HALABJA

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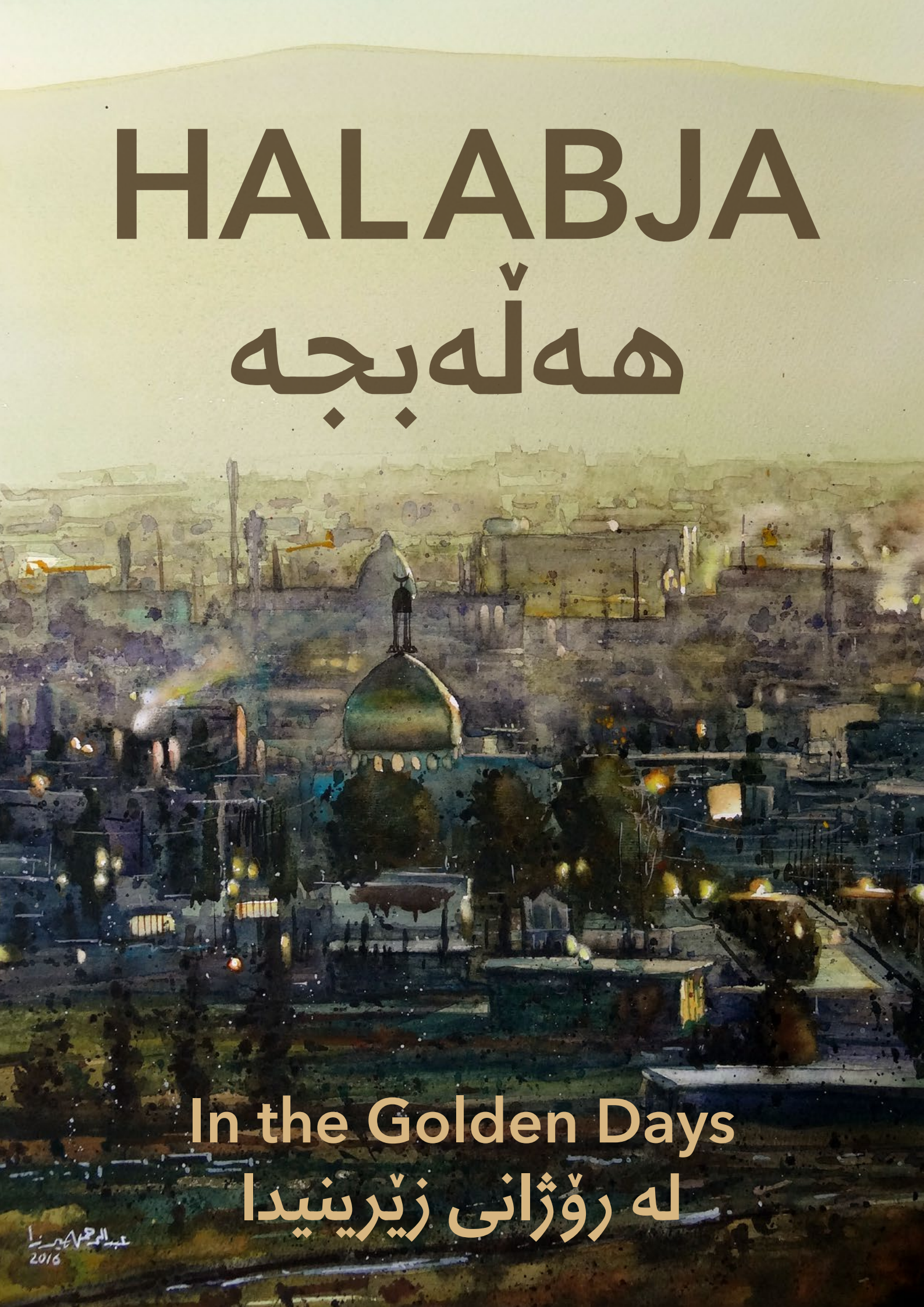

In the Golden Days

لە رۆژانی زێرینیدا

HALABJA

هەڵەبجە

In the Golden Days

لە ڕۆژانی زێڕینیدا

GULAN

Promoting Kurdish Culture

Cover artwork by Abdulrahman Mirza

Halabja: In the Golden Days has been conceived and produced by Gulan in collaboration with the Kurdish community in Portsmouth and Halabja.

GULAN
Promoting Kurdish Culture

Gulan is a UK registered charity formed in 2009 to promote Kurdish heritage and culture. It has no political or religious affiliations and aims to celebrate and sustain Kurdish identity for the benefit of all.

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Curator: Richard Wilding

Assistant curator and artist liason: Mariwan Jalal

Project conceived by Della Murad

Project managed by Sarah Panizzo

Supported by Portsmouth Cathedral and Mali Kurd

Interviews by Kamaran Nawrooz, Della Murad and Bano Murad Kader

Translation by Abdul Jalil Muhammad and Dr. Mahsn Majidy

Editing and proofreading by Maria Gajewska

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Location of the Halabja Governorate (in red) within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (in yellow)

Introduction, Richard Wilding, Curator

Halabja is a city in a remote corner of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, 240 km north-east from Baghdad and just 14 km from Iran. Halabja's history and culture is strongly linked to the mountainous Hawraman region that spans the modern Iran-Iraq border. A new governorate of Halabja was established in 2014, becoming the fourth governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The name of Halabja is synonymous, both within Kurdistan and internationally, with the terrible chemical weapons attack that took place on the 16th March 1988, an event that would forever cast a shadow over the city and its people. During the final stages of the Iran-Iraq war, the Kurdish Peshmerga, supported by Iran, had liberated Halabja from Iraqi control. In retaliation, Iraqi planes dropped chemical weapons on the town, killing up to 5,000 people instantly and injuring up to 10,000 more.

