Poetry has always been the main pillar of Kurdish literature. By tracing the history of Kurdish poetry through its manifold themes and forms of expression and through its various periods of expansion and stagnation one also gets an interesting picture of the role and conditions of literature in an oppressed nation.

When the Kurdish poet Ahmad-î Khânî (1651-1707) wrote the epic *Mam û zîn* (Mam and Zîn) in 1694, he not only told a most beautiful love story, but also expressed his own political and philosophical ideals and described the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of a very important period in Kurdish history.

Khânî wished for the Kurds to have their own master, a master possessing his own throne and carrying his own crown, a master who knows how to appreciate science, art and poetry, learned books and dîwân”. He expressed own ideal role as a poet and a thinker in this way:

Then I would hoist the flag of rhymed speech to the sky.
I would resurrect Malâ-y Jazîrî,
bring 'Alî Harîrî to life
and give Faqe Tayrân such joy
that it would fill him with admiration for ever.”¹

Khânî was an outstanding pioneer within many fields, including Kurdish literary history. When Xânî in his epic mentioned the Kurdish poets Malâ-i Jazîrî, 'Alî Harîrî and Faqe Tayrân, it was the first reference to Kurdish literature ever given by a Kurd or a non-Kurd. However, this was no more than a reference, and a fuller recording of Kurdish literature was not to come for yet another century.

**Literary history: First attempts**

Any literary scientist who wants to research Kurdish literature will face great difficulties. This is because no comprehensive recording of Kurdish literature yet exists. Recorded Kurdish literary history consists of a number of articles and pamphlets and a few books, all written during the last 120 years.² Furtherance all the existing recordings suffer from two important shortcomings.

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² This essay was written originally at the middle of the 1980s and the sources on Kurdish literary history were then to a great extent limited. After the establishing of the federative Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan the political situation, and consequently the cultural also, has thoroughly changed. Many works in the field of literary history have been published since then. Mention should be made here of one of the most comprehensive and serious works, namely “History of Kurdish Literature” by professor Marouf Khaznadar, that appeared in seven volumes between 2000-2006.
Firstly, it is obvious that they are the first attempts at scientific research in this field, lacking back up material, literary sources and models. Consequently the works are rather superficial, incomplete and unsystematic. Secondly the works generally include merely certain periods of Kurdish literature, often restricted to a certain genre of literature from a certain part of Kurdistan.

There is of course also a whole set of external social and political reasons for this situation; negative conditions which impede the development of the Kurdish society and culture -, today may be more than ever.

The most important works of Kurdish literary history are, as follows:

- The literary data given to the Russian consul August Jaba by the learned Malâ Mahnûd Bayazîdî in Erzurûm at the end of the 1850s. The data was recorded and published as a book by Jaba in 1860.3

- Amîn Fayzî: Anjuman-î Adîbân (Assembly of Writers), Istanbûl 1920. This book describes in 147 pages the lives of some Kurdish poets with quotations from their poetry.

- Rafîq Hilmî: Shi'r û adabiât-î Kurdî (Kurdish poetry and literature), Baghdad, (Vol. 1 - 1941) and Vol. 2 -1956. This work is normally classified as literary criticism, but it also includes historical material, like biographical data and description of different periods in Kurdish literature.

- Alauddîn Sajjâdî: meêzhû-y Adab-î Kurdî (Kurdish literary history), Baghdad, 1st ed. 1952, 2nd ed. 1973: This has been one of the most important sources of Kurdish literary history to the present day. Apart from studies on 24 Kurdish poets it also includes studies on Kurdish history, the tradition of the Kurdish epic, Kurdish mythology, Kurdish journalism and a series of comparative literary studies of old Egyptian, Persian, Chinese, Indian and Hebrew literature.

- Dr. Izzuddîn Mustafâ Rasûl: Realism in Kurdish literature. Beirut 1968: This is an Arabic translation of Dr. Rasûl's Russian doctoral thesis, describing Kurdish literature from a Marxist point of view.


- Prof. Qenate Kurdoev: Tarix-a Edebiyet-a Kurdî (Kurdish literary history), Stockholm 1983 (2 Vol.). This is similar in many ways to Sajjâdî's Kurdish literary history.

