

Are the Kurds Indigenous to Anatolia and Northern Mesopotamia?

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Recently, the argument distinguishing the indigenous people of Anatolia, in modern Turkiye, has been vigorously debated on various Social Media outlets. Of course, this debate has been present for a long time. The most controversial point in this debate has been whether the Kurds are indigenous to Anatolia and/or Northern Mesopotamia or not.

Certain Kurds who are very active on Social Media have continued to claim that they are indigenous to that region. However, most of the arguments made by the Kurds lack the solid historical and archeological documentation that prove beyond any doubt that a well-defined ethnic group known as Kurds have existed in Anatolia and Northern Mesopotamia before the 1514 Battle of Chaldiran.

Nicholas Adontz, an Armenian historian, specializing in Byzantine and Armenian studies writes in his important study: *“The Kurds had not existed in Armenia from immemorial times, but were driven there by the Turkish authorities. The Turks took possession of Armenia after the battle of Chaldiran in the year 1514, defeating the troops of Shah Isma’il of Persia thanks to their artillery, which was employed for the first time. The Persians and the Turks continued to contend for Armenia, but in the end, the frontiers remained the same as they are today. Mullah Idris, a Kurd from Bitlis, who as a native of the country was well-acquainted with the local conditions, took an active part in the military operations of Sultan Selim... (He) supported the interests of the petty chiefs of the Kurdish tribes”*. (Adonz 1922: 5)

The 1514 Battle of Chaldiran between the Sunni Ottoman Turks and Shia Safavid Persians was perhaps the stage in history where the Kurds began to infiltrate into the modern regions of Eastern and Southeast Turkiye and Northern Iraq and expand their presence. For sectarian reasons, the Kurds, being Sunni, aligned with the Sunni Ottomans who won the decisive battle and pushed the Persians back deep into Persian territories. Here, Sultan Selim I of the Ottomans gave the Kurds permission to settle in the eastern parts of the Ottoman Empire. He began to gift lands that belonged to the indigenous Armenians, Assyrians and others to Kurdish tribal aristocracy and created the buffer zone between the Ottomans and Persians (or between Sunni and Shia) and in time it led to total Kurdisation of modern Eastern Turkiye (Anatolia) and finally resulting in the extermination of almost the entire Christian indigenous population of the region by the first three decades of the 20th century.

This fact is well proven and it could not be debated. However, the Kurds continued to claim that they existed in Anatolia way before the 16th Century Battle of Chaldiran. Some Kurds claim that they were in Anatolia and Northern Mesopotamia since the 11th Century and much earlier. They claim that the Seljuk leader Alp Aslan almost lost the 1071 Battle of Manzikert against the Byzantines, but a local Kurd offered the Seljuk 35,000 local Kurdish Calvary and together they defeated the Byzantines.

See below, a sample of one of such arguments on Quora.



Abas Said · Mon

The American military historian Mr Alfred Friendly wrote in his book *The battle of manometer A dreadful day*: the Seljuk leader realised he could not defeat the bezantines he wanted to withdraw to bring more troops, but the local Kurdish people offered him 35000 men who fought together with Seljuk army and could capture the bezentine castle and guarantee and great victory.

so Kurds where living there for thousands of years.

The claim by Mr. Abas Said is wrong and misleading on many levels:

1. Mr. Said provides a book title that is wrong.
2. Alfred Friendly was not a military historian. He was a journalist and a writer.
3. Most critically, Mr. Said insinuates that the Kurds were local inhabitants of Manzikert region of northwest Lake Van, which is part of Anatolia today.

However, the facts are:

- a) Correct title by Alfred Friendly is, *The Dreadful Day: The Battle of Manzikert, 1071.*
- b) Mr. Friendly mentioned 10,000 Kurdish Cavalry and not 35,000.

of triumph. Manzikert was indeed a key strong-point to have and to hold, sited on a sharp bend of the Murat Su and commanding entrance to its plain to the west, the easy route for both trade from the Caspian or, as the Seljuks had shown, for armed incursion into the heart of the Empire. What Romanus did not know at this moment of triumph was how badly matters had gone thirty miles to the south at Khilat, how strong his adversary was and, most important, how close at hand.

