita** (Goddess of purity, rain and water); there are numerous **Christian churches**, there is the large sanctuary of the **Ezidi** (in **Lalish**), there are Jewish temples, and the numerous sanctuaries of the **Alevis**, **Kakayis**, **Shabak** and **Sarayis**. All of this has existed for thousands of years, although in some cases “only” for several hundred years. Why did the **political and religious opponents and dissidents among the Arabs and Persians** (and also **Bahaollah**, the prophet of the **Bahais**) flee to Kurdistan? Bahaollah lived in Kurdistan for two years, from 1854 to 1855, while he was pursued everywhere else, and he could have lived in Kurdistan for the rest of his life in peace and quiet, had he not chosen to leave and spread his religion. Why can a close colleague of **Saddam Hussein**, who had murdered Kurds under Saddam for years leave Saddam and find asylum in Kurdistan? Even enemies of the Kurds come to Kurdistan because they have reason to hope that they can find shelter. They know it is a custom of the Kurds to forgive their enemies when they are guests in their homes. The Kurds are the only people in the Near East who have been able to maintain their traditional dance, the **Rashbalak**, in spite of all the criticism of fanatics among the neighbouring people who maintain that the Kurds are **immoral** because in the

**Rashbalak** men and women dance together. How is it possible that **Kurdish women did not have to wear the veil**, that is, in those regions where the usurpers had no immediate influence? Kurdish women could even work with men together in the fields, and they still do today. And how is it possible that some women were even able to carry weapons and play leading roles although women in their neighbouring countries were not allowed to? How could a woman like **Kara Fatma** lead an army of men so that the European, that is the German and oriental press, reported on it with admiration? But women like that existed not only in the last century. Fifteen years ago, in the 1980's, a Kurdish woman called **Khaje (Xeco) Yesar** led a group of **Peshmarga (Kurdish freedom fighters)**, and lived with them in the mountains in Kurdistan. Later she went to **Paris** and wrote a doctoral dissertation at the Sorbonne. How was it possible that the **Mojahedin** (a Persian opposition group) made a **Kurd and a female at that**, the commander of their armed forces?

It is worth mentioning that a Kurd called **Qassim Amin** (1865 – 1908) who fought for women's rights in conservative Egypt around 1900, was given the name **Moharrir al-Mar'ah** (women's liberator). Qassim Amin was not the only Kurdish man, who fought for women's

rights. By the way, while Qassim Amin was writing about “**The liberation of Women** (1899) and “**The New Woman**” (1906), the Arabic-Muslim scholar **Mahmoud Shukri al-Alusi** (1857 – 1924) wrote a book about how to keep women out of schools in Baghdad, so that they had to stay at home and “could not write letters to strange men”. He called his book “**Al-Issabah fi Man’ Al-Nisa an Al-Kitabah**” (a shot aimed at making it impossible for women to write letters).

It is also worth mentioning that there are indications that in early times Kurdish society was ruled by maternal law, for it is a fact that even nowadays, not only in Kurdish folklore and mythology, women often have the more dominant part and the more prestigious status, also in everyday life. In Kurdistan today, chosen sons and daughters carry their mother’s name, and not their father’s name. This can be seen as an indicator that the position of women in pre-Islamic times carried a completely different weight among Kurds than previously thought. I refer to the Goddess Anahita and her large temple in Kangawar in East Kurdistan, the remnants of which are still recognisable to this day.

When the Iranians revolted against the Shah and voted for the Shiite fanatic **Khomeini** and his “**Islamic (God-**

**led) Republic”**, the Kurds, rallying around their intellectual Muslim leader **Izzaddin-i Hossaini**, were the only ones who refused and insisted – in vain – on the foundation of the **Democratic Republic Iran**. Whereupon, until today, they have had to bear the ensuing **state terror**, both in **Iran** and abroad. All that clearly shows that the Kurds do not only speak a different language, but also differ from the neighbouring peoples regarding their culture in general. The life which was forced upon them by their oppressors and occupants has for centuries demanded many sacrifices, definitely since the advent of Islam. Islam came like a glass dome down upon the region, under which nevertheless the Kurds insisted on their own traditions, as has been said here before.

It is a historic fact, that the **Kurdish rulers** or **Kurdish sheiks**, who were both religious and political leaders, were **traditionally more tolerant** with regard to the religious affiliations of their tribes and the lands they ruled; more tolerant, in fact, than the rulers who ruled the neighbouring Arabs, Persians or Turks. One example is the Kurdish Government which was established in South Kurdistan after the First World War under the mandate of Britain. The well-known religious leader of the Kurds **Sheikh Mahmoud** (1882-1956) was officially appointed

to **Governor of Kurdistan**. He was later crowned **King of Kurdistan**. This Kurdish state existed for about five years (1919-1924). During those years no one was executed, no one was tortured, no woman was stoned to death because of adultery, as it is common in Iran and **Saudi Arabia** today, no thief lost his hand, and no religious minority was discriminated. The same quality of public life existed at the time of the Republic of Kurdistan (1946) under its **President Qazi Mohamad** (1893-1947) who was a well known Muslim judge. **Sheikh Mahmoud** and **Qazi Mohamad** were two traditional Kurdish leaders with Kurdish upbringing and culture.

The current disarray and infighting among Kurdish parties/politicians are to a large extent the result of the Turkish-Turanistic, Arabic-Baathist, Persian-Shahinshahistic-Khomeinistic influences on the Kurds' educational system through the respective state-administered institutions throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Let us go back to the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, to the time of the Islamic invasion. After Islam had slowly spread in Kurdistan, albeit not quite thoroughly, something extraordinary happened. Quite a number of Kurds, all intellectuals, began catering to the new Islamic culture,

even more than that, they committed themselves to the enrichment of the Arabic-Islamic and Persian-Islamic cultures. This interest came somewhat belatedly but was genuine. Later, after the Turks had come into the region and – in stark contrast to the Kurds – had taken on Islam almost instantly, the Kurds similarly served the Ottoman-Islamic culture.