**The beginning of Kurdish Art Poetry: a scientific controversy**

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3 Jaba, Alexandre: Jâmi’ye risâlayân û hikâyatân bi Zimane Kurmanjî, St. Petersburg 1860. 250 p.
Apart from the lack of source material there are also other circumstances which limit scientific literary work and make it difficult. Many of the difficulties derive from the fact that Kurdistan is divided up between several countries where the conditions are different and where the political, social and cultural development has reached different levels.

A direct result of this division is the lack of common standard for the written language. Kurdish is therefore written in two main dialects, and in no less than three different alphabets: modified Arabic characters are used in Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan, the Latin-Turkish alphabet in Turkish and Syrian Kurdistan and the Cyrillic alphabet in the Soviet part. In addition there is also some Kurdish literature written in Hebrew and Armenian characters. The culture of the dominating peoples in the region has of course influences Kurdish culture and language in many ways.

From a Kurdish point of view this influence has been negative and complicates the language situation to an even greater extent. This complicated situation is still the cause of numerous linguistic controversies concerning the origin and classification of the Kurdish language and its dialects. One of the dialects which is causing dispute is the Lurî (or Lori) dialect. Most Kurdish literary critics and historians consider Kurdish art poetry to have started with the poet Bâbâ Tâhir Hamadânî (935-1010) who wrote in this dialect. Many European Orientalists, however, classify Lurî as southwest Iranian language, unlike Kurdish, which belongs to the north-western group of Iranian languages. Due to the complicity of this situation, the classification of the Iranian languages and dialects cannot yet be regarded as completed.

The classic period: The northern Kurdish (Kurmanji) School

There is general agreement that the emergence of Kurdish art poetry is connected to the establishment of Kurdish principalities of the sixteenth century. The foundation of the Safavide Empire as a power antagonistic to the religion of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the sixteenth century created a new situation which caused major changes in the Middle East. At an early stage war broke out between the two empires, a war culminating with the Châldîrân war on Aug. 23, 1514, in which the Safavides were defeated by the Ottomans and great parts of the empire were occupied, including the capital Tabriz.

The Ottoman Empire immediately started to reinforce the Kurdish principalities within its territory and also established new Kurdish principalities. The purpose of the Ottoman Sultân was “to build a wall of flesh and blood” between his empire and his enemy to protect his borders.4

One of the most influential principalities in the history of Kurdistan was Botân the capital of which was Jazîra, nowadays a small city in Turkish Kurdistan where the international borders of Iraq, Turkey and Syria meet. Because of its superior position Botan came to be an important centre of Kurdish culture. Here the first school of classical Kurdish poetry in the North Kurmanji dialect was established.

4 Ahmad(dr.), Kamal Mazhar: Mêzhu, Baghdad 1983, footnote p. 130.
Malaye Jazîrî (1570-1640) was the leading representative of this school and, one can add, a fine representative of classical oriental poetry as a whole. His ties to this tradition are expressed through the strong Sufî elements and through the concept of love in his poetry. In his universe there are no clear borderlines between human and divine love. Thus the reader is often lead to ask whether it was the love of God or the beautiful Selma (said to have been the daughter or the sister of the prince of Jazîra) which brought fire to the poet's heart.

Apart from these traditional oriental elements, Jazîrî's poetry is also deeply rooted in romantic patriotism, and the poems he wrote in tribute to the princes of Kurdistan differ from the poetry written at the courts of the mighty kings in the region. Kurdistan's name appears frequently and is always connected with great pride:

Not only Tabrîz and Kurdistan shall belong to your reign.
Let a hundred kings like the king of Khorasan bow to your crown."⁵

Or, praising himself and his poetry:

I am a flower in Botan, garden of Eden.
I am a luminous jewel in Kurdistan's night." ⁶

Malâ-yê Jazîrî as well as his contemporaries and predecessors had a strong influence on the Kurdish language and culture in general. One of these poets was Malâ Ahmad-i Batayi who wrote the first Mawlûd-nâma (poems about the birth of the prophet Muhammad) in Kurdish. Faqê Tayrân (or Faqîh-ê Tayrân) was another. His epic Shekh-î San'ân (Sheik San’an) and Qawl-â Hasp-e Rash (The tale of the black horse) are outstanding contributions to Kurdish literature. He also wrote several poems. The most famous amongst them are the epistolary poems he wrote while corresponding with Malâ-yê Jazîrî.

