



Kurdology: Successes and Challenges on the Example of Georgia

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Abstract

Kurdology, as an independent scientific discipline, has a long history, which is confirmed by a large number of scientific works created by various scientists and researchers in different periods. Georgian Kurdology, which also has its' own long-standing tradition, originates from the period of the Soviet Union. It was during this period that many important works were created by different authors. It is noteworthy that the works of Albert Menteshashvili, who took Kurdology to a new level, have a special place in this regard. The monographic studies and separate scientific articles created by him still occupy a prominent place in Kurdish studies.

On the one hand, the present article is an attempt to present the knowledge accumulated in the field of Kurdology during Soviet Georgia, while on the other hand, it aims to provide information about researchers working on Kurdish issues and the results of their scientific works, as well as challenges and problems facing Kurdology in Georgia, to persons interested in the topic. Within the scope of this research, it was outlined that modern Kurdish research in Georgia

covers issues beyond the topics of the history of Kurdish people, culture, language or religion. This is also proven by the dissertations from 2020 and 2023, where the authors of corresponding research analyze the Kurdish issue in the prism of political and legal aspects. This indicates that Kurdish studies in Georgia have started to master a new scientific area and thus further expanded the scope of the interdisciplinary approach that existed before.

Keywords: Kurdology; Kurdish Studies; Kurdish Question; Oriental Studies.

Introduction

Kurdology, or Kurdish studies, as well as Turkology, Arabic Studies and Iranian Studies, is an independent branch of Oriental studies, and it researches and studies the history, culture, language, politics, society and many other areas of the Kurdish people. Unlike the other independent branches of Oriental Studies mentioned above, it should be noted that Kurdology is a relatively new direction. Earlier reports on the history, culture and social relations of the Kurdish people were collected mainly in scientific works solely devoted to Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, because the scientific study of the Kurds and Kurdistan was not an independent scientific research direction at the initial stage.

Kurdology as an academic discipline was formed within the Russian Empire, and later it found great development during the Soviet Union. Within the framework of the article, it is important to review the scientific and academic tradition that existed in the early years of the history of Kurdish studies in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. In the research process I have used the scientific article of Lali Utarashvili, which is researching the development of Kurdish studies and its directions, additionally author reviews the previous period, which laid the foundation for the tradition of Kurdish studies.

Also, in the article, she investigates researchers whom were working in the field of Kurdish studies in Soviet Georgia and scientific works created by them related to the problem of Kurds. In this regard, the joint scientific article of Khanna Omarkhali and Nadar Mosaki, which is dedicated to the history of the Russian school of Kurdology, turned out to be an important contribution. In their work, there is an overview of the Kurdish studies, as well as a brief review of scientific works created by scientists and researchers. Also interesting is the article authored by Sacha Alsancakli, a specialist in Kurdish studies and the history of the Middle East, where the author describes in details the early history of Kurdish studies.

The main purpose of presented article is to show the importance and value of Kurdology, as well as to show the achievements of Georgian Kurdish studies of the last period and to introduce to those who are concerned the scientific works of scientists and researchers working on the subject of Kurds. The article is introductory and informative in nature and it somewhat summarizes the accumulated knowledge in the direction of Kurdology up to the modern period.

Methods

This article is based on well proven research methods in the social sciences and humanities. The work uses such methods as historical analysis, comparative analysis, determining the cause-and-effect relationship and discourse analysis. There is also library research was carried out within the article, which aimed to collect scientific works (monographs, dissertations, articles) created in different periods across Georgia in a single field. In the research process I have also used the method of mutual comparison of scientific literature data.

Results

In 1991, Lali Utarashvili's scientific article by the title "On the Development and Directions of Kurdish Studies" was published in "Actual Problems of Asian and African Countries" journal, in which the author summarized the current situation of Kurdish studies. Since

then, a no other similar type of research on Kurdish studies has been carried out. One of the results of this article lies in the fact that it presents the results achieved in the last period, as well as the scientists-researchers working on the Kurdish issue.

The research carried out within the article reveals that the earlier tradition of Kurdish studies continues in Georgia, integration and institutionalization of Kurdology as an independent field in higher education is still not possible.

