

The challenges of writing Kurdish literary history: Representation, classification, periodisation

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Abstract

Writing Kurdish literary history, that is a historical account of the development of Kurdish literature, is a fairly new project. Literary critics have strived to construct a comprehensive narrative of the evolution of poetry and prose and to classify individual works into certain schools and movements. Doing so, however, has proved to be a challenging task for Kurdish literature predominantly due to the lack of adequate knowledge of classical, and even contemporary, literature as a consequence of sizeable unpublished or lost manuscripts. In fact, the scarcity of knowledge on classical literature has left critics with a fragmented and episodic picture of Kurdish literary history. In this article I evaluate Kurdish literary historiography in the light of the scarcity of information and examine its ideological foundation and methodological problems. I discuss the significance of collecting, editing and publishing documents and manuscripts as a crucial step in rewriting Kurdish literary history and the way this might change our understanding of Kurdish literature.

Keywords: Kurdish literature; literary history; literary canon; manuscript; classification; periodisation.

Astengên li ber nivîsîna tarîxa edebiyata kurdî: Pêşkeşkirin, tesnîfkirin, û qonaxbendî

Nivîsîna tarîxa edebiyata kurdî, anku nivîsîna tarîxa werar û geşeya edebiyata kurdî, hewldaneke nû ye. Rexnegirên edebî hewla wê yekê dane ku wêneyekî giştîgîr ê şîr û pexşana kurdî bikêşin û berhemên nivîseran jî di nav rewî û herketên edebî de bisenifînin. Lê belê, ev yek kar û erkeki zehmet e di çarçoveya edebiyata kurdî de, lewre windabûn an belavnebûna gelek ji destnîvîsan nahêle ku zanyariyên saxlem û berfireh bi dest bikevin li ser edebiyata klasîk û hevçerx. Lewma bi tenê zanyariyên belawela hene li ber destê me sebarek bi tarîxa edebiyata kurdî. Ev gotar binemayên îdeolojîk/hizirî yê tarîxnivîsiya edebiyata kurdî û kêşeyên wê yê metodolojîk rave dike û balê dikêşe ser girîngiya berhevkerin, amadekirin û belavkirina belge û destnîvîsan wek pêngaveke esasî di jinûve-nivîsîna tarîxa edebiyata kurdî de, hewldanek ku dikare têgihîştina me li ser edebiyata kurdî biguhere.

لەمەڕ مەکالی نووسینی مێژووی ئەدەبی کوردیی: پێشکەشکردن، یۆلنکردن، و ژێنکردن. نووسینی مێژووی ئەدەبی کوردیی، واتە نووسینی مێژووی گەشتی ئەدەبی کوردیی، یۆزژێمکی نوێیە. رەخنەگرانی ئەدەب لە هەولی ئەمەدان کە وێنەیەکێ گشتگیر لە گەشتی شێر و یەختانی کوردیی دەستەبەر بکەن و بەرھەمی نووسەرەکانیش لە ناو قوتابخانە و بزوتنە ئەدەبیەکاندا یۆلن بکەن. ئەمەش ئەرکێکی سەختە بۆ رەخنەگری کوردیی، چونکە ونبوون یان بۆنەبوونی دەست نووسەکان لەمەڕێکی زۆری بۆ بە دەست ھێنانی زانیاری سەبارەت بە ئەدەبی کلاسیکی و بگەرە ئەدەبی ھاوچەرخیش ھێناوتە ئاراوە. لە ناکامی ئەمەستا، بە ھۆی گرتنی کەمی زانیاری سەبارەت بە ئەدەبی کلاسیک، زانیارییەکی یجڕیجەرمان لە سەر مێژووی ئەدەبی کوردیییدا دیکۆتییە بەر دەست. ئەم لیکۆلێیەتیە بنەما نایدۆلۆژییەکانی مێژوونووسیی ئەدەبی کوردیی و کێشە مێتۆدۆلۆژییەکانی رافە دیکا. مەن، لەم لیکۆلێیەتیەدا، بەھا و واتەیی گەڵاڵکردن و بۆنکردنەیی ئەو دۆکیومێنت و دەستنووسانەیی کە بەر دەستن دەخامە بەر یاس کە دەپێتە ھەولێکی گرینگ بۆ نووسینی مێژووی ئەدەبی کوردیی. ئەم کارەش وەک ھەنگاوێکی وەرچەر خێرمانە، دەرکەرێ تێگەشتنمان لە سەر ئەدەبی کوردیی بگۆریت.

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What is literary history?

Literary history is the practice of recounting the development of a given body of literature.¹ As a recognised discipline it began with the antiquarian and the bibliographic cataloguing of manuscripts and books in the eighteenth century (Baldick, 2008; Perkins, 1993: 1), but with the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century the national “spirit” turned the discipline into the task of “re-discovery and celebration of the literary treasures ... of a given nation or linguistic community” (Baldick, 2008).

Though literary history enjoyed “unquestioned prestige” for about 70 years (Perkins, 1993: 1), its validity and foundations as an academic discipline began to be questioned from the early twentieth century onwards by critics of different backgrounds; the Formalists, the Marxists, and the Feminists. Later postcolonial and postmodern critics questioned the basis of the discipline and attempted to present new narratives. Feminists and postcolonial critics, for instance, questioned the creation of the literary canon which, in their view, had excluded both women and subject peoples in colonised countries, and urged the revising and the rewriting of literary history to recover silenced or marginalised subaltern voices. Such criticisms have made literary history more diverse and comprehensive.² Despite all the debates on the theoretical problems of writing literary history, in the last few decades (see for instance Perkins’s (1993) extensive debate in *Is Literary History Possible?*), literary histories are continuing to be written for various purposes. In this paper I explore the challenges and problems of writing Kurdish literary history by examining existing Kurdish literary histories, the narratives they present, the strategies they have employed and the canon they have formed.

Literary histories are written based on primary and secondary sources and, as Crane (1971: 1) argues, the first question to be considered in understanding literary history is “that of the materials”. A literary historian draws on a range of texts, literary and non-literary, and to present a plausible narrative and critical evaluation of these texts is the primary rule of the discipline. Therefore, the first step toward writing literary history is collecting, editing, and critically evaluating literary texts as the primary sources. But what happens if critics do

¹ The term “literary history” has been used to designate a variety of meanings; see Pelc’s (1975: 90) list of meanings (of the term) in “Some Methodological Problems in Literary History,” and Harris’ (1994: 436-439) argument in “What Is Literary “History”?” Harris traces a recent example of the diversity of usages of the term in six essays grouped under the topic of literary history in an issue of PMLA published in January 1992 and argues that the subjects of the essays are so diverse that had it not been for the introduction by the editor, it would have been “unlikely that most readers of the issue would recognise that the six essays constitute a group treating the topic of literary history” (1994: 436).

² Peterson (1999: 5-6) brings the example of a committee on the “Literature and Languages of America” formed in 1977 with the purpose of the reconstruction of the canon which resulted in four new literary histories: minority language and literature, Afro-American literature, American literatures, studies in American literature. In other words, the study tripled the size of the already large canon.

not have ample access to the primary sources? Is it possible to write a “reliable” history in the absence of the primary sources? This is the main challenge in writing Kurdish literary history, since a large part of Kurdish history and literature, both written and oral, is yet unavailable to scholars, mainly due to the loss of manuscripts and documents.