In the second half of the seventeenth century the above-mentioned Ahmad-î Khânî (1651-1707) was one of the leading and most influential Kurdish poets. His influence on Kurdish language and culture extends to the present day. His poetry still influences Kurdish poets and his ideas of Kurdish nationalism are still in circulation.

In addition to his main work Mam u Zîn, which is a fine example of the classical oriental epic, Khânî produced varied literary works. He wrote the first dictionary in Kurdish, called Nûbâr-î Bichûkân (The children's first fruits), which is an Arabic-Kurdish dictionary in verse. He also wrote a 73 baits long essay in verse about religion, called Aqîd-â Imân (the article of faith) and lyrical poetry.⁷

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⁶ ibid., p. 534.
The Goran (or Hawramî) School and the South Kurdish School

Like Botan, there were also two other important Kurdish principalities that became centers of Kurdish culture: Ardalân, with the capital Sina (Sanandaj) (now in Iranian Kurdistan), and Bâbân, with the capital Sulaimani (now in Iraqi Kurdistan). The Kurdish school of classic poetry reached its peak in Ardalân. The cultural influence of the principality extended beyond its political boundaries, and its school of poetry set standards for poets far and wide throughout the region.

The literary language of Ardalân was written in the Kurdish dialect of Goran, also called Hawrâmî or Hawrâmânî, which is a branch of the Goran dialect. Many important Kurdish poets, like Khânâ-y Qubâdî (1700-1759), Besaranî (1641-1702), Mawlawî (1806-1882) and Ahmad Bag-î Komâsî, wrote their poems in that dialect. Mawlawî represents the peak of this school of poetry, and he is considered one of the three greatest Sufis in the history of Kurdish poetry, the other two poets being Malâ-yê Jazîrî and Mahwî.8

When the principality of Ardalan was crushed in the middle of the 19th century, its cultural influence ended, and the Hawrâmânî school of poetry gradually declined until it finally vanished as a living tradition. On the contrary the classical School of Poetry in Baban grew so strong that it has maintained its influence right up to the present day.

In 1784 Ibrahim, the Pasha of Baban, built the town Suleimanî and made it the capital of his principality instead of the old capital Qalâcholân. The many schools, mosques, teachers, mullahs and scientists in the new capital soon made it an important cultural centre. The classical Kurdish School of Poetry in the southern Kurdish dialect grew rapidly and for a while it also influenced Kurdish culture outside the principality. The literary dialect that was developed in Suleimani was built on several branches of the Southern Kurdish dialect spoken in the areas of Sharazûr and Qaradâgh.

Nâlî (1797-1855 or 1870), Sâlim (1800-1866) and Kurdî 1800-1866 were pioneers and leading poets of this school. Nâlî’s poetry is based on personal experience expressed in a rich, picturesque and lyrical language. A substantial part of his work consists of poems he wrote to the love of his youth Habiba from Qaradâgh. The initial period of Nâlî’s literary production is thus characterized by a strong longing for love, by dreams and hope. However, after a great many years of discouraging and negative experiences, his writing slowly moved from the optimism of youth to a more pessimistic outlook and at the sad longing for his country and for times already gone.

Nâlî was an enlightened Kurdish patriot, and he strongly hoped that the princes of Bâbân would be able to defend Kurdish independence against aggressions from the Ottoman Turks and the Iranians. However, Bâbân was finally conquered and became occupied by the Turks, and Nâlî was forced to leave Kurdistan. It is believed that he spent the last years of his life in Damascus, Istanbul and Mecca. We don’t have access to first-hand information about where did he spend the

very last time in his life and accordingly there is no agreement upon the place where he was buried.

Nâli's most famous poem is an epistolary poem he wrote to his friend, the poet Sâlim, when he was living in Damascus. Here he expresses his warm feelings and longing for Kurdistan, recalling Kurdistan's rivers, plains and its beautiful picnic spots and town quarters. In the end he asks Sâlim about the possibilities of a return:

Explaining the pain of exile, this burning fire of separation inside
Melts my heart, slowly dripping.

Tell me: has the day for my return now come,
Or must I remain in this place forever?"9

This poem and Sâlim's answer, likewise written in verse and with a similar rhyming pattern still stand as literary masterpieces in Kurdish poetry. Together they give a broad and complementary picture of the difficult and chaotic time in Kurdish history to which they belonged. While Nâli is lamenting the enormous distance separating him from his country, Sâlim describes the ruin of the country and the brutality of the occupant Turks with their barbarous and tyrannical rule.