In 2013, I visited Halabja with my Gulan colleagues to attend the 25th anniversary event commemorating the attack. Together with Della Murad, I had designed a badge of remembrance for the Halabja attack and the wider Anfal campaign in which up to 182,000 Kurds were killed by Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime.

Della Murad was born in Halabja and later taught biology and science in the town's high school. In 1986, she fled with her husband and children to Iran and then on to Germany. Many of her students were killed in the 1988 attack, along with some of her cousins and neighbours.

It has been a long-held ambition of Della's to celebrate Halabja as it was before Anfal, when it was renowned for its natural beauty, history and culture. Halabja was famous for its parks, orchards and agricultural produce. The city produced many poets, the most famous being Abdullah Goran, the father of modern Kurdish poetry. One of Halabja's most important historical figures was Lady Adela Jaff, who governed the town from 1909 until her death in 1924. It was rare for a woman to occupy such a position of power, and she was renowned for overseeing one of the most prosperous eras in Halabja's history.

Gulan and our associates have conducted interviews with people from Halabja to create a series of articles on the city's art, theatre, music and sports. Together with essays written by experts on Halabja's history, poetry and costumes, these articles are being published in this magazine as part of the Journeys Festival International 2020.

In addition to the many people from Halabja involved in this project, Gulan has also worked with Portsmouth's Kurdish community, Portsmouth Cathedral and the organisation Mali Kurd. The large Kurdish community in Portsmouth, many of whom were originally from Halabja, have for many years held an annual commemoration ceremony for the Halabja attack.

With this project we hope to demonstrate that there was much more to Halabja than just the terrible events of 1988. We want to show the great diversity of culture that existed before Anfal and build support for a cultural renaissance in Halabja. We hope to create a platform for the people still living in Halabja to talk with pride about their culture. We also to hope to give the Kurdish diaspora who fled Halabja an opportunity to celebrate their history and identity.

Village scene in Hawraman by Awder Osman

Hamai Hama Seid, Minister of Culture, Kurdistan Regional Government

My earliest memories of Halabja go back to 1975. At the time, our house was in the village of Tawelah in Hawraman and I was in year six of primary school. We went to Halabja for my baccalaureate exam. My father took me on our mule on the caravan route, even though there was also a car route back then! Once we arrived in Halabja, we went to the house of my father's acquaintance, who would take me to the school where the examinations took place on the next day. At that time, Halabja was a small but truly gorgeous city, with many thriving markets and shops. This was after the clashes between the Peshmerga and the Iraqi government, and the city had largely settled down.

At that time, in the 1970s, we did not get to see Halabja too often, but some people from our area did move there to work in trade. They came back to Tawelah in the summer and their children would tell us all about the city. My father, my paternal uncles and our neighbours, who made their living by selling fruit and trading in wheat and barley, would also regularly commute to Halabja by mules. They always talked about the city and their friends who lived there.

Geographically, Halabja is surrounded by the majestic mountains of Hawraman, Sooren, Shnrwe, and Ballanbo. The landscape around the city is dotted with picturesque villages, springs, and water channels. The most prominent of the local tribes is the Bagzaday Jaff, who ruled Halabja for many decades. Many Europeans visited Halabja in the early 20th century, and their accounts can be quite informative. For instance, Cecil Edmonds, who travelled through Halabja in 1920-1921, mentions the city in his *Kurds, Turks and Arabs.* Gertrude Bell also visited Halabja in 1921 and in her memoirs, she vividly describes Adela Khanem, the formidable Jaff woman who governed the region at the time.

Traditionally, Halabja was an agricultural city and also a local trade hub. Regionally it was, in many ways, a beacon of development, more so a hundred years ago than it is today. Literature and poetry were quite exquisite, as evidenced by many surviving volumes of poetry and works of literature by pioneering writers such as Piramerd. Politically, the city was surprisingly democratic, and the local tribes governed the area justly. Women in Halabja enjoyed many rights which they did not have in other parts of the Middle East. Even the local architecture was distinct and beautiful.