As a result of studying and observing a number of scientific works created by different authors, it was revealed that the following terms, such as Kurdology and Kurdish studies, are used with the same meaning. A similar trend is also observed with such words as Kurdish issue, Kurdish question and Kurdish problematic. All this indicates that there is no agreement on this issue and the use of terms depends on the taste and choice of the authors.

Discussion

Kurds as nation and Kurdistan occupy one of the prominent places in the Middle East region due to its geopolitical importance, which is why there appear to happen many conflicts between the Persian and Ottoman empires in different periods. The result of the dominance of these two empires in the Middle East region was that the Kurdish issue was confined to the borders of regional politics for centuries. However, the emergence of imperial powers in the Middle East region in the 19th century raised the Kurdish question from regional scale to global level politics. On the one hand, the weakening of Ottomans and Persia and the emergence of Kurdish nationalism and the national liberation movement struggle, and on the other hand, the appearance of European states (England, Germany, France, Russia) in the region dramatically changed the centuries-old balance of power in the region. For imperial powers seeking to expand their influence in the region, rapprochement with the Kurds and other ethnic groups soon became a major object of their foreign policy.

In the process of studying the history of the late 19th and early 20th centuries of the Middle East, the geopolitical interests of England, Germany, France and Russia in the region are sharply defined. Among the imperial powers, Germany stood out with a special interest, which was preparing for an attack on England's Asian lands by building the Baghdad railway. The influence Germany gained over the Ottoman sultan, ministers and generals caused serious indignation in England, which had far-reaching plans. British interest in the Kurdish issue was due to their further expansion in Iraq and Iran. In the same period, the United States of America expressed its interest in the Kurds and Kurdistan and opened a consulate in Erzurum in 1895, and later in Harput, despite the fact that the Ottomans refused from the beginning (Menteshashvili, 1978:96-97). After Russia annexed the South Caucasus region in the beginning of the 19th century, it became the first empire to be so close to the Kurds and the Kurdistan region.

Russia's rapprochement with the Kurds began in the early years of the 19th century, mainly during the wars with the Ottoman Empire (1806-1812) and Persia (1804-1813). There are sources according to which Russia tried to keep the Kurdish tribes neutral during the wars, in exchange for which it promised political and economic support to the tribal leaders (Menteshashvili, 1978:62-63). The above-mentioned factors created a necessary condition in Tsarist Russia to start studying the Kurds and Kurdistan, which in the early years was mainly based on the records of travelers and military officials and other European states had the same approach. In this regard, the situation was similar in European countries, where information about the Kurds and Kurdistan was spread mainly through the records of travelers and missionaries. Dominican priest Maurizio Garzoni (Maurizio Garzoni) as a result of the years spent in Kurdistan, in 1787, established the grammar and vocabulary of the Kurdish language (*Gramatica e vocabolario della lingua kurda*), his name is associated with the annulment of the previously existing opinion, according to which the Kurdish language

was considered Persian. In his reports we also find notes on Yezidis. It is recognized that Maurizio Garzoni is considered the "father" of Kurdology in the scientific community (Alsancakli, 2016:56).

Historians and orientalists rightly note out the fact that Kurdology as a scientific discipline was formed and developed even in Tsarist Russia, although it did not have any institutional form at that time. At first, it belonged to the direction of Iranian studies of Oriental studies, from which it later became an independent scientific discipline. In the joint work of Khana Omarkhali and Nodar Mossaki, which is dedicated to the discussion of Russian Kurdology and the surrounding scientific literature, it is noted that Kurdish studies in Russia were a constituent part of military geography and Oriental studies, specifically Iranian studies (Omarkhali, Mossaki, 2014:145). The scientific study of the Kurdish people begins later. Russian Kurdology of the pre-revolutionary period mainly represented two directions. First one researched the history, culture, and language of the Kurdish people, while the second direction was more kind of utilitarian (Utarashvili, 1991:339).