In *Sharafnāmah* (1964: 312-313)³, Sharaf Khān Bidlīsī mentions a few Kurdish poets who are unknown to scholars. For example, he mentions Yeḡūb Beg bin Muhemed Beyg who had a Diwan and was mainly writing in Kurdish, but this poet has not been mentioned in any other source. Likewise, van Bruinessen (2000: 8) refers to Evliya Çelebi’s book section on his travel to Amadiya in which the famous Turkish traveller noted, during his visit around 1660, the lively literary life of the city and cited a qasida⁴ by one of the local ulama, Molla Ramazan Kūrdiki, as “only one out of a rich body of Kurdish poetry” that he encountered there. Nevertheless, Kūrdiki and his poems are unknown to us and we are only acquainted with a few poets of this period.⁵ Another example is a eulogy for Kurdish poets by Rencūrî (1750?-1809?), an eminent Gurani poet, who names fifty five poets only eight of whom we have knowledge of and whose works are extant.⁶ This means that our understanding of Kurdish literature has been limited. By Kurdish literature I mean the literary production of the Kurdish dialects of Sorani, Kurmanji, and Gurani.⁷ It should also be noted that up until the late nineteenth century, Kurdish literature was predominantly poetry, and prose was only significantly practiced in the twentieth century. In this article I evaluate the Kurdish literary historiographies and their methodologies in the light of this scarcity of information and assess their representation or misrepresentation of Kurdish literature. I examine the Kurdish canon and probe if its formation has been premature. The classifications and periodisations Kurdish literary historians offer for the study of Kurdish literature and their problems will also be investigated.

³ *Sharafnāmah* is an important historic text about the Kurds written in Persian in 1597.

⁴ Qasida is a form of poetry with uniform meter and either monorhyme or stanzaic rhyme exceeding 15 verses in length which may belong to elegiac, the panegyric, the gnomic, or didactic modes of speech (Glünz, 1996: 183-184).

⁵ As van Bruinessen (2000: 8) rightly notes, due to Evliya we now know that Melayê Cizîrî was not an isolated figure but simply the best remembered, or perhaps the best, of a larger circle of poets writing in Kurdish.

⁶ Read the complete poem in Xeznedar’s *Mêjîyê Edebî Kurdî* (2002: 119-121).

⁷ The Kirmanckî (*Zazakî*) dialect has no written literary tradition. Its cultivation as a literary dialect began in diaspora in the 1970s thanks to the efforts of Zazaki intellectuals like Malmîsanij. The earliest classical texts in Zazakî, as Malmîsanij (2004: 41-43) notes, are two mawluds which were published in 1899 and 1933 (by *Mele Ebmedê Xasî* and Usman Efendiye Babijî) and no other literary texts were published until 1970s. Among the works published by Malmîsanij in Zazakî are *Ferbengê Dimilkî-Tirkî* (1987, Uppsala: Weşanên Jina Nû), *Folklorê Ma ra Çend Numûney* (1991, Uppsala: Weşanên Jina Nû), and *Mi Şêx Seîd Dî* (2009, İstanbul: Weşanxaneyê Vateyî).

The loss of Kurdish manuscripts

Manuscripts in the forms of “Diwan” (a collection of poetry), “Beyaz” (booklet or little notebook), and “Keşkoll” (anthology) were the means of distributing literary works before the emergence of printing, but their preservation and publication have faced various political and economic obstacles.⁸ Kurdistan has been the theatre of wars and battles resulting in the destruction of mosques, madrasas, and libraries and the subsequent loss of manuscripts. The situation worsened in the twentieth century when Kurds became the subjects of hostile nation-states with little or no tolerance towards their language and culture. Hassanpour (1990: 66) notes that “[M]ost manuscripts, especially those in private possession, were destroyed under repressive conditions in Turkey, Iran, and Syria”. In his famous memoir, *Çêştî Micêwir (The Verger’s Hotchpotch)*, in 1997, the acclaimed Kurdish-Iranian poet Hejar Mukriyanî (1920-1991), recalls the difficulty of retaining Kurdish books in Reza Shah Pahlavi’s time in the 1920s and 1930s and notes that, for fear of being arrested for possessing Kurdish books, people were forced to set fire to their books, or to bury them, including manuscripts.

The Kurdish language was not allowed to be taught, except on a limited scale in the USSR and Iraq, and the limited publications were subjected to state censorship. The first publication of *Mem û Zîn* in 1919 was suppressed by the Ottoman authorities and only a few copies were distributed (Hassanpour, 1990: 171). Political problems entailed economic difficulties and the lack of financial support which was making the costly processes of publishing sometimes impossible.⁹ It is due to such political and economic difficulties that a significant part of the manuscripts which have survived in private collections and libraries have remained unpublished, and as Mohemmed 'Elî Qeredaxî (2010: 139-141) rightly notes we have yet to establish the number of unpublished manuscripts in private libraries both in and outside of Kurdistan.¹⁰

In the first half of the twentieth century, Kurdish publication was mainly focused on papers and journals. Even by the 1950s, not much Kurdish classical literature was available in print, and the publication of Kurdish classics was mainly limited to excerpts in Kurdish papers and journals. In 1920, Emîn Feyzî Beg published *Encumenê Edîbanê Kurd (The Assembly of Kurdish Poets)* which was a short anthology of Kurdish poetry, and the first of its type in

⁸ For detailed information on printing, publishing and circulating Kurdish books see Hassanpour (1990).

⁹ For example Gîw Mukriyanî, the owner of Kurdistan Press, could not meet the costs of printing his largest dictionary, *Ferbengê Kurdistan*, and announced in 1957 that his manuscript “would be put at the disposal of anyone who could afford to publish it” (Hassanpour, 1990: 188-189).

¹⁰ Pîremêrd (2009: 29-32) in a note about Mehmûd Paşay Caf mentions a “keşkoll” (anthology) compiled and hand written by him that contained the Diwans of more than thirty two Kurdish poets including Nalî, Salim, Kurdî, Bêsarani and Xanay Qubadî. This anthology was especially valuable because it contained Mehmûd Paşa’s personal correspondence with Mewlewî and Mewlewî’s handwritten letters. Such a treasure, Pîremêrd mourned, was not preserved properly. It is not clear if this manuscript has survived.

Kurdish. His example was followed by ‘Elî Kemal Bapîr’s *Guldestey Şo’eray Haw’esrim* (An Anthology of Contemporary Poets) in 1939. The *Diwan* of Nalî, the prominent Baban poet, was first published in 1931, and then 1948, but it was not until 1976 that a good edition was published by ‘Ebdulkerîm Muderrês (Xeznedar, 2003: 47-48). Most of the early publications were poorly edited (for instance the *Diwan* of Salim in 1933), and went out of print very quickly because of their small numbers. In fact, the limited printing of these early publications, which were thus difficult to obtain, often led to them being turned into hand-written manuscripts to be redistributed. Kerîm Şareza and Serdar Mîran (2007: 15), the editors of the *Diwan* of Hacî Qadirê Koyî, mention among their sources, a hand-written manuscript based on the first published *Diwan* of Hacî Qadir by ‘Ebdurehman Seîd in 1925. The interesting point about this manuscript is that it corrected the mistakes of Seîd’s published version. The author seems to have edited the work for his own use and thus preserved a refined version of the *Diwan* which proved to be very helpful later for Şareza and Mîran in editing Hacî Qadir’s poetry. Therefore, manuscripts, in the absence of organised systematic publishing, have been a major source of literary historiographies, anthologies and studies of Kurdish literature and the lost or as yet undiscovered manuscripts constitute a significant loss to the Kurdish literary heritage.