He turns to his allied friend - the wind - begging it:

For heaven's sake, tell Nâli I beg him:
Never to come back to Sulaymanî in these conditions."10

The legitimate rulers of Sulaymanî, the Kurdish princes of Baban, were overthrown, but Sâlim thought no one else capable of ruling the country:

This country will not be ruled but by its master.
Without him let not Nâli come this way."11

There were also other notable poets belonging to the classic Southern Kurdish school, poets who all influenced the Kurdish language and culture in their own way, like Hajî Qâdir-î Koyî (1817-1897), Sheikh Razâ Tâlabînî (1836-1910), Wafâyî (1836-1892), Adab (1862-1917), Mahwî (1830-1909) and many others.

Hajî Qâdir-î Koyî carried on the nationalistic message of Ahmad-î Khânî in his writings. He wanted to enlighten the people and help them to remedy the problems of illiteracy and backwardness and ideas which result from lack of knowledge and religious fanaticism. He


10 ibid., p. 201.

11 ibid.
encouraged people instead to turn to science and to the realities of modern society in the struggle to liberate and build an independent Kurdistan.

Sheikh Razâ- y Tâlabânî holds a unique position in Kurdish literature. No other Kurdish poet has since written as great and advanced satire as he. He was a severe social critic, revealing in his poems many injustices, weaknesses and faults in society. His language is exuberant and powerful, the images sharp and poignant to the smallest detail, always hitting the nail right on the head.12

Mahwî was a great sufi poet, and together with Malâ- ye Jazîrî and Mawlawî constitute the best within Kurdish mystical poetry as a whole. Considering both form and content his works rank high within classical oriental poetry, and will always stand as one of the mightiest pillars of the classical Kurdish schools of poetry.

A new era; big changes

The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th Century was a turbulent period that brought drastic changes to the Kurds and the other peoples in the Middle East, especially within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. As the sultan and the Turks increased their chauvinistic oppression, nationalistic ideas developed and started to grow stronger among the oppressed peoples in the region. They were struggling to resurrect their national languages, their culture and history, to shake off the Ottoman yoke and build their own national states.

As a result of this national awakening numerous organizations flourished, namely culture organizations and youth, student and women's organizations, and there was a burst of books, magazines and newspapers being published. These were the methods which the peoples - including the Kurdish people - used in their national struggle.

The first newspaper in the Kurdish language was published during this period. It was called Kurdistan and was first published in Cairo on the 21 of April, 1898 by Miqdad Midhat Badirxan. Later his brother, Abdul-Rahmân Badirxan took over the newspaper, and expanded its publication to Geneva, London and Folkestone. Between 1898 and the last issue in 1902, 31 issues were published in all.13

Within the Ottoman administration and army there were several Kurdish intellectuals who then made Istanbul their center. These intellectuals became the driving force behind the national and cultural currents among the Kurdish people, and later behind the national movement for developing Kurdish language and culture in South Kurdistan.


13 Ahmad(dr), Kamal Mazhar: Tegayishtn-i Râstî, Baghdad 1978, p. 217. The present writer has published an essay in which he established the date of the publication of Kurdistan newspaper as 21st April, 1898, contrary to the previously predominant believe that it was first published on 22nd April. The essay caused a thorough debate among Kurdish writers who have done research in the field. See: Aso, 22nd April, 2007.
The national progress of the peoples in the region slowly forced back the oppressive policy of Sultan Abdul-Hamid, until he in 1908 was obliged to proclaim a constitutional reform. The reform granted the peoples wider political and cultural rights. As a result, many new Kurdish newspapers and magazines were published, e.g. *Rozh-i Kurd* (later *Hatâw-i Kurd*): Istanbul 1913, *Yakbûn*: Istanbul 1913, *Bâng-i Kurd*: Baghdad 1914, *Kurdistan*: Sabilâkh (now Mahabad) and Oroumiyyah (later called Razâ'iyya, now again Oroumiyyah) 1914, *Kurdistan*: Alippo 1915, *Zhîn*: Istanbul 1918-19 and *Kurdistan* : Istanbul 1919.