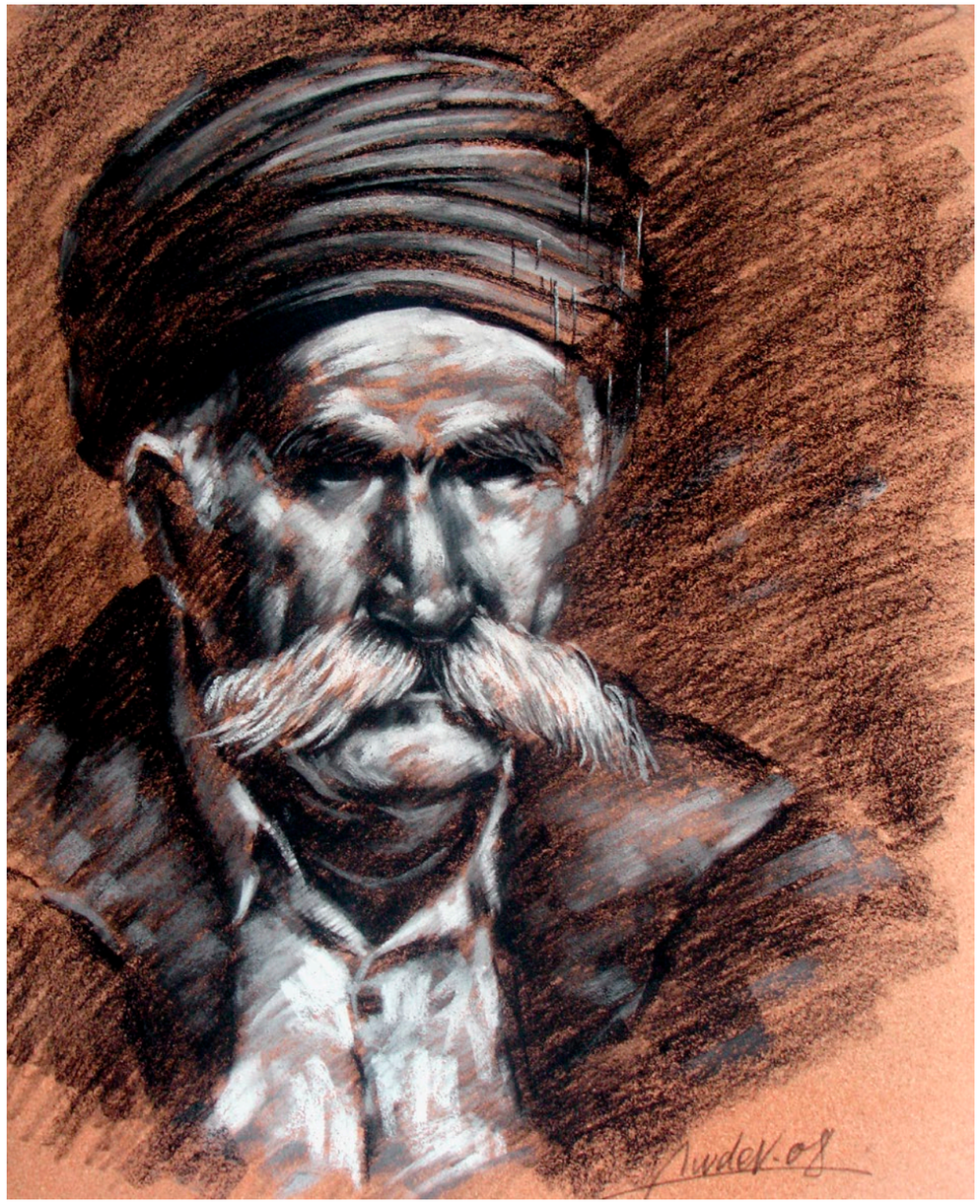
The area of Hawraman, though culturally distinct from the city, had much influence on Halabja as a local spiritual centre. Many Sheikhs and Naqshbandi Sufis lived there and established numerous hospices, which made Hawraman a seat of religious and medical knowledge.

This is how Halabja was in the past: a beautiful city, a city of poets, artists and good people. Various tribes and clans lived side by side, different religions: Muslims, Jews and Yarsanis co-existed peacefully. The culture was highly developed, and women enjoyed regionally unprecedented rights.

After the chemical bombardment by the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein, Halabja was completely destroyed. It stayed empty from 1988 until 1991. Even after it was re-built, those who survived the attack were mentally broken. People were angry with the politicians, and art and culture were pushed to the side. I would say that the people have lost their love and patience, which is why new, extreme political views and organisations (such as 'Ansar Islam and Daesh) have gained ground in Halabja. Although currently, the city appears to have grown, with many new roads, parks, schools, hospitals, markets and shops built, none of this has the 'flavour' of the past – the peace and social cohesion are gone. The unique identity of Halabja was destroyed in the chemical bombardment. Now it needs to be re-built, but it cannot be done solely through anniversaries and mourning! Halabja needs help from the international community to rebuild its culture. Even the simplest improvements require millions of dollars, which is why it is difficult. But we must try to invigorate Halabja again, to bring back the wellbeing and welfare to our people.

For me, the indestructible part of Halabja is its people's struggle to always gain and keep their freedom, liberty and salvation. Throughout the history of Kurdistan, Halabja has always led the way. For me, the people of Halabja are strong and its nature, environment, culture and society are all beautiful.

Following page: Landscape near Halabja by Abdulrahman Mirza



Portrait of a Yarzani man by Awder Osman

The Yarzan, also known as Kaka'i or Ahle Haqq, are followers of a religion founded in the late 14th century in western Iran. Their distinct practices and beliefs have resulted in some persecution. As a result, Yarzanis are secretive about their faith. In Halabja, the minority now has a reserved seat on the provincial council.




Artwork by Omar Darwesh

Azad Tofiq, Governor of Halabja

It is difficult to describe the past of Halabja without reference to my own past and I will not try to do so. Rather, I will talk about my childhood memories, details of Halabja and its culture as they were back in the day. I hope this literary text below will give the reader an idea of how Halabja was when I was young. If I have managed to convey this, thank God for that. If not then, as a beautiful Kurdish saying goes, 'an ugly thing belongs to its owner'!

Talking of your childhood is no simple or superficial task and to undertake it, I have to go back and look at yesterday, go back and look to a distant time, over half a century ago – back to when I was five or eight. The years are 1965-1968. I was born on the 24th April 1960, to a poor family, in a sand house which had two rooms and a corridor. I lived there until the age of ten.

These ten years! Ten years of happiness, filled with heat and cold, hunger and satisfaction; ten years of humility and innocence. It has not been said for nothing that 'the spring of the first eight years determines how bright or dull the stream of human life flows until the age of eighty'! So true, so very true, how the first events and trials, the chances and opportunities of your first eight years can bathe the heart in a gentle breeze and stir a soul, yet the same breeze can become a storm and engulf your soul in a hurricane. The first eight years can be like the gentle light of a full moon over the twilight age, yet they can also turn it into the darkest of Yalda nights.

The first memory that springs to my mind is a tender moment. I beg my mother to feed me a sip of milk, careful not to let my father see… I was the only boy of the family, born late, four years after my three sisters (Layla, Humayla and Lamia), and I was weaned so late that I remember the taste of my mother's milk well. Other things I remember – I still remember the struggle as she pulled me to the metal bowl, washing me with great force. I remember hiding my catapult and marbles for fear of my father finding them. So much fear in those days; fear and trembling at the school assembly without my handkerchief, fear standing quietly in front of the Arabic teacher, head and neck bent down, scolded for not writing my homework three times... And then the pungent smell of my feet as I warm them by the 'Aladdin' heater in our classroom.