The beginning of the institutional history of Kurdish studies is considered to be the period of the First World War in 1916, when the orientalist Yusuf Orbeli founded Kurdish studies in St. Petersburg. However, the term Kurdology became popular later, after the Pan-Soviet Kurdological Congress passed in Yerevan in 1934 (Alsancakli, 2016:56). In 1959, under the leadership of Yusuf Orbeli, the Kurdish department was established within the Institute of Asian People of USSR's Sciences Academy (Scalbert-Yücel, Le Ray, 2006:14). It should be mentioned here that within the Soviet Union, active scientific research about the Kurds was carried out mainly in three cities: Moscow, Leningrad (modern St. Petersburg) and Yerevan.

Kurdish Studies in Georgia can be conventionally divided into two periods: Kurdology in Soviet Georgia and Kurdology in post-Soviet Georgia.

Simon Esadze's article is found at the early stage of the history of Kurdish studies in Georgia, where the author analyzes the issue of the Kurds during the imperialist war on the Caucasus front based on the data of the Central Archive of the Georgian SSR. The intensive study of the Kurdish issue in Georgia began in the 1960s, and it is connected with the name of the historian and orientalist Albert Menteshashvili, who in 1963 defended his dissertation on the topic: "Some Issues of the Kurdish national Liberation Movement in Iraq (1919-1925)". Albert Menteshashvili's contribution to the formation of the scientific school of Georgian Kurdology and its further development is truly outstanding, which is confirmed by numerous monographic studies and many scientific articles created by him on the issue of Kurds in different periods. (Monographs: From the History of the National Liberation Movement of Iraqi Kurds (1919-1925), 1965; Problems of Agrarian Relations in Modern Kurdistan, 1976; The Kurds and Kurdistan: Problems of Social-Economic Development, 1977; Problems of the History of the Kurds of the Near East (X-XX Centuries), 1978; Kurds (in Russian language, 1984). Albert Menteshashvili's fundamental studies about the Kurds and Kurdistan remain the most important scientific works, which provide great help for the researchers interested in the study of the Kurdish issue. Mr. Albert was the scientific supervisor on a number of dissertations, among which were Murtaz Tayari (Thesis: Iran-Turkey Military Conflicts and the Kurds in the First Quarter of the 19th century - 1986) and Davit Saakadze (Thesis: Iran-Iraq Relations and the Kurds in the 60s and 80s of the 20th Century -1988).

Kurdish studies, Kurdish-Yezidi scientists and researchers working in Georgia have a significant impact on this scientific topic. A prominent representative of the study of the Kurdish language, an orientalist Karim Ankosi (1937-2019), who published a short Georgian-Kurdish (Kurmanji) dictionary in 2019 for the Kurdish-Yezidi population living in Georgia and people interested in the

language, and earlier a short Georgian-Kurdish (Sorani) colloquial dictionary (2011); Karim Ankosi is also author of following textbooks: Alphabet for the Kurdish language (in the Kurmanji dialect) based on the Latin alphabet (2004); Let's Learn to Read and Write in Kurdish (Kurmanji) (2016); Kurdish Folklore (Translation, 2007). Orientalist, ethnologist, and historian Lamara Pashaeva (1940-2015) has created a number of works on the subject of Kurdish-Yezidi culture, religion and traditions. Kerim Amoev (Orientalist, Iranologist, Doctor of Economic Sciences) and Dimitri Firbari (Theologian, Orientalist, Yezidi cleric) are still active in scientific activity.

Here, it is necessary to mention the Orientalist and Iranologist Tsatso (Tsatsa) Kotetishvili, who in different periods dedicated a number of works to Kurdish- Ezidi topics. In this regard, the scientific works created by him on the religious beliefs of Kurd-Yezidis, their life, religious rules and customs, folk songs and folklore of Kurd-Yezidis, Kurdish craftsmanship and decorations.

It should be noted that after gaining state independence, the previously existing tradition in Kurdish Studies in Georgia continued and quite important steps were taken in this direction. Madonna Paksashvili indicated this in her thesis in 1995 entitled "Kurdish Emigrant Societies and the Liberation Movement in the Middle East in the 20th Century", where the author deeply investigated the main moments of the Kurdish national liberation movement. Also interesting are the scientific articles written by the author on the Kurdish issue, where he reviews the current issues of the Kurdish problem (Articles: The Struggle for the Autonomy of Iranian Kurdistan in the Early 80s (1994); Iraqi Kurdistan: Prospects for Settlement (1994); The Activities of Kurdish Emigrants and the Struggle for Autonomy in Iraq (1994); Creation of the Kurdish Autonomous Republic in Iran in 1945-1946 (1994); Kurdish Emigrant Organizations and their Liberation Movement in Turkey (1994); Some issues of Internationalization of the Kurdish Problem (1995); The Activities of

Kurdish Political Emigrants (Turkey) in Western Europe in the 80s (1996)).