In recent years the discovery and publication of manuscripts has started to modify the understanding of Kurdish literature and even our contemporary understanding is likely to change with future discoveries. A glance at the works produced in the last decade or so reveals the significance of publishing new materials so as to better understand the past and to produce more comprehensive studies. We now know, for instance, that Kurdish *Shâhnâma* was a significant genre in Gurani poetry¹¹ and more is known about Kurdish women poets than ever before, thanks to the discovery and publication of new manuscripts. A recent example is the republication in 2005 of the *Diwan* of Mestûrey Erdelanî, which contained her lesser known Kurdish poems while she was generally assumed to have only written in Persian. Her *Diwan* was published by Aras press, with her other works and their Kurdish translation, as well as papers presented in a commemoration festival of the 200th anniversary of her birth.¹² The publication of these works revealed significant, previously unknown aspects of her life and career. Such new findings make the reassessment of Kurdish literary history and the revaluation of canon formation indispensable.

¹¹ See Chamanara, B. (2013), who has collected 62 different manuscripts of Kurdish *Shâhnâmas* for the purpose of his PhD dissertation.

¹² *Bîranînî Mestûrey Erdelan Şa’er û Mějûnûsî Nawdarî Kurd, Fêstîvalî Mestûrey Erdelan*. (2006). Hewlêr: Aras.

Kurdish literary histories

Literary history has been written for various purposes. Perkins (1993: 12-13) argues that literary history is written to recall and organise the literature of the past through the process of selection and evaluation of texts and authors, and to interpret literary works and periods and their characteristics by “relating them to their historical contexts”. To his list we can add reviving and celebrating the past as a way of constructing one’s identity and a step toward nation formation for the Kurds, which in fact has been the prime motive of writing literary histories as well as anthologies.¹³ The political agenda of Kurdish literary historians is revealed in the introductions to their works where they explain their motivations for undertaking such a huge task. 'Elaedîn Secadî, who wrote the first Kurdish literary history, *Mêjûy Edebî Kurdî* (The History of Kurdish Literature), writes in his (1952/2012: 31-33) introduction,

One day I was reading a text and as I was pondering upon it, it occurred to me who am I? Am I English? No. Am I Arab? No. I am a Kurd and from the Kurdish nation which is an independent and recognised nation in the world. As I was immersed in my thoughts I came to the conclusion that a nation should have its own language, literature and history and if not, it is of no significance and will be neglected ... finally I decided I will write a literary history for myself, and for my people, of which we have been deprived, and so that our children can stand among nations with a [written] literary history.¹⁴

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He is aware of the challenges of writing Kurdish literary history on his own and does not expect his work to be perfect; however he feels the need for there to be one (1952/2012: 33). For Secadî, writing literary history was part of the Kurdish struggle and it is for this reason that he wrote extensively on the history of the Kurds and the Kurdish language, Kurdish mythology, Kurdish social life and the population in different countries. This practice of devoting extensive sections to Kurdish history and social, political, and cultural life was also followed by Marif Xeznedar, Kurdish critic and writer, in his *Mêjûy Edebî Kurdî* (The History of Kurdish Literature) (2001-2006).

Qenatê Kurdo (1992: 7-8), renowned Kurdish philologist and academic, writes in the preface to his book *Tarixxa Edebyeta Kurdî*:

Today every Kurdish man and woman wants to learn the history of their nation and their literature in their mother tongue. Our Kurdish

¹³ Ideological motives behind the creation of literary histories and anthologies have been experienced by all nations and are not exclusive to the Kurds. Theodore O. Mason (1998: 187) in reviewing *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (1997) notes that from the first pages of the introduction to the closing pages of the book, some 2,600 pages, the literature contained in the Anthology “represents an ongoing discussion about the role of literature as a means toward national liberation”.

¹⁴ All translations in this article are mine unless specified otherwise.

youth, in their social gatherings often ask who has done what and when in Kurdish history? Who was truly concerned, fought and made an effort for Kurdish people? And the answers to all these questions are to be found in literary history. Kurdish literary history reveals that in the heart of the Mountains of Kurdistan there have existed many fine, noble, knowledgeable poets, bards and singers and that the Kurdish nation has brought up courageous and heroic personalities (“mêrên delîr, [û] qehreman”) who have created such great things that amaze the people of this age.

The poets and the authors, in the nationalistic view of Kurdo, are not merely writers, but the “heroes” of the nation. Such nationalistic views, in addition to the scarcity of resources and traditional literary criticism in reading and interpreting the literary texts, has led to serious flaws in historical accounts of Kurdish literature as I will discuss in the following section. I have studied the available Kurdish literary histories and anthologies written by Kurdish scholars and literary critics for the critique I present in this article¹⁵ I include anthologies in my study because they are as important as literary histories in creating the canon formation and are used for the purposes of instruction and entertainment even more than the literary histories. Their account of Kurdish literature and their presentations should be looked at critically, because order, inclusion, and exclusion are conscious acts of anthologists and, as Srivastava (2010: 162) notes, an anthologist is not simply a conservator of the canon, but an active agent in its invention.

Secadî's *Mêjûy Edebî Kurdî* (1952) remained a main reference on Kurdish literary history for decades, until 1983 when Qenatê Kurdo published the first volume of *Tarîxa Edebyeta Kurdî* which was followed by the second volume in 1985 (both were reprinted in one volume in 1992). Another two important relevant works on literary history were published in the same decade: Marif Xeznedar's *Li Babet Mêjûy Edebî Kurdîyewe* (On Kurdish Literary History, 1984) and Îzzedîn Mustefa Resûl's *Edebiyatî Nivêyî Kurdî* (Modern Kurdish Poetry, 1989). Sidîq Borekeyî (Sefizade) published his *Mêjûy Wêjeyî Kurdî* (The History of Kurdish Literature) in 1991 and then it was a further ten years before any significant work on Kurdish literary history was produced, when in 2001 Xezendar published his extensive work, *Mêjûy Edebî Kurdî* in seven volumes. Among the more recent works on Kurdish literary history one can mention Abdurrahman Adak's *Destpêka Edebiyeta Kurdî ya Klasîk* (The Birth of Kurdish Classical Literature, 2013), and Bakhtiar Sadjadi's *Kolîyat-e Tarîkêb-e She'r-e Kordî* (An Introduction to the History of Kurdish Poetry, 2006) in Persian.

¹⁵ There are a few studies on Kurdish literature by western scholars such as Joyce Blau, Philip Kreyenbroek, and David MacKenzie. However, no extensive literary history has been written by Western scholars, hence not being discussed in this article.