But there were happier times too: my mother embracing me and telling me a story at night, soothing my fears of a wolf or a monster coming to devour me. A journey to the alley where I lived, muddy in the winter, dusty in the summer, the dusty quarter of my childhood, which I would not exchange for all the riches of the world! Oh, how I pined for a bicycle ride, or for some wild cucumber, salty and sour, or to win some game or other against my friends; how I sat quietly in front of an older boy, hoping he would feel generous and make a kite for me! I walked around the neighbourhood, collecting money from all the children to buy a ball for just three-fifty. Another journey to buy some seeds of Persian turpentine from mam Hassan's house, another to get some syrup, though it is speckled with flour and dust, and we eat much flour with it. A journey to steal sweets and cowboy pictures from the local shops. So many journeys: a journey here and a journey there, and another journey, and of which of these journeys do I tell you now, and which do I keep to myself? These pictures of yesterday have been etched in my heart as if in stone, and until the Earth keeps moving, they will always stay in my mind.

Artwork by Omar Darwesh

In the mid-1960s I was six or seven years of age. That was the time when brother fought against brother, when the struggle reached our hands and collars, and when weapons were dripping with blood. That era of the red scarf and the yellow handkerchief: hot colours, the two bloodied colours of the Kurdish movement. Back then, weapons and bullets were in the hands of the Kurds and weapons and bullets hit the chests of the Kurds. So many Kurds were killed and martyred by their own kin… I am a son of that time. My city, a living joint in the body of the Kurdish people, was not excluded from the fight between brothers, from the bleeding of this unjust carnage. One day we would be studying in the heat, the next day we would shelter from the bombs and the shooting. Fighting, fighting everywhere, one of us is a killer, one of us is killed. A couple of cities would get hit and people would bleed and shout: 'By God, it has started!'.

For me, a boy of seven or eight, those moments when life and death used to hang by a thread, when existence lived side by side with oblivion, these days painted a picture which I do not think will ever fade away from my memory. Even today, they live within me and grow. But these days formed the culture and tradition specific to the people of Halabja, and they forged connections between our people which would not have been forged otherwise. We could even say that the people of that time looked at each other with a unique strength and morale, and with eyes full of love! In all the hunger and misfortune of these days, the hand of greed was short. Do not misunderstand: God forbid I should ever liken Halabja of yesteryear to Plato's 'City of Virtue' or More's 'Utopia'. But whatever our culture was then, there were always norms and rules, and people would follow them.

If there is no cultural magic that keeps people together, no universal good, then how come a single barrier could protect the property and honour of several families sleeping on the roofs of our neighbourhood? Had it not been for the community and goodness of the Halabjans, had there not been a common culture of kindness, who could protect a family on a wide, empty roof? What could prevent rogue eyes and rusty hearts? Our community was faithful and truthful. Community and fidelity make humans abide by the social customs that keeps us together and will always be worthy of respect and admiration. For us, then, community and fidelity meant chopping off the hands of greed – keeping away from the property and honour of other people and neighbours. Had it not been for that community and fidelity, how could a mere piece of wood become a sturdy fence and obstruct the filthy hands of thieves!

Please, do not misunderstand: I hope you, beloved reader, will not think that I want to take you back half a century, that I do not understand the meaning of development, that I am backward and confused! Believe me, I understand and know it well that the wheel of history cannot be stopped by holding onto a spoke. I understand modernity and development, and I know that we cannot go back not only half a century, but even half a second. But what can I say? The customs and traditions of that day were infused with morality and purity – do not blame me if I long for them today.

Every tradition, every custom and rite as shown on these pages had their own meaning and cultural dimension back then: each carried the rhythm of society, its hidden, inner nature; the beauty and ugliness of the days gone by. So I am not confused and I am not longing for the past, but if to this day no one has studied or described such a sensitive time in Halabja's history, we should do our best to bring these memories back to life.

You will see a sweet simplicity here, in the culture and traditions of my alley and my neighbourhood and my region, muddy in the winter and dusty in the summer, where I have lived day and night. Today, Halabja has joined the technological development of the modern world, and these traditions are all but gone. Whatever wish we may have of returning Halabja to its past, it is but a dream, fragile as a bubble, and nothing more. The Halabja of the past is gone.

Goodbye then, to the place where I learned my first Kurdish words. Goodbye to Ahmed Afani, our headmaster, goodbye to all our teachers: to the stick in Mr Mehdi's hand, the colourful chalk of Mr Ra'ouf, goodbye to the gentle Hami Afani, to Sheikh Kemal and Sheikh Omar! Goodbye to Ali Afani and Mr Noori, who died young, and to our baker, Nawzad Hama. Farewell to the summer slumber on the roof and to snow fights in the winter. Farewell to the smell of food on an 'Eid morning. Goodbye, men of my alley, beautiful and forgiving; goodbye, respectful and pleasant women, scented with cloves. Farewell to the evening call to prayer at the Pasha Mosque. Goodbye, my father's blessed house! Goodbye the hard desk of the classroom, the night-time meetings and the faithful, loyal neighbours of the past. Remember the bright light in our corridors and the rosewater sprinkled on our front doors. Sleep tight, children on the roof! And rest in peace, the dead of the Sheikh Smail and Gulan cemeteries. I am sure you were pious and good; you have been included in the God Almighty's blessed abode. Long live, neighbours of that time. Goodbye, memories of my childhood days: football, spinning wheels and marbles…

Goodbye Halabja. Farewell to my home, muddy in the winder, dusty in the summer. Farewell.