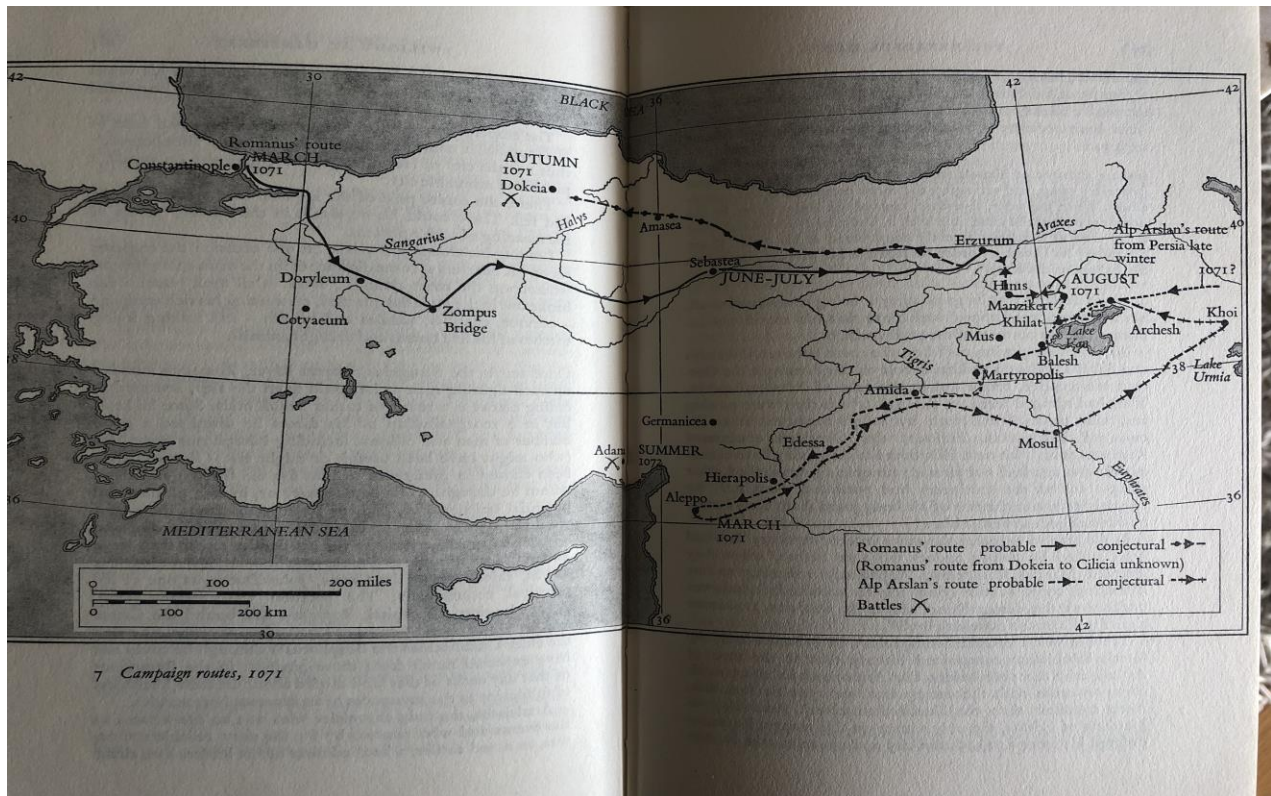
If Alp Arslan were to give battle – by no means a certainty – he would have to muster an army, and would therefore return to Persia to do it and would sally forth only after that. Or so Romanus calculated.

Alp Arslan did *not* return to Persia but, at most, only to the border of Persarmenia, not more than a hundred and twenty miles east of Lake Van.* Instead, he sent that energetic and able man, the vizier Nizam al-Mulk, back to Azerbaijan to recruit a force for him.

Moslem sources vary widely in defining Alp Arslan's return route from Aleppo, some contending that he speeded by the most direct route – Edessa, Amida, Martyropolis, Balesh to Khilat – which would not explain how or where he obtained reinforcements in the number he possessed when he got there or why that relatively direct passage would have taken more than two months to traverse. More credible are accounts declaring that from Amida he followed the Tigris to Mosul and thence to Khoi/Khvoy, then as now a node of east-west and north-south routes, slightly north of Lake Urmia, and that it was from there that he sent his vizier (and his wife) back to Tabriz or Hamadan. *En route* he had picked up some 10,000 Kurdish cavalry, later, presumably, further reinforcements hurried to him from Persia. The agreement is general – and the figure may be accepted as credible – that he assembled a total force of about 40,000, mostly cavalry, each trooper with an extra horse.

c) The author did not say that those 10,000 were local Kurds of Manzikert (northwest Lake Van). The author (see above) mentions that Alp Arslan followed the Tigris River from Amid (Diyar Bekir) to Mosul and from there to Khoi in north Lake Urmia region and in his route, i.e. the mountainous region between modern Iraq and Iran (Persia), he picked up 10,000 Kurdish Calvary. Meaning, Alp Arslan was in Persia when he picked up those Calvary and not in Anatolia in northwest Lake Van (Northern Mesopotamia).

See the map below for a better understanding of the locations mentioned above by the author.



d) Most importantly, we should not take the term “Kurdish Calvary” at face value, i.e. organized horsemen that were part of a homogenous ethnic Kurdish people. Minorsky writes: “... not every occurrence of the term Kurd in the historical sources—especially those of the early period—are an explicit indicator of the Kurdish ethnic element. (See Minorsky 1943)

We know that the Persians applied the term Kwrt that means “tent-dweller” on ALL the nomads of the Zagros Mountains region. (See Asatrian 2009) These 10,000 horsemen that Alp Arslan picked up were in fact the Kwrt or horse riding nomads from different tribes in the region and not necessarily some militarily organized ethnic Kurds.

We need to educate ourselves in order to be able to challenge history revisionists, because we ought it to our future generations. If we do not challenge these revisionists, what they publish will soon become the accepted narrative of the future.