Important Kurdish literates and thinkers even served the Arabic, Persian and Turkish language, and wrote important works in these languages. They neglected their own **Kurdish language**, all of which is documented, e.g. in the **Lexicon of the Ottoman Empire** “Qamüs ül-Aalam” written by **Shemsettin Sami** in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and published in 1314h. /1896-7, in which he says: **“Is it not strange that the Kurds have so many scholars, however, they don’t write in their own language. They apply themselves in Arabic and Persian. Why is that so?”**

Let me now go back to the beginning of the presentation when I said, that Kurdistan is a region that was **influenced by many civilisations**. For example, the Greeks were often involved in wars with the **Achaeminid** and the **Sassanid Empire**. They positioned themselves in no few numbers in Kurdistan

and stayed for a few centuries. The population must have mixed with the Greeks, and took over elements of the Greek language. One of the most interesting ancient Greek words is the word “**mitra**” (forehead bandage, bishop’s cap) which survived as “**mezer**” in Kurdish, with the meaning “Muslim clerical head bandage”. In the past the Kurdish scholars wore another special head gear called “mezer”. Even nowadays we have **mountains** and **villages** in Kurdistan that carry **Greek names**.

The Kurds used to have a **notable university** in a town called **Harran**, whose ruins remain until today **near Urfa** in **North Kurdistan**. In the early Islamic time Harran-University was a science centre in the Orient. Our Arab friends who are here today have certainly heard of Harran because **important Arabic philosophers such as Farabi studied there** as well as the well-known Muslim lawyer and scholastic **Ibn-Taimia**. He was in fact **a Kurd who came from Harran**. Today Harran is a ruin, two kilometers from Urfa in North Kurdistan. Numerous important scholars of the Orient were students in Harran. Thanks to the Kurds of the time the **Greek culture** began to be translated into Arabic and Persian. It was in Kurdistan that the Occident, i.e. Europe, and the Islamic culture were first mediated. We shouldn’t forget that **Urfa (Ruha)** was also a **cradle for the Christian culture**.

The Kurds did not only serve their neighbours, especially the Arabs and Persians and Turks in cultural respects, but also as **soldiers**. When the **crusaders** attacked the “**holy country**” **Palestine**, the Kurdish sovereign ruler **Saladin** (1137-1193) marched with his Kurdish army to Palestine and was able to defeat the **crusaders**. With large losses of life he was able to gain victory. **Saladin** treated neither the **Arabs** nor the **Europeans** badly and because of this Saladin, together with the Kurds, deserves to be mentioned positively in **world history**. History has it, that when Saladin went to Damascus, an Arab personality welcomed him saying: “**God, I thank you, that through a Kurd the State of the Crusaders was humiliated and the religion of the Arab prophet strengthened**”. Then he said: “**We are pleased that a Kurdish brother takes possession of our country and not a stranger**”. Saladin answered: “**I didn’t come to possess, I came to serve.**” When **Saladin built the first hospital** ever in 1189 in Egypt, he named it “**bimaristan**” which is Kurdish and means “place for the sick”. Still today the Egyptians call this antique hospital “**bimaristan**”, as they do all others as well.

Not only **Palestine** and **Egypt**, but also **Syria** and **Jordan** bear witness until today of the glorious past of

the Kurds when referring to the ancient monuments they treasure. In Syria there are remnants of a once powerful fort that is called the “**Kurds’ Fort**” (Hossn al-Akrad) and in Jordan there are the remnants of the “**Salts- and Ajloun-Fort**”, to mention only two examples of Kurdish strength in past times.

I’d like to add another interesting detail concerning the Kurds’ contribution to the culture of the Near East. This time it is an early enrichment of the Arab-Islamic culture. When the Muslims came to Iran, into that region peopled by Kurds and other Iranians, **Islam** became the official religion, i.e. the **state religion** and **Arabic** the means of communication, in religious and also in worldly affairs. But there was also a cultural exchange concerning language. The Arabs took on a multitude of **words from Kurdish**, especially technical terms, e.g. **qalam** (pencil), **barid** (postal service), **fan** (art), **handasa** (geometry) . I spoke on that in detail in a presentation in Arabic on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1994 in **Cologne**. This talk was given to numerous Muslim theologians from all over the world. The presentation was published this year (1997) under the title “**The oppressed Kurds and their Muslim brothers**”. At least some dictionaries and lexicons, e.g. the well-known **Lexicon of Firouzabadi**, say that the words in Arabic for pencil, art, geometry, postal service,

notebook are **foreign words in the Arabic language**. Unfortunately this is not the time and the place to go into a detailed **etymology** of these words.

It is most regrettable that the cultural achievement of the Kurds and what they contributed to world heritage in the past has been continually neglected and vastly underestimated, especially when viewing the pre-Islamic time, albeit no less with regard to the time following the Arabo-Islamic invasion.

As much can also be said of Kurdish music. Kurdish music has its own rhythm and scale. Musicologists can give reasons for this fact and explain it. What I can do is to give you some historical insights. Music is something so inherently Kurdish that surely it has been with the Kurds since times immemorial.

Kurdish music became distinctively popular in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Baghdad palaces of the Arabo-Muslim rulers, probably because of the Kurdish composer and singer **Ishak Mussli (767 – 850 A.D.)**. There are terms used by Arabic musicians, e. g. “**Rast Kurdan**” (literally “Key of the Kurds”) and further terms like “**Watar al-Kurdan**” (literally “Kurds’ lute string”) and “**Kar-Kurd**” and “**Bayati-Kurd**”. They have gone into

the Arabic language and give witness to this day of their Kurdish origin. There can be no doubt that Kurdish music enriches oriental music till today. Kurdish musicians, singers and composers, who have enriched the music of the neighbouring people through Kurdish music, are numerous. **Rahim Moeni Kirmashani among the Persians, Nazim Ghazali among the Arabs, and Ibrahim Tatlis and Izet Altinmese among the Turks** are only a few examples. It is to be noted that the states which have divided and rule Kurdistan have taken over elements of the Kurdish culture. Sometimes **in a very primitive manner**, e. g. “per law”. Syria celebrates the Kurdish national festival **Newroz** (new year festival) on the 21st of March as “tree festival”. Turkey, which has levelled heavy punishment on the celebration of the festival since its foundation in 1923/24, only a few years ago proclaimed “**Nevrüz**” to be “an old Turkish feast”, and the Kurdish national colours **red/yellow/green**, which were forbidden for years, suddenly became valued conventional Turk colours. It is as simple as that.