Kuestan Khan, Head of Halabja Municipality

Regarding my memories of Halabja, I have spent all of my childhood there. From a young age, I would play out on the streets or go on picnics with my friends. I remember there was a big rock a little out of town, where we often went to play. Now, in my current role as Governor of Halabja, I have left this rock in place and built a little garden around it.
This garden is a space where people who are suffering from mental health issues can go and visit. It took a lot of work to get this park done, but I was determined to do it and even now when I go there, it reminds me of my wonderful childhood memories.

At school, I always took part in physical education and art classes. I did a lot of drama, acting in school plays and also singing in the choir. For me, Halabja is a place filled with memories of arts and sports. As a young person, I wanted to get involved in everything that was going on in school. In Fourth Grade, I acted in a play directed by another girl in my class, Zhyan Ibrahim, titled *The Rights of Workers*. It was about how the rights of farmers and labourers were denied by landowners and I played a farmer's daughter. Every year, I also got involved in parades and in sporting competitions against other schools.

As a young person, I was quite politically engaged – I was very aware of the brutality of the Iraqi Baath regime and I would take part in anti-government demonstrations. Like many in Halabja, I had multiple family members who were Peshmergas and were often involved in these demonstrations too. I was one of those people who witnessed the chemical attacks of Halabja in 1988. Unfortunately, it destroyed not only much of the natural environment and wildlife but also our culture, our people and our way of life.

After the chemical attacks, my family and I fled to Iran. We came back after three months, but we were imprisoned in Top Zawa. Then we were released after a general pardon for all the prisoners of war. In the following years, when Kurdistan was freed, I was happily one of those who took part as a witness in the trials of Saddam's Hussein himself. I saw Saddam in his defendant's cage in court and this was one of the happiest moments of my life.

Following the establishment of the first parliament after the uprising of 1991-1992, Halabja slowly began to recover. We have been able to set up universities, stadiums, arts faculties… All of this has been done in order to regenerate the beautiful and artistic culture of Halabja.

The landscape of Halabja is beautiful: the city is caught in a valley between the two impressive mountains of Shinarwe and Hawraman. This makes it an ideal location for tourism. The people of Halabja are very strong and robust, and I have a lot of faith in our young people and their abilities. We have a lot of organisations and societies which are there to help them, and every organisation is a sign of how willing our people, both men and women, are to learn and grow. All of this is being done to return Halabja to its golden era. For example, there are two great musicians currently living in Halabja, and one of them is the famous Azad Malla Saber. He has returned to the city and has set up a school to help teach young boys and girls how to sing and compose music.

Keeping the culture of Halabja alive does not just mean the arts! We do a lot to promote local industry and cuisine. Traditionally, Halabja was known for producing a kind of natural chewing gum. Many people have started to do this again, as means of making money and supporting their families. We also grow a lot of pomegranates, so we have a few factories that make pomegranate juice and molasses. This has been a wonderful opportunity to create jobs in the area.

Above, Right and Previous page

Artwork by Abdulrahman Mirza

Since we have become a Governate, the size of our administration has increased dramatically. Before the chemical attacks, Halabja was only 7 km wide but now it is 30 km! Because of this, our population has increased quite significantly, and we have also been able to use much of the new land for agriculture.

I am happy that as head of the municipality of Halabja, I am able to use my position to, step by step, bring prosperity and life back to Halabja and to revive its beautiful history and culture, despite financial constraints.

Thank you for asking me to take part in this project, it is so wonderful to hear that you want to tell the world about Halabja before the 1988 attacks and to let the world know about its beauty and history. Halabja is a very dear place to me, I know all its streets and passages and they all hold dear memories for me. From the time my eyes opened till now I am bound to Halabja, and I always will be.

Above: The Darband-i Belula rock relief depicting Tardunni, probably a king, prince, or other high-ranking official of the Lullubi mountain tribe, circa. 2000 BC. This relief is located on the Belula pass, 40 km south-west of Halabja, close to the border with Iran. Tardunni is shown bearing weapons and trampling enemies. Next to the relief is an inscription in the Akkadian language, invoking the protection of the deities Shamash and Adad. Photograph by Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin.

Right: Bakr Awa is located 5 km north-west of Halabja on the Shahrizor Plain. The tell (mound) is 40 metres high and consists of a central settlement mound surrounded by a lower city measuring 800 by 600 metres. The oldest excavated layers date to the third millennium BC and are contemporary with the Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic periods. Photograph by Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin.

A History of Halabja, Adil Sdiq

In the time of the Lullubi Kingdom (2300 – 675 BC), there was a city called Har-har. Some historical sources say that Har-har was on the site of present-day Halabja, but apart from occasional reports of Akkadian and Assyrian aggression, little information is available on the city. There are also some archaeological sites near Halabja, such as Girdi Bakrawe (the Bakr Awa tell), dating back to antiquity before Christ, and some others that belong to the Islamic era. These are evidence of the historical roots of the area.

No explicit references to an area called Halabja have been found in sources pre-dating the 18th century. According to some, the Siyanza-Mala family, descended from the Shiwakali aristocracy of the Sharbazher region, moved to the Halabja area at the beginning of the 18th century. Alternatively, other sources suggest that the Mala Abdullai Kharpani family built the city, starting with the construction of the Grand Mosque (Jami'a) by Mala Abdulla's father in the Pir Muhammad Quarter between 1712 and 1713. There is also mention of Jewish families moving into Halabja around this time and setting up a Jewish quarter.

Early in its history, the Halabja area experienced much strife due to the internal struggles between the Baban princes and also the persistent conflicts between the Ardalan and the Baban, and between the Iranians and the Ottomans. It was only in the second half of the 19th century that the region became somewhat stable, enabling further development. A period of great progress followed, particularly after the Jaff tribe arrived and settled in the city.