In this article, for anthologies, I review Refîq Hilmî's *Şê'r û Edebiyatê Kurdî* (Kurdish Poetry and Literature, 1941-56/1988),¹⁶ Kakey Felah's *Karwanê Şê'ri Nwêy Kurdî* (The Caravan of Modern Kurdish Poetry, 1978),¹⁷ Sadiq Behadîn Amêdi's *Hozanvanê Kurd* (Kurdish Poets, 1980), Balî's *Antolojîya Helbestvanên Kurd* (An Anthology of Kurdish Poets, 1992), Mehmed Uzun's *Antolojîya Edebiyata Kurdî* (An Anthology of Kurdish Literature, 1990) which was republished in one volume in 2003, and Selim Temo's *Kürt Şiiri Antolojisi* (An Anthology of Kurdish Poetry, 2007). These works have inclusive titles and I will examine them against their claim of being anthologies of "Kurdish" literature. I have not included works which deal with the literature of one specific dialect and do not claim to be representative of all Kurdish literature, such as Celîlê Celîl's *Keşkûla Kurmançî* (2004) which is an anthology of Kurmanji poetry. I present my criticism of Kurdish literary historiography in three sections: the question of exclusions and inclusions, the validity of the information, and the periodisation of Kurdish literature.

Exclusions/inclusions

The question of choice over what to include and exclude has been the main issue of literary historians and they are often criticised for their manipulative choice to justify a specific narrative (Perkins, 1993: 3). Yet, historians have to select and limit their studies to be able to classify and study literature. Representation, as Perkins justifiably states, can never be complete and literary historians and theorists have always recognised this, but the question, as he rightly notes, is "how much incompleteness is acceptable" (1993: 13). He (ibid.) highlights that:

Incomplete representations and partial explanations are not usually criticised as seriously distorting the past by their omissions. But if a literary historian leaves out particular considerations that are important to other historians, or if his account of the past is obviously not thick enough, incompleteness will be viewed as misrepresentation.

The most noticeable exclusions in Kurdish literary historiographies are the exclusion of oral literature and the literature of certain dialects. Literary historians seem to have a notion of literature based only on written literature and for this reason oral literature is not included in their studies. The only literary historian to discuss oral literature, though briefly, is Xeznedar. Allison (2010: 135-136) notes that valuable collections of Kurdish oral literature have been made and published by Kurdish scholars (such as the Celîl brothers's *Zargotîna K'urda* 1978), but they are "only a small proportion of the available

¹⁶ The first volume of the book was published in 1941 and the second volume in 1956 in Baghdad. In 1988 they were reprinted as one volume.

¹⁷ Although there is no reference to "anthology" in the title of these two works their structure is similar to critical anthologies and both are important works in Kurdish literary studies.

materials". Studies of the oral literature, as Allison (2010: 136) remarks, are also scant.¹⁸ Kurdish literary historiography should incorporate oral literature and its study as a valuable part of Kurdish literature and important source of inspiration for written literature.¹⁹

Despite their inclusive titles Kurdish literary histories and anthologies, apart from Marif Xeznedar's *Mêjûy Edebî Kurdî* (2001-2006) and Selîm Temo's anthology (2007), present incomplete pictures of Kurdish literature and the literature of one or two dialects is either excluded or noticeably marginalised. Secadî's *Mêjûy Edebî Kurdî* (1952/2012), as the first Kurdish literary history, discusses twenty four poets, of whom two are Kurmanji (Cizîrî and Xanî) and four are Gurani. This is due to the fact that he did not have enough material for his work, and he acknowledges this in his introduction by emphasising that in conducting the project he had to face two main obstacles, the lack of resources and the diversity of the dialects. Nevertheless, this exclusion was repeated in Kurdish literary studies until 1990 and for decades the knowledge of Kurmanji poetry was limited to Melayê Cizîrî and Ehmedê Xanî. Qenatê Kurdo, in the preface to *Tarîxa Edebyeta Kurdî* (1992: 9), rightly complains that "reading Sorani sources on Kurdish literature one assumes only Sorani has a rich literature, but if we read the classical literature well, we realise Kurmanji and Gurani are also rich and had a significant literary tradition." Ironically despite this critical view on the question of choice he did not mention a single Gurani poet in his work.

The continued exclusion of Kurmanji and Gurani literature in literary studies, as I argue in my doctoral dissertation, has resulted in the production of definitions, classifications and interpretations based only on Sorani literature (Ghaderi 2015, forthcoming). A case in point that I discuss (ibid.) is a three-day seminar on Kurdish classical poetry that was held in Sulaimaniya in 1981 in which most of the recognised Iraqi Kurdish literary critics such as Kakey Fellah, Kamîl Besîr, Muhemmedî Mela Kerîm and Kameran Mukrî presented papers. These papers were later published in the *Beyan* journal and ultimately in a book, *Dîdarî Şê'rî Kilasîkî Kurdî* (Revisiting Kurdish Classical Poetry) in 1986. Discussing the implication of the term "Classic", Kakey Fellah suggested a definition of classical poetry which was widely recognised and has become an accepted definition in Kurdish literary studies. Felah (1986: 293-5) suggested that classical poetry has the following features: 1) the poems are in Aruzi meter. 2) Ghazal and Qasida are the main poetic forms, though satire, elegy, and eulogy are also common. 3) There is no thematic unity in the poems and each line has an independent meaning. 4) The poems are presented in alphabetical order in Diwans. 5) Arabic and Persian words are frequently used, and 6) the poems have a certain repertoire of images and metaphors

¹⁸ For a critical introduction to Kurdish oral literature see Allison's (2010: 33-69) chapter on Kurdish Oral Literature in Kreyenbroek and Marzolph's *Oral Literature of Iranian Languages*.

¹⁹ For similar critique on Persian literary historiography see Clinton (1994).

which are repeated. This definition, though indicating the main features of classical poetry, is by no means inclusive, because it has not taken into account classical Gurani poetry at all. Classical Gurani poetry did not apply Aruz, had a different rhyme scheme than those of Sorani and Kurmanji and had exclusive literary forms (e.g., Hawrami ghazal). Throughout the seminar there was only one paper on classical Kurmanji poetry, which discussed only Melayê Cizîrî and Xanî. The book of the seminar contains the Q&A after each paper and interestingly Gurani poetry was not mentioned at all. Thus, certain definitions and classifications of literature were made, based predominantly on Sorani literature.

Nevertheless, the vindication of Kurmanji literature was started first by the anthology of Sadiq Behadîn Amêdî, *Hozanvanê Kurd* (1980), in which he introduced twelve poets of Badinan and five Kurmanji poets ('Elî Herîrî, Feqiyê Teyran, Melayê Cizîrî, Xanî, and Pertew Hekarî). He did not include any Sorani and Gurani poets in his anthology. Qenatê Kurdo's *Tarixxa Edebyeta Kurdî* (1992) was the second attempt to reintroduce Kurmanji poetry to Kurdish literary studies. He, nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, did not include Gurani poetry. In 1991 Borekeyî published *Mêjûyî Wêjeyê Kurdî* in two volumes, which was by far the most extensive literary history up until that point and listed three hundred and sixty four poets of whom, only fourteen were Kurmanji. Although his book suffers serious methodological flaws, as I will discuss below, it was successful in redrawing attention to Gurani poetry and bringing it back to the Kurdish literary canon. In addition to being the language of sacred Yarsan texts, Gurani poetry formed a significant school of Kurdish poetry from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century; thus it is indispensable in Kurdish literary studies. Gurani poetry is also absent in Balî's and Uzun's anthologies. Balî (1992) mentions sixty four poets of whom forty three are Kurmanji and nineteen are Sorani, and Uzun (2003) mentions eighty two Kurmanji and nineteen Sorani poets. Sadjadi, who published the first Kurdish literary history in Persian (2006), limits his discussion of Kurmanji poetry to the works of Cizîrî and Xanî. The table illustrates the number of poets of each dialect in the mentioned works.

