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Book Reviews

Sebastian Maisel, ed., **The Kurds: an Encyclopedia of Life, Culture, and Society**, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2018, 376 pp., (978-1-4408-4256-6).

Reference works available on Kurdish history, culture, geography, language and society lacked, until recently, a comprehensive coverage and rather focused on overlapping but different cultural and geographical categories, for example the Islamic World, Middle East, or Arab World. Many of those works study the Kurds mostly from a political perspective and few address the social and cultural aspects. Furthermore, misconceptions about the Kurds dominate public opinion despite their wide media coverage in the West. International interest has grown as the Kurds in the Middle East have become politically more prominent and visible during the last two or three decades. Sebastian Maisel's *The Kurds* comes out as a response to this increasing interest.

General history books on the Kurds have been available since the appearance of Şerefxan Bidlisi's *Serefname*, a chronical of Kurdish dynasties, in 1596-97. The tradition of writing articles and books that contain general information on the Kurds continued into the twentieth century. Among these works one can include the book length encyclopedia entry on the Kurds by V. Minorsky written for the first edition of *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1913-36), Basile Nikitine's book *Les Kurdes: Étude Sociologique et Historique* [The Kurds: Sociological and Historical Study] (Paris, 1956) and Thomas Bois's *Connaissance des Kurdes* [Knowing the Kurds] (Beirut, 1965). Meanwhile, dictionaries on Kurdish personalities appeared in Persian, Arabic and Kurdish. Mihemed Emin Zekî's two volumes *Mashahir al-Kurd wa Kurdistan fi al-Dawr al-Islami* [Famous Kurds and Kurdistan during Islamic Period] (Baghdad and Cairo, 1945-1947), Baba Mardukh-i Ruhani's three volumes *Tarikh-i Mashahir-i Kurd* [History of Prominent Kurds] (Tehran, 1364-66/1985-1987) and Muhammad Ali al-Harki al-Kurdi's eight volumes *al-Mawsu'ah al-Kubra li-Mashahir al-Kurd 'abra al-Tarikh* [The Great Encyclopedia of the Prominent Kurds through the History] (Beirut, 2008-2013) are some of major works on Kurdish notables, including scholars, poets, politicians, and literati.

The Kurds were largely ignored in most of the latter half of the twentieth century, in great part due to the denial of their existence by authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. By the end of the century, an increase in political activity in the region led to a surge of interest in the Western world.



Dictionaries, encyclopedias and handbooks have appeared in major Western languages, such as Boris James and Jordi Tejel Gorgas's *Les Kurdes en 100 Questions [The Kurds in 100 Questions]* (Paris, 2018) and Michael M. Gunter's *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds* (Lanham, MD, 2004). Maisel's encyclopedic work on the Kurds is the latest of such works, combined with the long tradition of reference works covering Kurdish society, culture, politics and history. Compared with other reference works, this book has an unconventional approach towards the subject because it addresses various topics in varying formats. It does not offer conventional A to Z short encyclopedia entries. An expert for a given topic writes a short essay on a theme and the themes vary. They include diverse topics such as food culture, Kurdish diaspora in a Western country or translation of an original document on Kurdish history. This collaborative work features 25 contributors, most of them new generation scholars.

The work is divided into three parts. The first part covers thematic essays on various topics from geography, politics, religion, language, and history to education, literature, gender, media, food, dress, music, and cinema. The section "Origins and History", although somewhat incomplete for the Ottoman period, offers a concise historical background. The twentieth century, especially the period after the First World War, is mostly covered in the sections of "Conflicts and Issues" and "Political Systems and Parties." These three sections comprise political history. This work distinguishes itself due to the excellent historical overviews provided for a wide range of topics on geography, religion, education, literature, settlement, media, and cinema. Under "Geography", social, historical, political and human geography is discussed alongside physical geography. Kurdish tribal structure dominates the section on "Social Organization and Family Life". Non-tribal Kurds are mentioned shortly here whereas urban Kurdish population is mostly covered under "Housing and Settlements". In general, the essays in this part are well written, informative and comprehensive.

The Kurds are dispersed among several Middle Eastern as well as Western countries. The second part is focused on the profile of these Kurdish communities. The populations in Middle Eastern countries are treated as indigenous minority groups, while those in the West are presented as diaspora immigrants. Iran, Iraq, and Syria are well known, besides Turkey, for centuries-old residing Kurdish populations. Less known groups in Russia, Caucasus, Israel, and Lebanon are also covered. Western countries such as Germany, Sweden, France, the United States and Russia, that hold a significant part of Kurdish diaspora, are also treated in individual essays. These essays, depending on the character of the Kurdish population in each country, focus on the historical formation of diaspora and native communities, political parties, prominent individuals, cultural organisations, and their involvement in local and national politics.

Certain important historical and modern documents are translated in the last part of the reference work, organised chronologically and accompanied with an introduction, sources and further reading. Documents range from excerpts from the classical poetry of Ahmed-i Khani to article 140 of the new Iraqi constitution. No work, to my knowledge, brings together such documents on Kurdish history, literature, religion, and politics.

The book successfully combines earlier and current research. The essays are easy to follow, each structured with subtitles. Information boxes on various interesting topics, such as a movie, a musical instrument or certain personalities, can be found throughout the book. The list of suggested reading helps students and researchers deepen research and knowledge on a given topic. However, one may consider that a fourth part, with biographical essays on political, literary, female and historical personalities, could have been added. The part on historical documents could have included more documents. The photos and maps are not sufficient: there is only one demographic map indicating where the majority of Kurdish population exists. More maps could have been added on Kurdish historical, linguistic, religious, tribal, and ethnic diversity. More images on historical architecture, artifacts, as well as drawings from Kurdish artists could have been used. The book's bibliography is inadequate and the sources are not classified according to disciplines or area studies. The glossary of Kurdish words is kept short, spelled out in English orthography but not in modern Kurdish. Nevertheless, this is a very useful reference book for researchers on the Kurds and a sourcebook for undergraduate courses on the Middle East.

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Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş, eds., **Non-State Armed Actors in the Middle East: Geopolitics, Ideology, Strategy**. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 278 pp., (ISBN: 978-3-319-55287-3).

Non-State Armed Actors in the Middle East: Geopolitics, Ideology, Strategy is an edited volume focussing mainly on the rise and role of the Islamic State (IS), the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the People's Protection Units (YPG), as well as, to a lesser extent, Al-Hashd al-Shaabi in Syria and Iraq. The two editors and most of the contributors are faculty staff and researchers of the International Relations department at Sakarya University in Turkey. The editors place the significance of the book against a background of a pervasion of the international landscape by non-state armed actors (NSAAs). Defined as an armed group with the capacity to exercise control over a territory in order to achieve a political goal, NSAAs are regarded here as having emerged in the context of inter-state and proxy conflict, this being related to a decline of state structures and the parallel emergence of cross-border ethnic loyalties. In their conclusions to the book, the editors make a plea for strong collaborations