

MICHAEL M. GUNTER. *The Kurds: A Modern History*. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2016. xvii + 236 pages, references and sources, index. Cloth US\$26.95 ISBN 978-1-55876-615-0.

The Kurds, the fourth largest ethnic group (after Arabs, Turks and Persians) in the Middle East, have long played key roles in four Middle Eastern states: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Despite a large population, however, the post-WWI era, which saw the rise of modern states in the Middle East, turned Kurdish people into minorities in these four countries. Today, at between thirty and forty million, they form the world's largest "stateless nation," making up roughly 20 percent of the total population in both Turkey and Iraq and 10 percent of the population in both Syria and Iran. A large population and geographical concentration of the Kurds, coupled with assimilationist and repressive state policies have resulted in a century of rebellions, protests, and uprisings.

The collapse of state structures in Syria and Iraq, however, two countries with shaky foundations and sizable Kurdish minorities, has left many to wonder about the sustainability of these countries in their current forms. As the region is undergoing monumental changes, the Kurds in both Syria and Iraq have managed to defend their territories, function like de facto states, and proven to be the most effective force in the fight against the Islamic State. As such, the Kurds have emerged as a key to stabilizing these countries, serve as a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism, and potentially contribute to democratizing these fragile state structures.

Michael M. Gunter's *The Kurds: A Modern History* is a timely attempt that provides a concise history of the Kurds. As such, the author deserves credit for tackling such a complicated history that involves four key Middle Eastern states, competing Kurdish groups, and a century marked by numerous Kurdish uprisings. The book is divided into seven chapters, starting with an introductory chapter that covers the early history of the Kurds, followed by four chapters covering the Kurdish struggle in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran, respectively. Chapter 6 lays out a short yet helpful history of the United States and the Kurds. Chapter 7 addresses the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and the implications for changing dynamics and alliances between Turkey, the United States, and the Kurds.

However, the book, partly owing to the complicated and transborder nature of the Kurds and the conflict, does not live up to its promise. Organizationally, it fails to offer a coherent picture of the Kurds and their struggle for equal rights that goes back more than a century. At times, it appears to be a compilation of several disparate, competing, even

contradictory arguments. At the outset the book could have clarified the targeted audience, the methodology used, and provided an outline that would have helped the reader traverse such a complex history.

Gunter methodically utilizes a host of sources, including news articles and the author's personal observations. The author's extensive experience on the topic certainly gives him a unique position to offer important insights. However, these valuable personal observations could have been utilized in a more systematic way.

Finally, the book is in need of a more substantial concluding chapter. I would have liked to see an overall assessment of the Kurdish question in a region characterized by violence, state failure, gross human rights violations, and competing ideologies from a veteran scholar of Kurdish politics. The Kurds have not only proven to be the most reliable and effective partner in the fight against the Islamic State but also, with their secular and progressive stance toward women, offer a real alternative to what the Islamic State, often described as brutal and barbaric, represents. A chapter on the prospects for peace between the Kurds and their respective governments, as well as the ramifications of repeating the mistakes of the early twentieth century by "dismissing" Kurdish demands for equal rights, would have been a welcome addition to the book.

Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, this book is a brief yet valuable introduction to such a complex topic and is likely to appeal to a wide audience interested in the Middle East and Kurds. ✨

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JAMES H. MEYER. *Turks Across Empires: Marketing Muslim Identity in the Russian-Ottoman Borderlands, 1856–1914.* London: Oxford University Press, 2014. xi + 211 pages, figures, acknowledgements, transliteration note, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$99 ISBN 978-0-19-872514-5.

James H. Meyer's *Turks Across Empires* focuses on several key actors who crossed Russian-Ottoman frontiers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and participated in the political life and intellectual formation of subsequent Turkic, national, pan-Turkic and even Turanian identities. His main focus is the Volga Tatar Yusuf Akcura (Akchurin in Russia), with much attention paid also to Crimean Tatar Ismail Gasprali (Gasprinskii) and Azerbaijani Ahmet Agaoglu (Agayev). Other figures come in and out of the