The following events were to shake not only Kurdistan and the Middle East, but the whole world. It was during the years of the First World War. For Kurdistan, however, the worst was yet to come when the war ended. Then the country was carved up and had its colonial fate sealed by the “peace”-treaty of Lausanne in 1923. When the Ottoman Empire was to be broken up into smaller national states, it was originally proposed (in Sevres 1920) that the Kurdish people be given their own independent state. This promise was, however, sacrificed in the interests of political expediency. The Turks under Mustafa Kemal's leadership won the territorial war against the Greeks, and Kemal's aspirations to build a modern Europeanized Turkish state were met with great enthusiasm by the Western allies for several reasons. Thus the new Turkish borders, including half of Kurdistan, were finally ratified by the treaty in Lausanne. The rest of Kurdistan was annexed by Iran and the two Arab states, Iraq and Syria. A part of North Kurdistan had by then already fallen to the Soviet Union, as a part of the Armenian Republic.

The division of Kurdistan into five parts resulted in drastic changes in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the Kurdish people. Since this time South Kurdistan has become the center of Kurdish language and culture.

In the beginning of the 1920s the British established two states under their mandate. There was one Arab state and one Kurdish, called South-Kurdistan, under the leadership of Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji (or Hafid) who was appointed the Governor (Hukmdar) of Kurdistan by the British. The Sheikh never trusted the British colonialist authorities. He was sent into exile to the Andaman Islands in the Bengal gulf, where he was jailed until 1922. The British couldn’t bring their authority to the Kurdish region and were therefore obliged to take back Sheikh Mahmud to Kurdistan. He was given control over Sulaimany province and a few adjacent regions, but the Sheikh soon proclaimed himself the King of Kurdistan. After a short while the British themselves crushed the young Kurdish kingdom and annexed it to Iraq, on the condition that the rights of the Kurdish people should be respected.

The Kurdish intelligentsia who had been working for the cultural and political Kurdish movement in the Ottoman Empire now settled in South-Kurdistan. With them they brought several valuable years of experience and knowledge from their time spent in Istanbul. Among these intellectuals, who originally came from all over Kurdistan, and who now began to play an important role in the cultural life in South-Kurdistan, were Tawfiq Wahby (1891-1984), Pîramerd (1867-1950), Rafiq Hilmi (1898-1960) and Muhammad Amîn Zakî (1880-1948).
Towards modern poetry

It was under these conditions that modern Kurdish poetry emerged. The first notable modern poet was Nûrî Sheikh Sâlih (1905-1958), who also brought the ideas of modernism to literary criticism. Because of increasing political involvement, however, Nûrî Sheikh Sâlih never really reached the influential and important position within Kurdish literature which he otherwise certainly would have attained.

The poet who undoubtedly brought about a revolution in Kurdish poetry, was Goran (1904-1962), also called the father of Kurdish modernism. At this time Kurdish poetry was loaded with hundreds of years of foreign heritage, especially Arabic. Goran cleared his poetry of this influence and gave it a form, rhythm, language and content which were based on Kurdish reality and Kurdish culture, nature and folkloric traditions. The Arabic meter (‘Arûz), much used in all Muslim Oriental poetry, was exchanged for patterns from old Kurdish folk songs, and the vocabulary was purified of Arabic and other languages.

The dominant themes in Goran's poetry are his ideal of freedom and his love for Kurdistan, for women and for nature. His way of depicting nature is unique within Kurdish literature. Here and through other aspects Goran reveals a familiarity with the leading European modernist poets.

Goran went through three different periods in his literary career. This is evident in both the content and the form of his poetry. First he went through a classic period following the footsteps of his predecessors. Then he went into a romantic period, where woman and nature were the most dominant themes. He started to transform traditional patterns of poetry. Characteristically Goran often sees the woman in Nature and Nature in the woman as in the poem Beauty and the woman. First he mentions several examples for the beauty in Nature, and then he goes on:

All this is beautiful and good,
casting its light on the way through life.
But Nature without the smile of my love
contains no light at all."14

In his mature years, Goran turned to free verse as a means of expressing his political commitment to his people's fight for freedom and the working class struggle. Throughout the last years of his writing, however, one will observe how a progressively stronger political tendency in the end overshadows and weakens the aesthetic aspects of Goran's poetry.15