Source	Sorani	Kurmanji	Gurani
'Elaedîn Secadî (1952/2012)	17	2	4
Refîq Hilmî (1941-56/1988)	22	0	0
Kakey Felah (1978)	9	0	0
Sadiq B. Amêdî (1980)	0	17	0
Qenatê Kurdo (1983-85/1992)	20	13	0
Balî (1992)	19	43	0
Mehmet Uzun (1990/2003)	22	77	0

As the table illustrates, Gurani poetry is the most excluded, a fact that is reflected not only in the accounts of literary histories and anthologies, but also in the number of academic studies, theses and dissertations on it. In contrast,

Xeznedar begins his *Mêjîy Edebî Kurdî* with the Gurani poetry of the Yarsans and the poets of the Ardalan period. His work is the most extensive Kurdish literary history to date. Furthermore, in 2007 Selim Temo published an extensive anthology in Turkish in which he included a number of Gurani poets hitherto unknown to Kurmanji readers. He also mentions eleven Zazaki poets. These two works have remained the main attempts to draw a more comprehensive picture of Kurdish literature.

Refîq Hilmî's *Şê'r û Edebiyatî Kurdî* (1941-56) and Kakey Felah's *Karwanî Şê'rî Nwêy Kurdî* (1978), despite their inclusive titles, "Kurdish Poetry and Literature" and "The Caravan of Kurdish Modern Poetry," are exclusive studies of the Sorani poetry of Iraqî Kurdistan. *Şê'r û Edebiyatî Kurdî* (1941-56) gives a critical account of twenty two poets of Iraqî Kurdistan in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, and *Karwanî Şê'rî Nwêy Kurdî* (1978) presents a detailed study of the works of nine modern poets of Iraqî Kurdistan. Although Hilmî clarifies in the dedication page that his work is dealing with a selection of poets from Iraqî Kurdistan, he does not explain why his selection is confined only to the Sorani poets of this region. Likewise, Kakey Felah does not clarify how in a study of modern Sorani poetry Hêmin Mukriyanî, the prominent Sorani poet from Mahabad, was left out. The lack of adequate resources, unfamiliarity with other Kurdish dialects, regional and political fragmentations can be mentioned among the main reasons for such exclusions.

Studying the inclusions and exclusions will also reveal methodological flaws in the writing of Kurdish literary history. When Borekeyî mentions three hundred and sixty poets and Temo names one hundred and thirty one poets in the first volume of his work alone²⁰, we must ask what methodologies were employed to excavate so many obscure figures. Both are particularly extensive in the number of Yarsan poets they include yet, except for *Saranjam* and a few other Yarsan sacred texts, their sources for this inclusion are not very clear. Borekeyî constantly refers to manuscripts "in his possession" without providing their details. They both seem to have taken the names of almost all Yarsan pirs as poets without taking into account the question of authorship. Some of the poets they mention have only a few poems ascribed to them in the Yarsan sacred texts, for instance Balûlî Mahî, Baba Receb Loristanî, and Baba Hatemî Loristanî.

Another interesting example is the inclusion of Malek al-Kalâm-e Majdî by Secadî in *Mêjîy Edebî Kurdî* (1952/2012) as a prominent Kurdish poet even though only one complete Kurdish poem of his is known to scholars (he had a Diwan of Persian poetry). Secadî argues that despite knowing of only one Kurdish poem by Majdî the quality of this single poem testifies that the poet must have written more Kurdish poems which have been lost. This argument is persuasive, yet not sufficient and efforts are needed to find out more about Majdî's works and writings. Secadî could have mentioned Majdî as a Kurdish

²⁰ In his two volumes Temo mentions two hundred and ninety two poets.

poet who was writing in a language other than Kurdish, but including him among the pillars of Kurdish poetry such as Cizîrî, Bêsarani, and Nalî is unjustified. His inclusion was not made because of his contributions to Kurdish literature, but more likely because of his status in Persian literature. Majdî was given the title of “Malek al-Kalâm” (The King of Words) by Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, the king of Persia.

Consciously or unconsciously, literary historians and anthologists create canons and institutionalise the national literature through their selection. But, marginalising or ignoring the literary production of a dialect, a region, or a movement produces a distorted picture of literature and fail the mission of creating a national literature.

The validity of the information

Little is known about Kurdish literature before the nineteenth century and we have only a vague and fragmented picture of the literature of the pre-modern period, due to the lack of adequate resources. A question to be asked is what methodologies Kurdish literary historians have applied in gathering information and how reliable this information and their interpretations are? I will attempt to answer this question in the following three sections: the historical dates, the poets’ biographies, and the representation of the literary works.

Historical dates

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Despite the recurrent emphasis on the lack of resources as a major obstacle in writing Kurdish literary history, Kurdish historians have suggested exact dates for the life and the death of poets and the rise and the fall of literary schools with hardly any justification or explanation. In fact, only Secadî and Xeznedar, albeit occasionally, explain the process of deducing the historical dates, yet there is rarely enough evidence for their estimations and their conjectures often turn out to be uninformed guesses. It is for this reason that the critics often do not agree on dates and sometimes the differences are significant. The suggested dates for Melayê Cizîrî in the table below illustrate these discrepancies.

	Secadî (1952/2012)	Borekeyî (1991)	Kurdo (1983- 85/1992)	Xeznedar (2001-2006)	Temo (2007)
Melayê Cizîrî	1407-1481	1565-1638	12 th century	1567-1640	1566-1640

The poems are often the only source of information and critics read the lines closely in order to find clues to dates, historical periods, patrons, and the philosophy and the ideology of the poets, but reading and interpreting the poems is often a subjective act. As far as the date of birth and the completion of works are concerned, poets had the habit of indicating the dates either directly in number or in disguise in “Abjad” numerals, a decimal numeral system in which the twenty eight letters of the Arabic alphabet are assigned nu-

merical values.²¹ An example of the first category is a “mi’rāj Nāmeḥ”²² by Rencûrî (1750?-1809?) in which the poet indicates the completion date in the last line of the poem;

“Ew seney Mérac nezmiş weko bê etrîxeş hezar û dû sed û no bê”

The composition of [this] mi’rāj [nāmeḥ] was completed in 1209.

Thus, 1209 Hijri/ 1794 A.D. is the date the poet completed this qasida (as cited in Xeznedar, 2002: 117). An example of the use of the Abjad numeral system is the concluding lines of Xanay Qubadî’s *Xosrow û Şîrîn* (as cited in Xeznedar, 2002: 90-91):

“Ezîzîolqedrê ew çon Nizamî bipirso te’rîx ey namey namî

X’eyn” û “qaf” û “nûn”, “cîm” kero hîsab lêş mebo renşen çon qorsê aştab”

If a nobleman like Nizami asked about the date of this composition

Let him calculate the letters “x” (خ) “q” (ق), “n” (ن), and “j” (ج) and the date will be as clear as the sun.