Let us go back again to the time of the Arabo-Muslim invasion. It is a fact that in the centuries that followed the Arabo-Muslim usurpation, which later was supplemented by a Perso-Muslim variant, as well as a Turco-Muslim

one, the Kurds have nonetheless not given up their proper language and culture, although, in the open and outwards, they did in fact dedicate themselves to the cultural concerns and interests of the neighbouring people, Arabs and Persians at that time.

Another ethnic people came about 700 years ago (in the 13<sup>th</sup> century), when a seemingly endless chain of Mongol tribes, Turkish and Turkmen tribes as well, flowed into the region from Central Asia and went as far as to what is now called Asia Minor or Lesser Asia. These new invaders were able to overthrow the **Islamic Caliphate** in Baghdad in 1258 that until then had been in the hands of the Arabs.

Naturally the Kurds also resisted the new invaders. They tried to organise independent principalities. When they succeeded they of course tried to preserve them. At that time there were no modern states but principalities, a form of sovereign rule. That was so not only in Kurdistan but in the Orient in general. The Kurds had several principalities as well. The most powerful were **Hassnawie**, established in 959 A.D., and **Dostaki** (990 – 1096 A.D.), which was located in Central Kurdistan and maintained diplomatic relations to the **Byzantine Emperor Basilius II (957 – 1025 A.D.)**. When in 1258

the Islamic Caliphate was overthrown by the Turko-Mongolian Invaders and the newcomers had grasped the power, they were not only able to retain this power but enlarge it, namely by immediately adopting the Islamic belief, i.e. **the Islamic Confession** represented by the Caliph of **Baghdad**, to be exact, the Sunnite confession. That was the beginning of the small Islamic-Sunni dynasty in Asia Minor, from a Turk family whose head was called **Osman**. This dynasty founded the so called **Ottoman Empire**, starting as a principality in 1299 and ending altogether in 1923/24.

### **Honoured guests, dear participants,**

Originally there were three confessions in **Islam: Sunnites, Shiites, and Kharijites**. The Kharijites are of lesser importance nowadays. There are only a few of them left in **North Africa**. The Sunnites and Shiites remain, of which there are at present about 85 % Sunnites and approximately 15 % Shiites. As has been mentioned, with **Osman** and his tribe taking on the Sunnite-Confession, this confession became the official confession of the later **Ottoman Empire** (1299 – 1923/24). In Iran, the **Safavids** (1501/1502 – 1736), who ruled a vast principality consisting mainly of **Persians**

and **Azaris**, adopted the **Shiite confession**. That was the beginning of the Safavids' rise to power in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Safavids forced the Persians and Azaris who they ruled, and who in the beginning were in the majority Sunnites, to become Shiites. During the religious **conflicts** between the **Sunite Ottomans** and the **Shiite Safavids**, the **Kurds** were on the side of the **Ottomans**. Therewith a totally new era began for the Kurds. Before that (and before the Arabo-Muslim invasion), the Kurds lived in close relationship only to the Persians and other Iranians such as the Balouchi, who are also **Iranians**. Consequently the cultural ties of the Kurds were much closer to the Persians and Balouchis than to the newcomers in the region, the Arabs and Turks. Some regions that were mainly peopled by Persians were also the home of numerous Kurdish tribes. As a result, Kurds quite often sided with the Persian tribes when there were fights against the invaders.

This situation changed completely when, seven centuries after the Arabo-Muslim invasion and five centuries after the Mongol-Turkish invasion, the **Safavids** started a new kind of religiously tinted "power politics" against the Kurds, in the name of which they also committed crimes against the Kurds. When in 1514

another multi-level conflict between the Ottomans and Safavids arose, the Kurds did not side with the Safavids and the Persians. On the contrary, the **Kurdish-Turkish Alliance** led to the defeat of the Safavids. The decisive “**Chaldiran-Battle**” is considered a significant date in world history.

At this point I want to make clear that the identification of **Persia** with **Iran** is incorrect. The Persians are only a part of Iran. Iran is very large and diverse. **The relationship of the Persians, the Kurds, and the Balouchis and Azeris to Iran can be compared to the relationship of the Germans, Frenchmen or Englishmen to Europe.** The Kurds are Iranians. “**Where we meet a Kurd, there is Iran**”, a famous European orient expert said in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after he had seen the Orient with his own eyes. Originally the word **Iran** comes from “**Bum-i Aryanam**”, which means “**ground of the Aryans**”. In **ancient Iranian languages** the word “**Iran**” **didn’t exist**, but rather the word “**Eran**”, and today the Kurds still do not call it “Iran” (as the Persians do) but “Eran”. This shows the antiquity of the Kurdish language. The Kurds are Iranians, but not Persians, and the Persians are not Kurds, although both have – as other Iranians (Balouchi, Tadjiks, Patans, Osssets) – a common Iranian culture. Like **Frenchmen**,

**Germans**, and **Englishmen** all have their peculiarities, i.e. their own culture, although they are also part of Europe and share in the European culture. So is it in respect to Iranian culture, which extends from Central Asia to the Mediterranean Sea and in the South to the Arabic or Kurdish-Persian Gulf. On one side of this Gulf, there are the Arabs, hence it is called the “Arabic Gulf”, and on the other side there are the Persians, but as well, today as in the past, there are also Kurdish tribes living on that side of the Gulf. Hence, to be more exact, that side of the Gulf should be called the “Kurdish-Persian Gulf”, unless you prefer calling it the “Iranian Gulf”. It is for this that the name of the country was changed from “Persia” to “Iran”. “Iran” is more inclusive.

To sum up: The invasion of the Arabs, who in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. brought Islam to Kurdistan and Iran, was a great event in the history of the Kurds. The other great event was the invasion of the Turks from the north which led to the overthrow of the Caliphate in Baghdad. The later Ottoman Empire began with an inconspicuous principality which chose an Osman as their leader, the founder of the Osman dynasty. The Kurds also had their independent principalities and dynasties, which in various ways were related to a plurality of Kurdish tribes.

The same applied to the Persians. The loyalties and political ties were as manifold at that time as they are today, and yet in many ways different from those of today as well.