The Ottoman records dating back to 1842 show that Halabja was recognisably an Ottoman administrative district. After the appointment of Midhat Pasha as the governor of Iraq, the region underwent some changes, which included attempts at settling down various tribes and drawing clearer administrative boundaries. Midhat Pasha appointed Muhammad Pasha Jaff as the first governor of Halabja on 24th November 1869. Since then, barring some minor interruption, the city was governed exclusively by Jaff nobility until 1931. These Jaff governors guaranteed regional stability and security for decades, forging strong trade relations with the cities of Eastern and Southern Kurdistan and contributing to the urban development of Halabja. This was especially apparent during the era of Adela Khanem, who governed Halabja after the death of her husband Osman Pasha in 1909 until her death in 1924.

Above: A new survey and excavations were undertaken at Bakr Awa by the University of Heidelberg in 2010-2014. Photograph by Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin.

Since the 1930s, the political identity of Halabja began to crystallise. In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the city witnessed some serious conflict between communist activists and other parties. Many political demonstrations took place in Halabja at the time, giving testament to the local reactions to the injustice which had befallen the citizens of Iraq generally and the people of Kurdistan in particular.

From the 1950s, the Halabja area was subjected to a series of attacks at the hands of the Iraqi government. In 1963, the Iraqi army led by the Arab nationalist Major General Za'eem Sdiq executed thirteen farmers in the village of Chiqlawa near the Khurmal administrative sub-district, killed three other civilians inside the city of Halabja, and set fire to both the Bakhi Meer (Meer Gardens) and the library within Osman Pasha Jaff's home. About ten years later, the Iraqi army bombarded the city on 26th April 1974, killing 52 civilians, injuring dozens, and displacing thousands, who were forced to flee to Iran. As a result of the bombardment, the city remained uninhabited for a long time. Later, following the Aylul revolts, the Iraqi government forcibly evacuated ninety-one villages in the Halabja area, relocating the population to resettlement camps, effectively banishing people from their land.

Being located near the border with Iran, Halabja endured great suffering during the Iraq – Iran war. Entire villages, alongside the administrative sub-districts of Biyara and Khurmal, were resettled under the pretext of being too close to the frontline. Throughout the war, the inhabitants of Halabja endured temporary displacement dozens of times, fleeing to the surrounding villages and towns as a result of the Iranian army's shelling of their city. Hundreds of people fell victim to the Iranian bombardments. For example, on 6th August 1986, Iranian artillery targeted a shelter in the Sirwan sub-district, killing 200 civilians.

In retaliation for the forced displacement of villages in Sharazur, the people revolted against the Iraqi regime on 13th May 1987. Dozens of people died and around 10,000 fled to Iran. The ultimate calamity was the chemical bombardment of the city by Iraqi warplanes on 16th March 1988, as a result of which 5,000 people were killed, 10,000 others were injured, and more than 70,000 civilians fled to Iran.

Following the Iraqi government's announcement of an amnesty on 6th September 1988, most of the civilians who had fled to Iran returned to Iraq. However, the Iraqi government issued a decree declaring the area from 'Arbat to Halabja a prohibited military zone, effectively preventing the people of Halabja from returning to their city. They were also not allowed to resettle in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate; instead, they were relocated to the camps of Barhushtir and Girdachal in Erbil Governorate. Later, a small number of people were allowed to resettle in the camps of Bazyan and Bayinjan, in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate. For those families who moved away from Halabja before the chemical bombardment and did not seek refuge in Iran, the Iraqi regime set up a forced resettlement camp called Saddamiyat Halabja.

All in all, nearly 1,512 people from the Halabja area were affected by the resettlement campaigns following the Anfal military campaign against the Kurds and the chemical bombardment of Halabja. Those who stayed in Iran were sent by the Iranian government to the camps of Sarbas, Kanigawar, Sanghur and Sahna in Kermanshah Governorate.
A group of nine families migrated to Pakistan, from which they were later transferred to Australia, Europe and the United States through UN efforts. It was only after the Kurdish uprising in 1991 that the people of Halabja were able to return to their native district and began the gradual reconstruction of their city.

Above: *A Man of the Jof Tribe* (Jaff Tribe). Illustration from *Narrative of a residence in Koordistan* by the British traveller and antiquarian scholar Claudius James Rich (1787-1821).

Some other historical aspects of Halabja

Language and literature

Apart from forming a strategic link between the mountains and the Mesopotamian plain, Halabja is the point where the Kurdish dialects of Central Kurdish (Sorani) and Gorani (also known as Hawrami) meet. The two dialects, one spoken in the Hawraman areas of Lihon and Takht to the east and the other spoken in Shahrizor at the foot of the Hawraman Mountains, meet in the largest regional city of Halabja, enhancing the linguistic and cultural diversity of the area.

Like everywhere in Kurdistan, Halabja and its surroundings are steeped in local culture and folklore. There is an abundance of folk tales, a variety of local games, aphorisms, proverbs, myths, riddles and idioms, all of which speak to the cultural and linguistic wealth of the area. The region has a particularly rich literary heritage. In the past two centuries, dozens of prominent Kurdish poets emerged in Halabja; these include Mawlawi, Nali, Majzub, Goran, Tahir Bagi Jaff, Ahmad Mukhtar Jaff, Hasan Fahmi Bagi Jaaf, Shaho, Natiq, Kardokhi, Hilmi, Qani', Salih Hazhar, A. A. Shawnem, Salih Sharazuri, among others. Accordingly, Halabja is known as the city of poets and intellectuals, which has made significant contributions to the Kurdish language and culture.