The value of the letters “x,” “q,” “n,” and “j” gives the completion date of the epic of *Xosrow û Şîrîn* which is 1153 Hijri/ 1741 A.D.²³

But the poets did not always give clear indications of the dates, and literary critics have to look for external sources or other hints in the poems. Reading poetry for hints concerning the period of the poet, or relying on external sources, has to be done with care, as otherwise this could result in unsubstantiated speculations. Studying Kurdish literary history reveals many examples of such speculations. Melayê Cizîrî is an interesting case in this respect, as almost every critic has come up with a conjecture of his period and, as illustrated in the table, they disagree in centuries. To reveal methodological problems I will examine Secadî’s (1952/2012) and Kurdo’s (1992) arguments for their suggested dates for Melayê Cizîrî.

Secadî (1952/2012: 189) refers to the notable Polish Orientalist²⁴ Alexander Jaba’s claim, which was based on Mela Mehmûd Bayezîdî’s information, that Cizîrî lived in 540-556/ 1145-1160²⁵ and notes that Martin Hatrmann, eminent German Islamic scholar, had the same view, but he refuses both

²¹ For more on “ḥesâb-e abîad”, the use of letters as numbers, see Krotkoff, G. Abjad. *Encyclopedia Iranica*, I/2, 221-222. An updated version is available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abjad> (last accessed 27 May 2015).

²² Mi’rāj Nāmeḥ is a long qasida written in praise of the prophet Muhammad and the account of his ascension into heaven (*mi’rāj*).

²³ The numerical value of the letter “x” in the Abjad system is 1000, the letter “q” is 100, “n” is 50, and “j” is 3. Their total is, therefore, 1153.

²⁴ Jaba published *Recueil de notices et récits kourdes*—a collection of Kurdish tales with a French translation in 1860 and the first Kurdish-French dictionary in 1879.

²⁵ Bayezîdî gives Cizîrî the life-span of 16 years, (1145-1161), but this glaring error was glossed over by Jaba and other critics before MacKenzie exposed its unreliability in 1969/1986.

views since there is reference to Hafez in Cizîrî's poetry and Hafez lived in the fourteenth century;

Ger lu'luê mensuri ji nezmê tu dixwazî wer şê'rê Melê bîn te bi Şîraz çî hacet

If you want strewn pearls from verse, come and see Mala's poems, what need do you have of Shiraz?

Secadî argues that Hafez died in 1391 and at least thirty years were needed for his poems to have reached and been distributed in Kurdistan in the way that Cizîrî refers to, thus suggests 1407 as Cizîrî's date of birth without further explanation (1952/2012: 190). Secadî refutes those arguments which claim that the lines referring to Hafez in Cizîrî's Diwan had been added in later periods. For Cizîrî's death, Secadî suggests 1481 based on his interpretation of a verse ascribed to Jami (1413-1492), the prominent Persian sufi and poet, which is claimed to be referring to a meeting with Cizîrî.

Pîremardî bedidam ze Jazîr Nîme Mardi Bedidam ze Harîr

I saw an old man from Jazîr and a half man from Harîr.

Secadî (1952/2012: 190-193) claims that "the old man from Jazîr" refers to Melayê Cizîrî when Jami met him in his Hajj pilgrimage, but he does not substantiate this claim. He also claims that since Cizîrî is referred to as an old man he must have been 60-70 years old. The poem, he argues, was written in 1472, thus he comes to the conclusion that Cizîrî passed away in 1481, when he was 60-70 years old, with no further explanation. All the claims are based on his subjective interpretation of a verse.

Qenatê Kurdo (1992: 90-91) refers to an article of Wezîrê Nadîrî which argues that Cizîrî lived 1101 to 1169 and finds it "close to reality" (ibid.) Nadîrî, Kurdo quotes (ibid.), held that the lines referring to Hafîz were added to Cizîrî's Diwan after his death²⁶ and interprets some of Cizîrî's verses as having reference to the Saljuq attacks on Kurdistan which he witnessed. However, he does not explain from which verses he and Nadîrî have inferred their understanding. What Secadî and Kurdo both forget is the undeniable mark of the 'Erâqî style (sabk-e 'Erâqî) of Persian poetry and Hafez as one of its eminent representatives, in Cizîrî's style, diction and form. In other words Cizîrî's poetry reflects the clear influence of Hafez so it is not really important if there is any direct reference to Hafez in his poetry or not. Kurdish literary histories are replete with such ungrounded dates and arguments and a critical examination of the suggested dates will expose their unreliability.

A famous example of exposing the unreliability of these dates is MacKenzie's study of Bayezîdî's (and Jaba's) suggested dates for the period of Melayê Cizîrî and Feqiyê Teyran. MacKenzie suggests 1640 for Cizîrî's death, based on the suggestions of the Muftî of Qamîşlî (who published an edition of Cizîrî's Diwan with Arabic translation) and an elegy by Feqiyê Teyran. Muftî

²⁶ Hartmann held the same view and denied the authenticity of the tarkib-band by Cizîrî which quotes the first ghazal of Hafez (MacKenzie, 1986: 27).

argued that Feqiyê Teyran and Melayê Cizîrî were contemporaries, based on a poem which is in the form of a correspondence between them. He then finds a poem of Feqiyê Teyran with an explicit date of completion, 1041/ 1631, and suggests that Cizîrî lived in about 1640 (1986²⁷: 27-29). MacKenzie (1986: 30) then refers to an elegy by Feqî for Cizîrî, quoted by Celadet Bedir Xan in Hawar in a paper entitled “Klasîken me,” which indicates 1050/1640 as the date of death, confirming what Muftî surmised.

The poet's biography

Very little is known about the life of the classical poets. The absence of “Tazkares” (biographical anthologies) and adequate resources have made writing the account of the classical poet's life a difficult and a challenging task. But there are many examples in Kurdish literary histories where precise information is given about the poet's education, love life, and social life, yet with no verification, except for subjective interpretations of the poet's verses. An extreme case is perhaps Secadî (1952) and his detailed information on the poet's physical features, way of speaking and dressing. While in the introduction to his book he acknowledges that he did not have enough resources to write his work he does not explain how he (1952/2012: 195) can talk about Melayê Cizîrî as “a good-looking, tall and slim man, with big black eyes, long eyelashes, thick eyebrows, small nose and a round face in his smart clothes...” Secadî gives detailed information on Cizîrî's way of dressing and outfits as a young and an old man.

Secadî follows the same manner in introducing other poets (for instance, see Kurdî (p. 324) Şêx Reza (p. 369), and Mehwi (p. 354)). Interestingly, almost all classical poets are portrayed as handsome men with faces like Persian miniatures (small nose, thick eyebrows, and big eyes with long eyelashes). Secadî, as a nationalist author and critic, attempts to present an enchanting picture of the classical poets for his readers. He has rightly been criticised for his language and style by Sadjadi (2010: 242), who argues that a critical historical work should adopt an objective language.²⁸ The information Secadî, and other critics give about the poets' lives should be taken with caution as they often do not have much basis in fact.

Unfounded information sometimes affects the reading and the interpretation of literary texts and leads to further misunderstandings and flaws. For instance, in introducing Bêsarani, Xeznedar (2002: 39) claims that he was in love with a girl named Amîne who was from Paygelan village. What is striking is that this information which has been repeated by other critics, albeit without any support, has become the central point in interpreting Bêsarani's poems as we can see in the following verse:

Çillê ce pena, çillê ce pena (a branch, oh a branch of a tree)

²⁷ MacKenzie's paper was first published in Minovi and Afşar (1969).

²⁸ Despite his critical views on Kurdish literary histories, Sadjadi (2006) repeats most of the information given by Secadî and Xeznedar uncritically.