Let's go back to 1514, an important date in Kurdish history. In that year the **Ottoman Turks** (who were **Sunnites**) formed an alliance with the **Kurdish Sunnites** against the **Persians**, who were **Shiites**. That the Kurds weren't on the side of the Persians was a result of the incredibly awkward politics of the Safavids at that time. In the name of their confession they openly committed many crimes in Kurdistan. They overly stressed their being Shiites, to the point of becoming fanatic Shiites. Thousands were killed. At that time, the Kurds were on the side of the Turks, against the Persian Safavids. They even temporarily occupied **Tabriz**, the **capital of the Safavids**, but later, of course, withdrew. What remained was a kind of military alliance between the **Turks** and the **Kurds**. Such alliance had not existed previously, and eventually evolved into something of larger dimension, namely the **Ottoman Empire**. It is incorrect to say that the **Ottoman Empire** was founded by the Turks. The Kurdish principalities were the major stock, in terms of area ruled and the need for an alignment. If the Kurds had not agreed with the Ottoman

Sultan to fight against the Safavids, the Safavids would have taken the chance to rule. The foundation of the **Ottoman Empire** was based on the **promise** given to the Kurds that the Ottoman Sultan would respect the **internal independence** of the Kurdish principalities. Contracts were signed but the Ottoman Turks didn't respect them.<sup>3</sup>

The **aggressively expansionistic politics of the Ottoman Turks** soon became clear. Two years after the union of the Ottoman and the Kurdish principalities (1516 – 1517), the Ottoman **Sultan Selim I** annexed Syria and Egypt. In the year 1517 he not only took by ruse the Caliphship from the Arabs, but also led his army into Europe to fight the neighbouring Christian **nations, the Greeks, Bulgarians, and Austrians**, all of whom were considered “**godless**” people. Their countries were taken over. It must be mentioned that the Ottomans quite early had already occupied **Constantinople**, the capital of the **Byzantines**, in the year 1453. Of course, we are talking about Istanbul. The word Istanbul is a Turkish rip-off (or transmogrification) of the original name: Constantinople. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Ottoman-Turkish Sultanate annexed all Arab countries. In 1639, a little more than a century after the battle of Chaldiran,

the **Ottomans** agreed with their **longstanding** enemies, the **Safavids**, to divide Kurdistan.

Between 1839 and 1859, the Ottomans published a series of decrees called “**tenzimat**” (reform directives) and started to destroy the traditional economical and social system of the Kurds. They nationalised the agriculturally used land in Kurdistan, which until then had not been in private possession of families or individuals, but instead was collectively owned by tribes or in collective possession of some adjoining villages. Cultivation and harvesting were done collectively. This is still a tradition in some remote mountain regions in Kurdistan. The Kurdish language had already for centuries had original terms in this context, long before communism and socialism were invented in Europe, namely **Harawazi** (Cooperative) and **Navkoyi** (common weal collective). The **Ottomans** gave these lands into the hands of representatives to have them administered. With time the representatives became owners. An externally directed feudal class emerged, which collaborated with the Ottoman rulers against its own people.

Parallel to the tenzimat-directives, which were only decreed in special regions and under certain conditions,

other inroads were made to cut the power and the authority of the Kurdish sovereigns or princes, i.e. their agreed upon and unhampered Kurdish rule was in one way or another put into question and in the end militarily assaulted. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in 1851, the Ottoman Turks managed to bring down the last of the principalities of Kurdistan. It was the **Babani-Principality**. By the way, the downfall of the Kurdish principalities was induced with the weapons and the technical aid of Germany's predecessor **Prussia**. The best-known Prussian field officer in the service of the Ottoman Sultan was the later Prussian field marshal **Helmuth von Moltke (1800 – 1891)**. But he was only one of many.

Soon after the Kurds had made agreement with the Turks in 1515, they noticed that the Ottoman Sultanate did not respect the contracts.

If the Kurds in 1515 had established a real federation with the Ottoman Sultanate, instead of closing a series of contracts, there wouldn't have been the dilemma that lasted for hundreds of years. There were a lot of regionally limited uprisings against the Sultanate. However, especially after the **Turks** and **Prussia** had entered their alliance, the Kurds were doomed. If

Prussia hadn't helped the Ottomans, it may have been possible for the Kurds to draw up a new contract with the Ottoman Turks, for the Kurds did have some kind of military might at the time. There are only very few documents that relate to that era. There is one rare source, however, that does suggest that there was potential for a new treaty between the Kurdish Sovereigns and the Ottoman Turks, before Prussia became an ally, of course. Why that potential did not materialize at the critical moment, we must leave for the time being.

Instead let's turn to a source that tells us much about the Kurds at the time, in modern early history, that is.

**Four hundred years ago** a valuable book named **Sharaf-Nameh** was written. Sharaf-Nameh means "**the book of Sharaf**", and **Sharaf** (1542/43 – 1603/4) was not only an important **scholar** from **Bitlis**, but also the **son** of a **Kurdish prince or sovereign**. His father had fled to the Persian part of Iran before Sharaf's birth because of ongoing battles in his principality against the Ottoman Sultanate. Hence, Sharaf was born in **Qom**, the holy city of the Shiites. He learned the Persian language and lived at the palace of the Kings of the Safavids. When he noticed that the Safavids wanted to

turn against his Kurdish people, he returned to his hometown Bitlis where he wrote in Persian in 1596/7 his historically significant book. Sharaf-Nameh is an important work on the **history of the Kurdish people**.

The Russian scientist and Kurdologist **N. J. Marr** did not tire of studying this work. But that did not make Marr famous. It was **Stalin's** feuds against him which did. Stalin wrote several articles against Marr concerning general linguistics.

Why should Stalin turn against Marr on linguistic matters? This most probably had to do with Marr being a Kurdish expert and a friend of the Kurds. One must know that Stalin was an adversary of the Kurds, if not to say an outright enemy. It was **Stalin** who **annulled the Autonomous Republic of Kurdistan** or "**Red Kurdistan**", which Lenin had accorded to the Kurds. Stalin annexed these Kurdish lands to Azerbaijan and had the larger part of the Kurdish population deported to **Kazakhstan**. During the Second World War Stalin deported those Kurds who had remained in what had been the Autonomous Republic of Kurdistan. Stalin once said that he was positively impressed by **Atatürk** and likewise **Hitler** (who had on his part once said that

Atatürk was his teacher). As to his politics concerning the Kurds, Stalin was fully in keeping with both them.

