LETTER TO EDITOR

# Parallels between Kurdish and Central European Historical Formations

Dear Sir,

It is my impression that Kurdish people often think of the lives, mores, and lifeworlds in Europe and the Middle East in terms of a dichotomy or even as complete opposites. In my letter, I would like to draw readers' attention to historical parallels, links, and commonalities between medieval Kurdish worlds and those in medieval and early Modern Central Europe, especially in the case of Hungary.

Strong, independent medieval histories were followed by 500 years of trouble and dependency in both Hungary and the Kurdish lands (Arpadian dynasty in the Middle Ages and High Middle Ages in Hungary versus Merwanids, Saladdin for Kurds). Glorious medieval histories for both people ended roughly at the same time: By 1526, the battle of Mohacs for Hungary and the famous 1514 Battle of Chaldiran for Kurds.

Following the early 16th century, both medieval nations' core territories mostly fell under the Ottoman state (for Hungary 1526–1686/1719, Kurdistan changing but 1514–1920 – until the Treaty of Sevres).

Both lands developed traditions of fighting and respect, especially for aristocratic traditions and virtues in both Kurdish lands and Hungary. Ottomans did not change the hereditary principle in Kurdish emirates – kingdoms actually (wrongly translated usually as governorates!), while in Hungary, much of the old kingdom's nobility fled to the North (to under the Habsburgs), some choosing the Ottoman side. What this means is: In Kurdish border areas, the Ottomans did not rely on a Sipahi system and did not link landholdings to service, but kept hereditary, feudal structures intact. Hereby, I follow a non-Marc Blochean, traditional, and structural understanding of "feudalism" that posits its prevalence outside Europe (in places such as Japan, Northern Nigeria, Russia, and the Kurdish countries).

Both medieval nations have been historically placed between two/three major empires: Hungary between Germans (in the forms of the Holy Roman Empire and then Austria)/the Russians/the Ottomans, Kurdistan between Ottomans and (Safavid/Qajar) Iran and of course the Arabs.

Both peoples threw very numerous uprisings to ensure relative or absolute independence under very difficult circumstances for many centuries following medieval times. Following the Janpulat revolt (Jumblat), Ali Pasha Janpulatoglu was pardoned by the Padishah and became the Ottoman vali of (then Hungarian) Temesvar, in 1607 (executed 1610). Rozhiki Revolt, Bedr Khan of Botan's revolts followed for Kurds. In Hungary, the onetime local king Imre Thokoly revolted (his crown came from Istanbul and not from Rome), then Francis II Rakoczi, independent prince of Hungary tried to throw off Austria's yoke. In Kurdistan, the Sheik Ubaidullah's revolt against Sevres and the Kingdom of Kurdistan (in Sulemani) followed, in Hungary: 1848–1849 put up very protracted anti-Austrian uprisings.

Both peoples suffered considerably under "state socialist" systems, especially Stalinism in the mid-to-late 20th century (both Hungarian leader Rakosi's and Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's favorite teacher happened to be the selfsame Joseph Stalin who ran a "degenerated workers' state"). The Hungarian revolution of 1956 arrived to ensure freedom and independence, followed by Soviet reoccupation. Iraqi Kurdistan suffered under the so-called "Arab socialism" of Saddam Hussein's rule that brought gassing and genocide to Kurds in 1983. National aspirations often took on a conservative character against enforced modernization both in Hungary and in Kurdistan. Left-wing traditions are also present in both locales, but their success depends on whether they can work with land-based, traditional culture (in both nations, there have been problems related to this matter).

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Thus, we can see that though it may be warranted in the United Kingdom-key risk indicators (KRIs) comparison, placing a dichotomy between the histories of Europe in general, or say Central Europe, and Kurdish lands, is actually a serious mistake. There are deep rooted, underlying structural similarities that unite the histories of these peoples beyond mere universal, global commonalities. The case of a Kurdish pasha in early modern Hungary is only the most striking case in this point. The strength and resilience of land-based traditions, the hereditary principle for offices, and borderland style, tolerant versions of religions (Islamic for Kurdish lands, Catholic, Calvinist, and other in Hungary) are all important unifying factors. Certainly, these commonalities, along with the KRIs, awe-inspiring resistance against Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham in 2014 and beyond, have created sympathy in the public of Visegrad four countries, especially Hungary, for Kurds and Kurdistani minorities alike.

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