Other poets of the Goran generation


15 A collection of some of Goran's poems were published in Sweden in 1986, translated by Lars Bäckström, Ferhad Shakely and Bakhtiar Amin.
There were also other poets in this so called Goran-generation (the period from the 1920s to the end of the 1960s) who contributed to the development of modern Kurdish poetry. These were poets such as Pîremerd, Ahmad Mukhtar Jâf, Faiq Bekas, Dîldar, Zewar, Ahmad Hardî, Asîrî, Osman Sabrî, Jasîm-e Jallî, Qânî, ‘Alî Bâpîr Agha, Bakhtîâr Zewar and Akhol.

But there are three poets who especially demand particular attention: Jigarkhûn (1903-1984), Hazhar (b. 1920) and Hemin (1921-1986). Their poetry expresses the ideas of modern romanticism and realism while maintaining the classical form of traditional Kurdish poetry.

Jigarkhûn wrote in the North Kurdish dialect, and his poetry has had such an enormous influence on the people and on the Kurdish culture in Turkish and Syrian Kurdistan that the whole period is often called the Jigerkhwin-period in Kurdish poetry (of the North Kurdish dialect: Kurmanji). Jigarkhûn took good care of the old heritage from classical Kurdish poets like Jazîrî and Ahmad-î Khânî. His poetry is simple and revolutionary with a strong popular appeal often at the expense of the aesthetic.

This also in many ways applies to Hazhar's poetry, where as the aesthetic dimensions of Hemin's poetry is qualitatively stronger than in the two others. His language is more lyrical and does not lean towards political slogans to the same extent. Jigerkhwin, Hazhar and Hemin were forced to leave Kurdistan and spend a considerable part of their lives in exile because of their political convictions.16

Between the Goran-generation and the new generation of poets of the 70s there was an intermediate generation of poets who only played a secondary role in Kurdish literature. They were partly overshadowed by Goran and partly overtaken by the sudden cultural changes in Kurdistan, which produced the new generation. To this intermediate generation belong Kakay Fallah, Dilzar, Hawar, 'A.H.B., Dîlan, Kâmarân Mukrî and Jamal Sharbazherî.

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16 Jigarxwin spent his last five years in Sweden. By then he was acclaimed by Kurds all over Europe. He also published many of his own poetry collections in Sweden before he died there on the 22nd of October, 1984.

Hazhâr's exile started after the fall of the Kurdistan republic in Mahabad. He then spent many years in misery and poverty, living and working in Iraqi Kurdistan. When the Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani returned from his exile in the Soviet Union in 1958, Hazhar became a close friend of his until Barzani's death. Since 1975 Hazhâr lived in Karaj, outside Tehran. He died in February 1991.

Hemin spent ten years in exile in Iraqi Kurdistan and in Baghdad, before he was allowed back to Iranian Kurdistan after the Islamic Revolution. He lived in Ouroumiyeh until his death in April, 1986.
Two unknown modernists

Because the oppression of the Kurds has been even stronger in the other parts of Kurdistan than in Iraq, the Kurdish writers in those parts have not been able to play their role in influencing modern Kurdish culture. Those writers, who have managed to publish their works at all, have not had the facilities to distribute their literature to a wide audience. Therefore there are many writers who will remain relatively unknown, often in spite of the high quality of their works.

The poets Qadrîjân (1916-1972) and Suwâra-y Elkhânî (1940-1976) are among those who have suffered this fate.

Qedrican was originally from Northern (Turkish) Kurdistan, but moved in his young years to Syrian Kurdistan, where he lived and worked until his death. Besides his cultural contributions he was an active member in the political Kurdish movement in Syria. He published his poems and his translations from the French in Hawar magazine. His poems that he dedicated to Barzani, after the collapse of the Kurdistan Republic in Mahabad, and Barzani’s going to exile in the Soviet Union gained a wide popularity amongst Kurdish readers. After the building of the republican Iraq he settled in Baghdad and was in close relation to the Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani. He was an outstanding modernist and an innovator of both form and content in Kurdish poetry. Nevertheless he remained unknown within his own lifetime, as his poetry was banned.