Naturally, Stalin's articles against Marr were of no scientific value. He could not devalue Marr's arguments, because **Marr was an important linguist**, and an outstanding **Kurdish expert**. Last but not least one should consider his opinion on **Sharaf-Nameh**. Marr once said that history forgot the Kurds, but if one attentively studies Sharaf-Nameh, written by a Kurd in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (exactly in 1596/7), it will "**help to fill the gap**"<sup>4</sup>. I personally can confirm that. I also have deeply immersed myself in this work and it is my conviction, that the Ottoman Empire was founded on a series of agreements with the Kurdish principalities of that time, is to a greater part based on my study of Sharaf-Nameh.

In his work **Sharaf-eddin Bitlisi** describes the **boundaries of Kurdistan**. It is a fact that at that time all power was territorially established. At that time there were no nation states. **States** based on **nationality**, with **national boundaries**, only evolved after the **French revolution of 1789**. Previously there were also no national boundaries in Europe. But 200 years prior to the French revolution a **Kurd** already spoke about a

**Kurdish nation**, which consisted of tribes, and describes the **national boundary of Kurdistan**, ranging from the **Persian-Kurdish gulf** – from **Hormuz** – to the **Caucasus**, and from there to the **Mediterranean Sea**.

Sharaf in 1596/7 unambiguously put on record the existence of a national sentiment held by the Kurds, which outdid the simple feeling of commonality, and which – it is clear – must have long prevailed among the Kurds. Otherwise they would not have become known as Kurds.

I do not want to give any examples from ancient times or from Greek or Roman antiquity, because we have an early report by a European concerning the Kurds.

The Italian **Marco Polo** (1254 – 1324), **famous for the first “world trip”**, met **Kurds** in Mossul on his way to **China**, and he wrote what he had learned about Kurdistan and the Kurds to enlighten his European contemporaries.

The **Italian Kurdologist Mirella Galetti**, sorted these writings which were translated into Kurdish. I met Galetti on the occasion of a meeting of the **Kurdish Academy of Science and Art** in Vienna in August 1991. She

reported that she had searched for earlier relations between Italians and Kurds, but in vain. She believes that Marco Polo was the first European to use the word Kurdistan. Previously, however, there had been an Oriental, a **Turk called Mahmoud Kashghari**. He lived in Baghdad, where he wrote in 1073 a book with the title: "**Diwan Lughat al-Türk**", meaning "**the book of Turkish words**". In this book, which was printed in 1940 in Ankara, there is a map with a large area into which he had written in Arabic "**Bilad al-Kurd**" meaning "**land of the Kurds**". And there is another book, written by a Persian historian **Hamdollah Mustawfi** in 1339/40 named "**Nuzhat al-Qulub**" (Excursion of the Heart). In this book he also talks about **Kurdistan**, and that it was then divided into sixteen provinces. One of the oldest **European** maps indicating Kurdistan by name was drawn up in Rome in 1561 and signed by "A. Lafreri", titled "**La descrittione della prime part dell' Asia**".

To finish here, let me mention that there is a long article on Kurdistan, including its boundaries, in the already mentioned Ottoman-Turkish Encyclopaedia "**Qamüs ül Aalam**".

So Kurdistan is not the invention of **Karl May** (1842 – 1912), nor has the term only been used by the Kurds

and Englishmen, as not only a few fanatic Turks say. Kurdistan is an historic fact. As a matter of fact, Kurdistan is more than an historic fact and more than a geographic reality. It is also a cultural reality.

Surely Kurdistan and the Kurds originated in the region. They didn't appear out of a void. But the states which today have divided Kurdistan, the policy of which has always been to treat the Kurds and Kurdistan as a vacuum, have in fact emerged from nowhere. They rose from nothing, recently at that, after the 1st World War. They are artificial states with artificial boundaries and can only exist by brutal force including state terror. Kurdistan on the other hand has grown normally for thousands of years. Kurds have always lived there and 40 million still do. They all share in and represent the Kurdish culture, even if they hold different citizenships, altogether 6 (six) at the moment. It is a fact, that the Kurds have resisted assimilation despite their being divided by international consent, despite brutal suppression. What has enabled them to withstand? I hold that it is because they are strongly connected with each other on the basis of **syncretism** and in the framework of their **pluralistic Kurdish culture**.

There is presently a multi-level international political campaign at work against the Kurds that I would call the “politics of division”, and because of this there is constant talk about the ways Kurds differ. Let’s ask, what unites them; what they have in common! I maintain that the cultural achievement of the Kurds is that they are to a remarkable extent able to tolerate differences and that they are able to connect them organically, i.e. syncretistically. **This is probably the secret for the remarkable authentic wealth that Kurdish nation has to offer.**

I should mention here that there are many creative people among the Kurds who often work outside the Kurdish culture. Many celebrated writers, artists, philosophers and even statesmen of Arabs, Turks and Persians used to be, and are today, Kurds. Our neighbours know that for a fact but few Europeans do, as they live far from Oriental culture, and because Kurds simply don’t tell them. I want to make one thing clear: **The Kurdish intellect, the Kurdish science, the Kurdish music to an essential extent was taken into the Arabic, Persian and Turkish culture and became a life force for all three of those cultures. The contribution of Kurdish scientists, writers and**

**artists is such, that these cultures cannot be imagined without them.**

Think of the author **Yesar Kemal**. He is a Turkish author, but a Kurd. Think of the poet **Ahmad Shawki**. Our Arab brothers who are here today surely know him. Or think of the poet **Shamseddin Zarkuli**, or the author **Salim Barakat** in Syria. Or think of the poet **Bilind Haydari**, who founded the “**school of modern poetry in Arabic**”. They were all Kurds. Many outstanding Muslim theologians, long after **Dinawari**, **Amedi (Imadi)** and **Sharazuri**, were also Kurds. It is no secret that nowadays in the Orient and in Iran the best translators, writers and musicians are Kurds. And also in Europe and in the USA there are now many well renowned scientists, who are Kurds, e. g. the computer expert Professor **Kamal Majid** (who teaches and does research in England), the mathematician and electronics engineer Professor **Jelal Khelani** (in the USA) and the doctor and medical biologist **Dr. Goran Jemal**, who works in Great Britain and is from time to time asked for advice on the ministerial level. The internationally well known petrochemist Professor **Nadir Nadirof from Kazakhstan**, an early member of the former **Soviet Academy of Sciences**, now member of the **Russian Academy of Sciences**; the pharmacist Professor