Education

The first primary school in the city, Awali Halabja, was established in 1892, marking the advent of formal public education. The school began with one teacher and 30 pupils, and it operated in a rented residential house, without adequate premises, until 1927. Initially, the school was attended exclusively by boys, but from the 1930s onwards it became coeducational. Later, an additional girls' school was also built. The Jaff nobility were also particularly respectful towards religious education and provided substantial support to a large number of regional religious schools.

Manuscripts and documents

Until the end of the 19th century, religious schools were the only local source of knowledge and scholarship, and they housed hundreds of thousands of books and historical, religious, and literary manuscripts. It is lamentable that this intellectual wealth is largely lost, owing to the lack of a developed publishing industry back then, as well as due to the persistent conflicts which have affected the area. Many book repositories were forcibly destroyed: for example, a few days after the assassination of the poet Ahmad Mukhtar Jaff, one of his wives set fire to a large collection of his manuscripts. Additionally, after Za'eem Sdiq's assault on Halabja in 1963, the entire home library of Osman Pasha Jaff was set alight, ostensibly only because it included a single copy of a communist magazine. Concurrently with the joint Iranian Pasdaran (Iranian Revolutionary Guards) and Peshmerga attacks on Halabja on 13th March 1988, the Iranian forces plundered nearly 13,000 books from the city's public library, hundreds of manuscripts from private households, and more than 500 historical manuscripts from the grand mosque. The latter included historical records spanning hundreds of years. The forces also looted many ancient artefacts and transported them to Iran.

To give an example of the work lost, Tahir Bagi Jaff's dictionary of Kurdish, Farsi, Arabic and Turkish, which would have been a great contribution to local literary and linguistic scholarship, akin to Sheikh Marif Nodeyee's *The Ahmadiya Wordbook,* was destroyed. No traces of this work have been found to this day. This is merely the tip of the iceberg of the great cultural and literary wealth of Halabja, which was lost through the various armed conflicts afflicting the city over the years.

The cultural centres

Aside from scholarly institutions and educational establishments, currently Halabja houses a number of cultural activity centres such as the Halabja Cultural Centre (established in 1997), the Halabja Intellectual Centre (2003), the Halabja Culture House (2008), the Halabja Children's Education Centre (2003) and the Halabja Youth Centre (2009).

Theatre

Before the 1920s Sleman Bagi Katb Farsi, father of the poet Goran, produced and staged a number of plays in Halabja and the surrounding villages. These included *The Judge and the Court*, *Pasha Pasha*, and *The Shepherd, Lamb and Wolf*. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Ahmad Mukhtar used to organise public trips to the countryside around Halabja, especially to the areas of Ahmadawa and Zalm. These excursions involved many artistic activities and theatrical performances such as, again *Pasha Pasha*, where Mala Abdulla Baqal used to play the leading role.

Four years after the assassination of Ahmad Mukhtar Jaff, A. B. Hawri came to Halabja as a teacher in 1939 and staged his first play, *Love and Allegiance,* with local actors. This play portrayed the economic, political, social and national issues facing the Kurdish society of the day, using a simple, accessible style but an eloquent language. This contemporary relevance proved problematic, and soon the Iraqi regime imposed censorship on the Halabjan theatre. This considerably weakened the development of the dramatic scene in the city.

Nevertheless, theatrical performances continued to be staged in Halabja. Initially, companies from other cities would perform there, however later the city developed its own, more professional dramatic scene, with many producers, playwrights, translators, makeup artists, designers and actors operating there. The great poets and the writers of Halabja contributed many plays for the nascent theatre; perhaps the most prominent being A. A. Shawnem, Sajida Awara and Jamali Mala Qadir.

Many theatre companies emerged in Halabja between the late 1930s and the 1980s. Some of the most prominent were Firmesk (founded in 1955), Hiwa (1970), Wafayee (1975), Nwandni Halabja (1976), Nwandni Goran (1980) and Mashkhal (1987). They performed Kurdish and foreign works, and, in the absence of proper theatre halls, they adapted various public spaces for theatrical performance: school courtyards, the public park, sometimes even open squares in some neighbourhoods. These troupes also performed at festivals in other Kurdish cities, underscoring their high standard.

Even the various tumultuous political developments of the 1960s, such as the outbreak of the Aylul Revolts or the defections within the Kurdistan Democratic Party, did not halt theatrical productions. Subsequently, the period between 1970-1974 is considered the

Above: 'Lady' Adela Jaff with her son the poet Ahmed Mukhtar Jaff, photographed by Gertrude Bell in 1921. Image PERS_M_028, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University.

Gertrude Bell's caption reads: The feature of Halbja is Adlah Khanum the great Jaf Beg Zadah lady, mother of Ahmed Beg. She is the widow of Osman Pasha, sometime dead, and continues to rule the Jaf, as much as she can and intrigue more than you would think anyone could, and generally behave as great Kurdish ladies do behave.

golden age of theatre in Halabja. Following the bombardment of Halabja by Iraqi forces on 26th April 1974 and the absconding of thousands of its people to Iran, Halabjan art continued to develop in exile, and theatre was no exception. Then, after the return of the displaced people to Halabja between 1975 and 1980, art and theatre recommenced in the city. In the 1980s, Halabja once again became known as a centre of literature and poetry. However, the Iran-Iraq war, the chemical bombardment of the city, the Kurdish exodus in 1991, and the infighting in Kurdistan all set back the local arts and culture by decades. At present, there is no theatre hall in the city, despite the establishment of the Institute of Fine Arts in 2006-2007, which includes a theatre department. There are three theatrical groups in the city: the Halabja Theatre Band (1992), the Halabja Performing Band (2003) and the Theatre Expanse Band (2013).