Unfortunately, thesis papers created within the framework of Kurdish Studies and the issue of Kurds will not be found until 2020. Shavlego Tabatadze's dissertation "Problems of Political-State Organization of Kurds" and the scientific articles created by him are an important scientific contribution in terms of the development of the field. In his thesis, the author deeply analyzes the role of the Kurds in the regional geopolitics of the Middle East. Also, the initiatives to settle the Kurdish issue are not left out of the author's attention. In the final part, he draws attention to the fact that the problem of the Kurds is a rather complex and interconnected issue both on a regional and international scale (Tabatadze, 2020:159). The scientific articles created by him in 2019-2020 are also interesting, where the author has extensively studied and analyzed the current issues of the Kurdish problem (Articles: A New Reality of the Near East: The Issue of Kurdish State in the Historical and Legal-political Context (2019); The Kurdish State and the Role of the Kurds in Middle Eastern Politics (2019); Kurds And International Organizations (2019); The Main Problems of Political-state Arrangement of Kurdistan (2020); Kurdish Issue and Israel (2020)).

Kurdish studies were also developed by Bukhuti Sitchinava, who in 2023 defended his thesis entitled "The Idea of Establishing the United Kurdish State: Challenges and Perspectives" within the Doctoral Program of Political Science of the Caucasus International University. In separate chapters of the dissertation, the author has studied the problems of Kurds living in Iran, Syria, Turkey and Iraq. The paper analyzes the complex and problematic issues that hinder the solution of the Kurdish issue in regional and global politics. In the thesis, attention is also focused on the factors hindering the consolidation of the Kurds and the visions of solving the Kurdish issue (Sitchinava, 2023). Within the minimum standard of the dissertation,

several scientific articles have been published, which address some of the actual issues of the Kurdish problem (Articles: The Kurds in Iran (2020); Kurds in Syria (2021); Water Security in the Middle East on the Example of Iraqi Kurdistan (2021); The Kurdish Issue in the Context of Contemporary Global Politics (2022).

Some of the current issues of Kurdish problems are covered in scientific articles created by Mamuka Komakhia, Tamar Kupreishvili, Giorgi Chighvaria, Natela Dangadze, Tamta Bokuchava, Mariam Gureshidze, Miranda Bashaleishvili, Tamar Vakhania and others in different periods (Sitchinava, 2023:12). The problems of the Kurds are widely presented in individual chapters of monographs and textbooks created by Mikhel Svanidze, Emzar Makaradze, Giorgi Sanikidze, Revaz Gachechiladze and other authors. Interesting works on the history of the Kurds living in the South Caucasus region belong to Bagchoe Isko and Moro Mamedov.

In the field of Kurdish-Yezidi studies, an important step was taken in 2019, when the department of Yezidi Studies was founded at the Giorgi Tsereteli Institute of Oriental Studies of Ilia State University. According to the information of the same center, it is the first Department of Yezidi Studies in the world, which was created in a scientific institution of oriental studies. The staff of the department researches the issues of Yazidi culture, language, religion, history, and ethnology. Employees of the department are Doctor of Economics Kerim Amoev and Dmitry Firbar (Head of the Department).

Regardless of the above-mentioned specific examples, it should be noted that due to objective or subjective reasons, the institutionalization of Kurdology has not yet been possible in Georgia. This fact is evident and proved by the fact that there is no academic course in any private or state higher education institution in Georgia that would teach students Kurdish language and Kurdish issue. In conclusion, it can be said that considering the geographical proximity between Georgia and the Middle East and the rapidly changing

political processes, it is important and necessary to understand that more attention should be paid to the mentioned direction in Georgia and specific steps should be taken in this regard.

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