**Baram Rasul**, who works in Sweden and in the USA, who recently received a science prize for the development of a new medicine (“Xaltan”) for high eye pressure (glaucoma prophylactics) - they all are Kurds. That shows us, that **“being a Kurd” can be connected with cultural achievement, technology and science**, and it shows us that so far the Kurds have not applied their abilities to further their common lot, although they could have done so. Instead they were much more interested in meeting and getting to know the neighbouring people and those they lived with. They wanted to get on well with them and indulged in their favourite cultural activity: comparing, weighing, associating and differentiating. That may be worthwhile and fun, but on the whole it has brought about a great problem for the Kurds and innumerable draw backs.

#### **Honoured guest, dear participants,**

After **World War I**, when the **new nation states** were established, cutting through Kurdistan with artificial boundaries, a cancerous condition developed. These states didn't even try to solve the problem, as democracies would, they didn't even consider the possibility that the Kurds could determine their fate

themselves. **They tried to solve the Kurdish problem by force and have continued doing so, because they want to believe that this problem – as any other problem – can be solved by force. Indeed, not only can the Kurdish problem not be solved by force; no problem is solved by force!** If problems could be solved by using force, these countries would have reached their goals long ago. Please think of **Saddam Hussein**, who even used **chemical and biological weapons** against the Kurds. Where is he now? In the long run the Kurds cannot be held down.

After World War I two problems emerged in the Orient, brought about by a fault of the European colonial powers: **the Kurdish problem and the Palestinian problem**. These two problems worry the Orient, and not only the Orient. The great powers think that if they help these two peoples to solve their problems, and stop supporting the states, unrest will result. The opposite is more likely. If the Palestinians and the Kurdish people get their rights, and the ensuing problems are solved democratically, on the basis of equality, we will experience a different era. There still will be violent criminals. They are everywhere, even in a democracy. No matter how content a people is, and how much freedom prevails, there will always be some individuals

who try to use force. But surely, if the approach is democratic, there will not be violence to the extent that there is in the Orient nowadays. Every people or nation has the right to self-determination, and the ruling people/nation of the day cannot withhold that right from the disadvantaged forever.

The problem, in any case, is not the ruling peoples but their states. There is not much adversity between the various peoples of the Orient. The problems are the states themselves and how their institutions of power are handled by members of the ruling nations. But this injustice cannot go on forever. As the **Ezidi-Kurds say: “There will be a time, when the world will be so pure that if you place an egg on one side of the world and you look at it from the other you will see the egg.”** If such is the promise, a little less will do as well. That is what we desire, for ourselves and for our brothers, the Palestinians. But not only are they our brothers, the Jews are our brothers too. They are a cultured nation, an ancient people, with whom the Kurds have been in contact for more than two thousand years. It is important that both – Jews and Palestinians – mutually respect their rights. This kind of relationship is what we have in mind concerning Arabs, Turks, Persians and Kurds. But we are still far from this goal. We get no response. All

we can do is to demand our rights from the **Arabs** and **Turks** and **Persians**.

That's why we (the **Kurdish Academy of Science and Art**) wrote a letter to Jitzhak Rabin when we noticed that Israel was about to collaborate with **Turkey** – both militarily and non-militarily. We criticised that, and he wrote us a very friendly answer. Our friend **Dr. Hassan Ali**, the **director of the Kurdish Community in Berlin**, whose guests we are today, knows that, because he is also a member of the Academy. **Jitzhak Rabin** wrote: "It is our policy that every people in the Middle East has its freedom, its existence, and its right to self-determination." It would be much better, if this person was still alive, but the terror of a misled person killed **Jitzhak Rabin**. That was not only a loss for the Palestinians but also for the Israeli people. The tragic death of Jitzhak Rabin was like the mysterious, premature death of the Turkish president **Türgüt Özal** whose death brought harm to both, the Kurds and the Turks. With the death of **Özal**, the short era when Turkish civil politicians were able to fend off the militarists ended. And with the death of Rabin, the era on Israeli-European understanding ended, along with some realistically democratic approaches. Israel's oriental strategist, along with militarily unrealistic goals, took the

floor. **Natanyahu** gets along well with the Turkish militarists. What else can you expect?

What may be interesting to know is that in **Natanyahu's** cabinet there is a native Kurd, General **Jitzhak Mordikhay**, another current example of the potential individual Kurds have, which is not used for the Kurds' own good. Nevertheless, Jitzhak Mordikhay is a member of the Association of Kurdish-Israeli culture and we have a photograph of him in the Kurdish Community in Berlin which shows him participating in Kurdish dancing. When the Kurdish Community in Berlin sent another letter on the same subject (on Turkish-Israeli alliance) to Jitzhak Mordikhay, he didn't even answer it. That shows the difference between Rabin and Netanyahu.

We do hope that you, **honoured guests and friends**, after this look at Kurdish history and culture, will help and support the Kurdish case. Any small assistance will help to further the understanding of the Kurds and their lot. **The Germans could try to tell those states, which do not recognise the rights of the Kurds and use force against them, that the Kurdish problem cannot be solved by force. The Germans should try to do this in an objective and patient manner.** The Kurds would like to cooperate with the German politicians

towards this end, and with the Germans in general, who have the same idea of advocating a dialogue between the Kurds and the countries that have divided Kurdistan. **That , in fact, is the policy and the concern of the Kurdish Community in Berlin:** to inform people how the Kurdish problem can be solved by way of a constructive dialogue, activating all available democratic forces, not only in Germany but all over Europe, so **that the Kurdish problem can be solved, democratically and peacefully. Thank you.**

<sup>1</sup> Interesting here is the double meaning in German. There are similarities in Kurdish, e. g. there are two words for demon. Dev and Drinj. Drinj also means „lie“ in Pahlavi. There is a saying in Kurdish: The liar is the enemy of God. Since the „devil“ is the enemy of God, here the devil symbolizes the liar.