Suwâre-y Elkhânî was a young gifted poet from Iranian Kurdistan. In spite of a short life he left behind a great many literary works of high quality; all unknown to his contemporaries. Apart from a remarkable collection of modernistic poetry, he also wrote novels, short stories, lyrical stories, prose poems and drama. He also wrote several literary and cultural studies. The language Elkhani used in his poetry and prose texts was a beautiful and highly refined literary one. In addition to many political and social themes that were frequently dealt with, he illustrated also fragments of his own experiences of love that mirror a great deal of agony and suffering.

Both of these outstanding representatives of modernism in Kurdish literature were only recently discovered, long after their death. But at least their important role has now become established at last.

The new generation

After the coup d’état, whereby Iraq was made a republic, in 1958 the Kurds achieved extended democratic rights. This resulted in a vital flourishing of the Kurdish culture. Cultural as well as political organizations were founded and tens of magazines and hundreds of books were published.
But the favorable situation didn't last long before the new rulers reestablished the oppressive and chauvinistic policy, which again put an end to all the activities and to the democratic and human rights for the Kurdish population. In the end the Kurds were forced to take up armed struggle against this harsh oppression. The result was the uprising and the liberation armed movement that was widely supported by various classes in the Kurdish society and became known as “The September Revolution” that went on 1961-75 under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani.

The 1960s brought many tragedies to the Kurdish people: war, bombardments, massacres and attacks on the civil population. All cultural life under these circumstances came to a halt.

Successive regimes during this period all applied the same oppressive policy and methods against the Kurds and their culture. However, at the same time the Kurdish liberation movement went from strength to strength. After several years of struggle it had become a force which could no longer be ignored by Iraqi or international politics. In the end the government was forced to sign an agreement with the liberation movement on the 11th of March, 1970.

This initiated a new peaceful period of four years, during which the Kurds achieved much. Kurdish became the official language in all the schools in the Kurdish areas. Again tens of magazines were published and the number of Kurdish newspapers increased. The Kurds established their own writers' union and their own Academy of Science and a university in Sulaymanî.

The new cultural boom also brought a strong literary outburst by a new young generation of poets who started and still are active planting the seeds of a new epoch in Kurdish literature. These poets, also called the post-Goran generation, brought fresh blood to Kurdish poetry after ten years of dormancy.

In seeking deeper into the common Kurdish soul, searching for the specifically national as well as the universal questions of the Kurdish nation, they are giving Kurdish poetry a new content. They have raised their voice to speak more strongly against the enemies and occupants of the Kurdish people, and are reflecting the new awareness and the revolt which included all Kurdistan in decades.

The new generation has a better understanding of the negative effects of the occupation and division of the country. Therefore the struggle to pull down and eliminate the borders put up by the enemies plays an important role in their writing. Their voice is no longer just a Kurdish voice, but the voice of Kurdistan and it is also a universal voice.

In March 1974 war broke out again between the Kurdish liberation movement and the central government. The war ended one year after, with the capitulation of the liberation movement in March 1975, as a result of an international conspiracy under the auspices of the USA, where Iraq and Iran were the two obvious oppositional parties. In 1976 the Kurds again took up the armed struggle in South-Kurdistan, and later also in other parts of Kurdistan.

All these political events have contributed strongly to Kurdish literature. The new generation of about 30 young poets who emerged at the beginning of the 1970s grew up under these conditions and was of course greatly affected by it.
Among the most advanced and successful poets from this new generation are Latif Halmet, Sherko Bekas, Abdulla Pashew, Farhad Shakely, Anwar Qadir Muhammad and Rafiq Sabir. The dominant form for the writing was free verse, but they also mixed different verse meter, or wrote prose poems. These poems often dealt with the Kurdish people's oppressed situation, a people robbed of fundamental human rights in a world which speaks of solidarity, humanism and justice, but whose actions support the Kurdish people's oppressors. Even among the more lyrical poems, questions of existential and philosophical nature are raised.

The elder generation of writers strongly criticized their younger colleagues at first, and a lively debate followed which dealt with every thing from esthetics, culture and ideology to political questions of the day. At present this young generation has been accepted and has pumped new blood into Kurdish literature. The poets went separate ways after 1975. Many were forced to leave Kurdistan and are now living in exile in different parts of the world.

This new generation of poets has only recently found a voice and a form of its own. It is still a young generation, which has already produced significant developments through their daring poetical experiments, but which should most certainly have even more in store for the future.

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