Çilê çon reqîb medran ce pena (a branch like a rival)
Hor aman medran nerîy temenna (veils the face of my desire)
Mer badê qudret bideroş fena (may it be destroyed by the strongest wind)
We badê qudret letar letar bo (may it be broken into pieces)
Nimazo ballay qîblem dîyar bo (it veils the sight of my beloved)

Xeznedar (2002: 41), in explaining the poem writes that Bêsarani was once standing on the rooftop of the mosque in Paygelan, admiring his beloved, Amîne, when the large branches of a berry tree in the garden became an obstacle and did not allow him to see his beloved properly. The tree, he says, became a wall, separating the poet from his love. Xeznedar presents a literal reading of the poem and there are many examples of this kind in Xeznedar's and other literary histories, where only a literal interpretation of a poem is offered. New theoretical methods and literary theories, more often than not, are absent in the readings and interpretations of the literary texts in Kurdish literary history.

Misrepresenting the literary works/poor editing

Excerpts of literary works are presented in literary histories and anthologies to illustrate the works of authors, poets and literary periods. The selected literary works and pieces will be canonised since they are assumed to have been "the best" literary works. Because literary histories and anthologies play a major role in canon-formation, recording the literary works correctly is of great importance. However, this has been proved to be a challenging task for Kurdish historians and anthologists as they are relying on sources which are often poorly edited. The mere publication of Kurdish works against the backdrop of political and economic problems was a triumphant achievement for decades and presenting well-edited Diwans was not a priority. In most cases little effort was made in editing manuscripts for the purpose of publication. Historians and anthologists, therefore, should be cautious about selecting their sources and if necessary seek editorial help. But the existing literary histories and anthologies reveal many examples of recording poorly-edited literary works. Hekîm Mela Salih, a Kurdish critic, in an article titled "Bêsarani le *Mêjûy Edebî Kurdî* da" (Bêsarani in the History of Kurdish Literature) (2007) criticises Xeznedar's misquoting/misrepresenting and misreading Gurani poetry in *Mêjûy Edebî Kurdî* by illustrating the misspelled words and omissions in the texts as well as wrong definitions of the Gurani words. In Xeznedar's (2002: 28-35) second volume of *Mêjûy Edebî Kurdî*, a poem of Êl Begî Caf, "Kê we qewlî kê eka," is quoted which although in Gurani, contains words from the Mukriyani dialect with no explanation or clarification.

The question of authorship has also not been taken seriously by Kurdish literary historians and anthologists. There are examples where certain verses have been attributed to more than one poet. An interesting example is a number of poems which have been ascribed to Mehzûni and Bêsarani as two individual poets in different resources, until Enwer Soltani in an article, "Mezhûni yan Bêsarani?" (1998), argued that they are not two separate poets, but Mezhûni is Bêsarani's pen-name. His argument was based on his study of an an-

thology of Gurani poetry, *Keşkolî Şêx Ebdulmo'min*, a manuscript in the possession of the British museum (he published the manuscript as *Anthology of Gorani Poetry* in 1998). The manuscript contains three hundred and eighty one poems by thirty nine poets and Soltanî noticed that most of the poems which are known to be Bêsarani's, such as "Çiraxîyat," have been ascribed to Mehzûnî in the manuscript. Soltanî (1998: 64) also noticed that fifty eight of the famous Çiraxîyat poems, which are named as Mehzûnî's in the manuscript, exist in Nik Raftar's well-edited Diwan of Bêsarani. He (1998: 65) thereby speculated that Mehzûnî and Bêsarani are the same person, a speculation which has been confirmed by two leading authorities of Gurani poetry, Seyyêd Tahir Haşemî and Muhemmed 'Elî Soltanî (1998: 64-65). The argument, whilst remaining speculative, has shed new light on Gurani poetry. Thus further investigation is required in order to present a more precise understanding of Kurdish literature and literary history.

The question of classification/periodisation

The order and classification of the literary periods are conscious choices by literary historians and editors, for which they are often questioned and criticised. The temporal succession of writers, Crane (1971: 24) observes, is broken by divisions into:

periods or ages, the definitions of which are sometimes drawn merely from the calendar ..., sometimes from the changes of rulers or other political transformations, sometimes from phases in the general history of culture (for example, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment), and frequently, as in many 'survey' histories of the standard sort, from an eclectic mixture of these and other similarly external criteria.

In Kurdish literary histories different styles of classification and order have been applied. Secadî (1952/2012), in his first Kurdish literary history, did not offer a classification and followed a temporary succession in listing his poets. The first five poets he mentions are: Baba Taher, Melayê Cizîrî, Bêsarani, Ehmedê Xanî, and Nalî. He is criticised by Sadjadî (2010: 243), for presenting poets of different periods, dialects and literary schools in a row, who describes this as a nationalistic gesture. What Secadî presents is a homogenous picture of Kurdish literature which does not reflect its fragmented and episodic nature. Furthermore, referring to Baba Taher as the first Kurdish poet is controversial. Although this has been repeated by other literary historians, and has been consolidated in the school textbooks of Iraqî Kurdistan, Baba Taher is not considered a Kurdish poet outside of Kurdistan.²⁹ A similar

²⁹ His Kurdishness has been refuted by Persian scholars, as well as famous orientalists like Minorsky, for linguistic and technical reasons; nonetheless there is a consensus that there is a certain degree of dialectal usage in his poems (De Bruijn, 1997: 14; Minorsky, 2013: para. 6), and there are arguments that they were recited in Luri (De Bruijn, 1997: 14). But, Kurdish critics

strategy of not following an order is particularly noticeable in the anthologies. Uzun's anthology (2003), for instance, does not follow any order, dialectal or temporal; in his anthology Kurdish poets of different historical periods, dialects, and schools are listed at will. Balî (1992) also lists his poets alphabetically, following the tradition of compiling Diwans.³⁰ Not following any order, however, has been advocated by postmodernist critics as implying no hierarchy.

Qenatê Kurdo (1992) is perhaps the first critic who classified Kurdish literary history according to the dialects; his book has two sections, Sorani and Kurmanji poetry. Almost a decade later Borekeyî (1991) suggested a classification based on the history of Kurdish emirates and principalities, following the traditional historiographies of Persian or Arabic literatures which were based on dynastic history. He suggested:

- 1- Benî Dolef poets (210-285/ 825-898)
- 2- Hesnewîye (330-406/ 941-1015)
- 3- Eyyarî (380-510/ 990-1116)
- 4- Îzedî (5th- 7th/ 11th-13th)
- 5- Etabegyetî period (550-827/ 1155-1424)
- 6- Erdelan period (616-1285/ 1219-1868)
- 7- Xalêdî period (650-1306/ 1252-1890)
- 8- Baban period (1088-1267/ 1677-1850)

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Borekeyî is the only literary historian to talk about the poetry of the Hesnewîye or the Etabegyetî periods and his classification is probably serving certain ideological interests. The poems he presents as examples of the first five periods, except for the Îzedîs, are all from Yarsan poetry and could hardly be justified as different literary schools, from a literary point of view. The last three stages (the Erdelan, the Xalêdî, and the Baban), however, are widely accepted as the main periods of classical Kurdish poetry although with different nomenclature and dates. He starts with Balulî Mahî (ninth century) and Yarsan poetry, before mentioning Baba Taher as a Kurdish poet of the eleventh century. He considers all the Yarsan pîrs as poets even though some have only a few verses ascribed to them and their authorship is contested. Selîm Temo (2007) follows Borekeyî in presenting a long list of Yarsan poets in his anthology without explaining the mechanism of his choice.

argue that the verses are a mixture of Laki and Gurani. However, his *do-baytîs* (quatrains) were composed in Aruzî meter (*hazaj mosaddas mahdûf*) unknown to the Yarsan and the Gurani poetic tradition until the eighteenth century. The subject and the language of his poetry are also not close to the Yarsan poetic practice. Clearly the importance surrounding Baba Taher's name and the antiquity of his works have made him an important figure to be claimed, or reclaimed.