<sup>2</sup> Hoffmann, Georg: Auszüge aus syrischen Akten, Leipzig 1879 – 81, volume 7 (1881), p. 74 – 75 and Minorsky V. in „Enzyklopaedie des Islam“.

<sup>3</sup> A letter from the Turkish Sultan to Idris-i Bitlisi, printed in the book „Tacuel-Tevarih“, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1279/80, Istanbul, pp. 322, written by Mufti Khuja Sedettin (1537 – 1599). In this letter the Sultan praises Bitlisi and speaks of sending him presents.

<sup>4</sup> „A thorough study of Sharefnahme will help to bridge the gap“, Sharefnahme, Russian edition, Moscow 1963, p. 615.

## **Guests and Representatives**

The Kurdish Community in Berlin was founded in 1993 as an above party-lines organisation, being the first Kurdish Community in Germany.

The Kurdish Community in Berlin supports the Kurds in Germany as regards the cultivation of their language, culture, arts and folklore, as well as the preservation of their Kurdish identity. Its function is that of a go-between – between the Kurds living in Germany and the German people - in order to serve and enhance mutual relations.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 1997, when Jemal Nebez gave his lecture on „The Kurds – Their History and Culture”, the occasion was the formal opening of the Kurdish Community’s new location, being attended by many guests: Germans, Kurds, and representatives of many other nationalities. There were representatives of the Greek community in Berlin, the head of the Palestinian Community of Berlin, Dr. Salah Abu Abid attended, as well as: Dr. med. Klaus Burghard of the German Red Cross, Dr. med. Wolf-Rainer Carlo, Paediatrician in Bad Pyrmont, Dr. Friedrich Voss, Director of Channel „Multi-Kulti“ of the Berlin Radio Station SFB, Herr Brandt, Director of the Berlin State

Office of Criminal Affairs, Mr. Greg and Mrs. Chris Callison, Representatives of the (American) Berlin Mission, Eckhardt Barthel, member of the Berlin Chamber of Deputies, several representatives of the Berlin House of Iranian Culture, the well-known Persian singer Pervin Nemazi, Dr. Kemal Fuad, member of the politburo of the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), Salah Raschid, official representative of the PUK in Germany, Hama Amin Kerkuki, official representative of the DPK (Democratic Party of Kurdistan) in Germany, the poet M. Amin Pencwini, director of the Kurdish Institute of Berlin) and the Kurdish researcher and turcologist A. Bali.

### **A Glimpse at Jemal Nebez' Life**

Jemal Nebez was born on the 1st of December 1933 in Silémani (South Kurdistan) as the son of a tolerant Muslim scholar who raised Jemal in several languages and put him on intimate terms with the cultures of the neighbouring peoples. Parallel to attending the state controlled schools in Iraq he had the opportunity to study Islamic law, philosophy and theology with his father and other scholars of the country. This study demanded a very good knowledge of the Arabic and Persian languages and their respective literatures. Jemal very soon noticed, while still a student, that not only the political situation of the Kurdish people but also the Kurdish language were problematic. If the political situation was to change, the Kurdish people had to be enlightened by means of their own language, including a reform of the Kurdish language.

Jemal studied physics and mathematics at the Science Faculty, and pedagogy at the Teacher Training Faculty of the University of Baghdad in the first half of the 1950s. The teaching aids at the time were in English, a language he had learned in Elementary and Secondary School and kept on learning at Baghdad University. During that period of time he read several works by

philosophers and writers of the occident, and he wrote many essays in Arab newspapers in Baghdad about the political, social and human rights of the Kurds. One of these publications, in spring 1954, was a critical article on a press-interview given by Celal Bayar, then ex-president of Turkey, during a sojourn in the USA. In this interview Bayar denied the existence of any other people but Turks in Turkey. Jemal's critical contribution was published in the Baghdad newspaper „Sawt al-Ahali“ (voice of the population), organ of the National Democratic Party of Iraq („al-Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati“). At the time „Sawt al-Ahali“ was published under the chairmanship of the wellknown Arab politician and social-democrat leader Kamil Al-Jadirji (4 April 1897- 1 February 1968). The publication of Jemal's critique became a diplomatical problem between the two allies of the Baghdad-Pact - Turkey and Iraq – and had juridicial consequences for the party and its newspaper, but was able to draw for a moment into the light the miserable situation of millions of Kurds under the militaristic anti-Kurdish system of Turkey.

Jemal knew as a student that in all probability he would one day teach physics and mathematics in secondary schools in Kurdistan. Accordingly, he started creating the corresponding Kurdish language teaching materials,

to help Kurdish pupils who, when being taught science subjects in Arabic only, were severely disadvantaged.

From October 1955 to 1961 Jemal was a secondary school teacher of physics and maths; for three years he taught in Southern Kurdistan, in Kirkuk and in Hawler, and for three years in Basrah and Baghdad (Iraq). From the beginning, Jemal tried to help his Kurdish pupils by teaching them in their mother tongue. Since at that time the Kurdish language was banned in Kurdistan's secondary schools, measures were taken against him, both politically and within the schools' disciplinary system, culminating in his being sent into exile in southern Iraq's Basrah. During the two years he had taught in Kirkuk, Jemal created the basis for the first physics and mathematics books in the Kurdish language. In 1956 he prepared a stencilized script on Algebra and in 1960 he succeeded in publishing the first physics book in Kurdish under the title: „Introduction into the Mechanics and Properties of Matter“, including a rich glossary of Kurdish terms pertaining to physics and mathematics.