³⁰ As Srivastava (2010) argues in her article "Anthologizing the Nation: Literature Anthologies and the Idea of India", anthologies can be compiled to show the sense of continuity or can ignore chronology in favour of a purpose. She analyses six anthologies of Indian literature and shows how an anthology can be written in a way to revive, celebrate and invigorate national literature or exactly the opposite.

Xeznedar (2001-2006) presents a temporal periodisation and starts with Yarsan poetry, but he is careful in selecting his poets and includes only twelve Yarsan poets. He incorporates the literary schools of Gurani, Kurmanji and Sorani in his classification and differentiates between the Yarsan and the Gurani School of poetry:

- A. 10th -14th century
 - a. Baba Taher
 - b. The Yarsan Poetry³¹
- B. 14th – 18th century
 - a. The Gurani poetry
 - b. The Kurmanji poetry
- C. 1801-1850
 - a. The Sorani poetry
 - b. The Gurani poetry
- D. 1851-1914
- E. 1914-1945
- F. 1945-1975

Xeznedar's narrative intends to show continuity and consistency in the history of Kurdish literature. It is an attempt to create a national literature and is in line with building a national history. He refers to the rise of Kurmanji literature in the fifteenth century and Sorani in the nineteenth century as "the Renaissance of Kurdish literature in Northern Kurdistan" and "the Renaissance of Kurdish literature in Southern Kurdistan" respectively. But despite his efforts, Xeznedar cannot hide the episodic and fragmented nature of Kurdish literature, and his narrative reveals the presence of isolated literary figures who do not fit the framework he presents. Poets like Baba Taher and Mela Perêşan have been presented as part of the Yarsan and Gurani schools, but their forms and styles do not share the main features and characteristics of these schools and there is no indication that their forms and styles were practiced by their contemporaries. Furthermore, presenting the Gurani and the Kurmanji schools in the time frame of the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, as Xeznedar suggests, implies that they are the products of the same circumstances, but these two schools, I believe, had separate and independent lives and had hardly any impact on each other.³²

³¹ Xeznedar (2001: 232-233) classifies Gurani poetry into three stages: Dewrey Şa Xoşîn (10th-12th centuries), Dewrey Sultan Sehak (13th-15th centuries), and Dewrey Ateş Begî (16th-20th centuries).

³² The relationship between the literary traditions of Kurmanji, Sorani and Gurani is beyond the scope of this article and is an understudied subject. There are sporadic works in Kurdish discussing for instance the influence of a certain Gurani poet on a certain Sorani poet or the common themes in classical Kurmanji, Sorani and Gurani poetry, but no in-depth study of the nature of the relationship of the literary traditions of the Kurdish dialects (if there was any) has been conducted yet. Ismat Khabour, PhD candidate at the University of Exeter, is currently working on this question for his doctoral dissertation entitled, "Kurdish Classical Poetry: Continuity or Discontinuity".

Sadjadi (2010) criticises Xeznedar's and others' classification for ignoring the varieties of Kurdish literary schools and presents a model which resonates with Borekeyî (1991) in recognising literary schools in accordance with major Kurdish principalities. It classifies the literature of the twentieth century according to the countries in which Kurds have been subjects:

- 1- Yarsan literary tradition (11th to 16th century)
- 2- Erdelan (11th to mid-19th century)
- 3- Baban (late-18th to mid-19th century)
- 4- Xaledye (15th to 18th century)
- 5- Transition Period
- 6- 20th century
 - A. Iran
 - a. 1919-1945
 - b. 1946-1978
 - c. 1978-present
 - B. Iraq
 - a. 1919-45
 - b. 1946-71
 - c. 1971-1991
 - d. 1991-present
 - C. Turkey
 - a. 1918-1928
 - b. 1928-88
 - c. 1988-present

Sadjadi presents a better picture of modern Kurdish literature by classifying it according to the countries Kurds lived in. Yet he completely ignores the Syrian and the Soviet Kurds and their contribution to Kurdish literature in the twentieth century.

The dialectical division of the classical poetry, whether it is called after the dialects (Gurani, Kurmanji, and Sorani) or the Kurdish principality the dialects were cultivated in (the Erdelan, the Baban and the Botan) seems to be a well-recognised and popular classification as the above examples illustrate. It is perhaps the best strategy to study the literature of different Kurdish dialects separately, but this classification is too broad and general. Putting the poetic practices of various poets into one box merely because they share a common dialect is reductive and does not account for the stylistic differences practiced within the suggested schools. How can we not differentiate the stylistic differences of Feqiyê Teyran and Melayê Cizîrî in Kurmanji or Welî Dêwane and Seydî Hewramî in Gurani poetry? Now that more manuscripts and texts are being recovered, a more precise model which could reflect the diverse nature of Kurdish literature should be sought.³³

³³ At this stage I cannot offer a periodisation since it would contradict my argument that we do not know enough yet to make a generalisation.

Conclusion

This article presented a critical evaluation of Kurdish literary historiography by reviewing Kurdish literary histories written by Kurdish scholars and critics. It discussed the challenges literary historians face in writing Kurdish literary history and whether it is possible to write *a* Kurdish literary history. Substantial effort is needed for identifying unexplored archives in and outside Kurdistan, in private collections, libraries, and museums and bringing them to light. The recovery, editing, and publishing of the manuscripts is a crucial step in rewriting Kurdish literary history. The publication of new manuscripts and documents will uncover unknown or lesser known features of Kurdish literature and will change our contemporary understanding of Kurdish literature. Recent discoveries have already made re-examining and revising Kurdish literary history indispensable. Besides the Kurdish texts, there are unexplored sources in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Russian which need to be identified and studied.

The diversity of Kurdish literature should be noted in writing Kurdish literary history. Examining Kurdish literary historiography in this article, however, exposed the marginalisation of Kurmanji and the Gurani literature. It is important to stress that Kurdish literature is diverse and heterogeneous and literary history should reflect this diversity and heterogeneity. The coherence of Kurdish literature should be critically evaluated and the Kurdish dialects, their relations with each other and with their neighbouring languages (Persian, Turkish, and Arabic) should be explored and incorporated in redrawing a new literary map. It is only with the inclusion of all Kurdish dialects and the consideration of the history and politics of their evolutions that writing *a* Kurdish literary history is possible. Serious flaws in the historical dates and information on the poets' biographies, as discussed in this article, necessitate re-examining the methodologies literary historians have employed for collecting information and the need for opting for new methods and techniques. Kurdish literary history could open new perspectives for the study of cultural, social, and political history of Kurds, therefore its re-examining and evaluating is an opportunity for discovering unexplored facets of not only Kurdish literature, but also culture and history.

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