In the summer of 1956, Jemal travelled to Syria and Lebanon, where he met many Kurdish intellectuals, poets and writers who worked and published in North

Kurmanji-Kurdish dialect. Amongst them were Osman Sebri (1 January 1905 – 10 October 1993), Qadrijan (1916-1972), Madame Rawshan Bedirkhan (11 July 1909 – 1 June 1992), Ahmad Nami, and others. They talked about the establishment of an „Academy of the Kurdish Language“ and the necessity to introduce a unified Latin alphabet for the Kurdish language. A protocol of their meeting, in the handwriting of Osman Sebri, who has since died, was printed in Jemal’s book „Kurdish in Latin Script“, which was published in Baghdad in 1957. In the course of his sojourn in Damascus he managed to write a booklet in Arabic on „The Kurdish Freedom Movement and it’s Aims“ which he dedicated to Nasser, the former Egyptian president and Arab nationalist leader. In this booklet he determined the mutual interests of the two nations, Kurds and Arabs. Nasser later in the same year (1957) had a daily Kurdish programme started at Radio Cairo which included the playing of the Kurdish national hymn. In addition, the Kurds, their history and culture, was from then on researched at the University of Cairo and historical books by famous Kurdish scholars republished, e.g. Sharaf Name which contains a large number of historical details including a description of the frontiers of Kurdistan in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century as it was first published in 1596/97.

Jemal undertook another journey, in a different direction but similar in intention, in the summer of 1957, when he travelled to eastern Kurdistan and Tehran. In Kirmashan he met among others the Kurdish writer Fath-Ali Haidari Zebajoui and in Sine (Sanandaj) he met the famous Kurdish cleric and writer, Ayatollah Mohammed Mardokh-i Kurdistani (1885-1975). They agreed continually to serve the Kurdish language and culture.

In the years that followed – until 1962 when Jemal left Kurdistan to come to Europe – he wrote prolifically in Kurdish and Arabic on various philological, cultural and political topics.

Jemal Nebez was the first Kurd who publicly criticized and scientifically analysed not only the totalitarian system of the USSR and its satellites in eastern Europe, but also Marxism and Communism as a whole, not to be confused with Socialism, which to Jemal is a social system with the highest possible degree of freedom and equality. Socialism as such cannot be brought about by a totalitarian system nor can it be dictated by the proletariat, but develops with freedom and humanitarian education.

He published many essays on this idea. His efforts led to what is called the „Kurdish School of Socialism“, an early version of which was adopted by the Kurdish KAJYK-Party. KAJYK was founded in the 14<sup>th</sup> of April 1959 and existed as a political party until March 1974. This school of Kurdish socialism determined freedom and equality as supplementary to each other. There is no freedom without equality and no equality without freedom. Accordingly, freedom is not divisible, i.e. there is no state between freedom and non-freedom as there is no state between life and death. You cannot accord a certain freedom to A and less to B. Jemal explained his ideas in detail in his book in Kurdish language „Some fundamental Considerations of the Kurdish School of Socialism“, which was published in Stockholm in 1984, the second edition of which appeared in Hawler (Kurdistan) in 2001.

Dr. J. Nebez has studied various subjects at various universities in the Orient and in Europe, i.e. physics, mathematics, philosophy and pedagogies at the University of Baghdad 1950-55; Arabic, Islam science, Iranology, pedagogies at the universities of Munich and Würzburg 1963-66; Iranology, Islam science and comparative pedagogies at the University of Hamburg

1967-70; political science, journalism and law at the Free University of Berlin 1970-79.

In 1965, when he was a student in Munich, with his partisan friends Brusk Ibrahim and Latif Ali, he jointly founded the National Union of the Kurdish Students in Europe (NUKSE). In 1985 he and other emigrants from Kurdistan, academics, scientists, literates and artists founded the Kurdish Academy of Science and Arts, based in Stockholm. Among the founding members were Brusk Ibrahim (engineer), the well known toxicologist Dr. Bahram Rasul (associate professor at the University of Uppsala), Dr. Kamal Ali (historian), Fakhri Salahschor (writer and researcher), Dr. Hassan Hissami (surgeon), Dr. Issam Sharif (economist).

Dr. J. Nebez has also worked as a professional translator on duty in German courts and for the notary public, the languages being Arabic, Persian, Kurdish and German.

He worked as examiner for the Kurdish language in "Staatliches Prüfungsamt für Übersetzer und Dolmetscher" in Berlin (1978-83) and in "Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Unterricht, Kultus, Wissenschaft und Kunst" in Munich (1992). When still in his home

country he translated some literary works by Shakespeare and Gogol into Kurdish. The French orientalist Professor Thomas Bois judged him to be an “excellent translator” (Bois, Thomas: *Connaissance des Kurdes*, Beyrouth, Khayats 1965).

In the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s Jemal held the following positions: 1971-72 Lecturer, Free University of Berlin, Ethnological Institute; 1971-78 Lecturer, Free University of Berlin, Institute for Iranian Philology; 1972-76 Scientific Employee in the field of Orientalistics at Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation); 1978-82 Assistant Professor, Islamic Iran, Persian and other Iranian languages, Free University of Berlin; and 1978 – 83 Examiner of Persian language translators and interpreters in Berlin (Staatliches Institut für Dolmetscher und Übersetzer) and Examiner of Kurdish language translators and interpreters in Munich (Bavarian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture).

Dr. J. Nebez is a member of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (German Oriental Society), Deutsche Vereinigung für Politische Wissenschaft (German Union of Political Science), the Kurdish Academy of Science and Art Stockholm,

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sprachwissenschaft (German Linguistical Society), and the Societas Iranologica of Europe, Nichtraucherbund Berlin (Nonsmokers' Association).

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(Annotation: This volume also contains some correspondence between Jemal Nebez and the leaders of the two main political parties in Southern Kurdistan, Masood Barzani and Jemal Talebani on the peaceful coexistence of both parties and some proposals how to bring about a better future for the Kurds).

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# **The Kurds; History and Culture**

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## THE KURDS

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Our subject is the **history and culture of the Kurds**. I would like to say beforehand, that the Kurds do not only have a very long history, but also a very moving and complicated one as well as a correspondingly rich culture. Therefore, I ask you to be understanding as I can do no more in one hour than give you a brief outline.

Today the Kurds are about **40 million**. Their homeland is called Kurdistan, which means “**country of the Kurds**”. **Kurdistan** is not the name of a country or state, but rather, a land which in the 20th century was obligatorily divided among **five states (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Soviet Union)**. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990's, the **Soviet part of Kurdistan (“red Kurdistan”)** became a part of **Azerbaijan and Armenia**. The Kurds are today the largest **stateless** territorial nation in the world.

**Kurdistan extends from the Caucasus to the Mediterranean Sea and from there to the Gulf**. A part of it lies in **Mesopotamia**, which is regarded as the “**cradle of humanity**”.