Below: The Shinrwé music group in 1980

Opposite page: The Shinrwé music group in 2018

Music

There is a very rich tradition of Kurdish folk music in the Hawraman region. Some of the most famous songs are *Siyachamana* and *Bezmi Chapla*. A typically local style of song popular in the area is the Horay Jaffi, which originates with the Jaff tribe. In fact, the Jaff notables were great patrons of music, organising dozens of concerts, in the same way they organised public seminars and country excursions. The most prominent singers of Halabja were Hussein Aziz, Hasan Hamamurad, Hasani Taqaswar, Salih Haji Sa'eed and Fazili Wasta Sadiq.

In the early 1950s, A. A. Shawnem formed a music band with Hiwa Sayyid Ahmed, Fayaq Sa'eed and Anwar Hamakareem. Burhani Muzamid was a famous lute player active in the 1960s, and in the 1970s, Kamal Mustafa Khafaf and Burhani Muzamid were well-known lute and violin players. Finally, the prominent Shinrwé music band (which is active to this day) was established in 1973. Throughout its existence, the band performed much work including *Shirin Halama*, *Jwani Lay Bana*, *Laya laya*, *Rafiqan*, *Khaw*, *Hanam Brda Khalqé*, *Ay Watan*, and many others. On some occasions, the band performed outside Halabja, participating in festivals across Kurdistan and Iraq.

Unfortunately, like all other branches of the arts, music was negatively affected by the chemical attack on Halabja, the uprising of 1991, and the subsequent civil war. However, despite the hardships of the 1990s, the arts did not die out. In fact, in some ways, the tragedy of Halabja gave a stimulus to new development in the art sector. Various organisations, such as the Halabja Theatre Band, Peyam Arts (established in 1994), Hawkar Arts School (1996-2001), or the Union of Muslim Kurdish Intellectuals honoured the memory of these tragic events through art shows and musical and dramatic performances. Their activities also included a few television and radio shows, satire programmes, open publications and bulletins. The bands Shinrwé and Azhi contributed dedicated musical performances.

Della Murad's aunt, Aftaw Mohamed Ahmed

Costumes of Halabja, Della Murad

My father was a textiles merchant in Iraqi Kurdistan and I was lucky enough to grow up with fabrics all around me from a very young age. My father would collect these fabrics from many countries including Japan and India, and would sell them to the markets up and down the country. As a small girl, I was fascinated watching my mother putting on her stunning Kurdish clothes. She added layer after layer, wonderful pieces of fabric with elaborate colours folding effortlessly on top of each other. Her expression was full of pride as she finished this ritual by carefully assembling her headgear with gorgeous gold jewellery and tassels.

It was my mother who made my first Kurdish gown for Newroz, in the spring of 1970 when I was 11 years old. Wearing that first dress made me feel like a princess. I didn't take it off the entire day and even slept in it that night. These early memories are what sparked my love affair with Kurdish clothes.

During my adolescence my family lived in Baghdad, but we used to travel to Halabja every summer. Halabja was a paradise; a picturesque landscape where we would picnic for weeks in the mountains or in the numerous parks, like the Gulan park. It was in Halabja where I saw the very best of Kurdish gowns. Back then, women would wear them all the time, even when they were working at home or in the fields. But the very best clothes were saved for special occasions. An example would be when we would visit my auntie, the wife of the mayor of Halabja and a fashion enthusiast. She would often invite dozens of people to an occasion called *Quboll*. This was a feast and dance, which in the 1940s was exclusive to the Jaff tribes, but which gradually spread throughout the region. It was a chance for the women to show off the best gowns they had, dressing from head to toe in gold, gemstones and magical colours that always seemed to match perfectly. This practice, along with many such joyous occasions, seemed to die out towards the end of the 1970s.

My love affair with Kurdish clothes stemmed from my love for my mother and my aunts, but my admiration grew as I studied the rich history of costume. The style of Kurdish clothes did not vary drastically from its traditional roots, but the main difference over time was in the fabrics. Each year was marked by a new fabric which every woman had to have. These mostly came from Iran, but could come from as far as Japan. In the 1940s we had Khamak and Goroon; and in the 50s we had Karnak. In the 1960s there was a fabric named Reshi Mam Jalal, which translates to 'the beard of Mam Jalal', the head of the PUK party and later the President of Iraq. Later on more fabrics arrived from all corners of the world, with names like Naz Naz, Quastor, Jamana and Jade Tehran.

Despite this global influence, each area in Kurdistan had their own distinct style of traditional clothes. This was partly due to the lack of professional dressmakers, with the majority of Kurdish women making their own clothes at home. Where professional dressmakers did exist, they were men, like Amin Ali or Abdula Khayat in Halabja. However, they mostly specialised in making the padded Kawa, a long coat worn for winter. This required more strength and machinery due to the tougher material.

For the first half of the 20th century, the creativity of dressmakers was limited by the dark and heavy fabrics available. When the colours and the materials became lighter, more vibrant and transparent, women began to experiment with sequins and embroidery that made any individual look like royalty. I used these early memories and every stage

of Kurdish history to later design my own modern Kurdish gowns, which I have proudly presented in numerous fashion shows throughout the last 20 years.

Returning back to Kurdistan after the uprising in the 1990s, for my cousin's weddings and other special occasions, I noticed that fewer people were wearing Kurdish clothes. This was extremely sad for me, because these were the same people who had lost everything in the chemical attacks in Halabja. After spending decades compiling the most precious fabrics, jewels and ornaments, they were forced to flee to Iran once again with only the essentials to live on. Putting on Kurdish clothes is a high-spirited endeavour, and after years of devastating turmoil, many no longer had the heart for it. It was in these moments of sadness that I promised I would dedicate my life to promoting these traditional clothes which brought so much joy to the women throughout my life.

I am often reminded of my first job interview to become a high school teacher. I was in a room in Sulaymaniyah with twenty other young hopefuls, waiting to be questioned by an education official of the Ba'ath Party. After sending one lady to teach in Halabja, the officer Mulazam Mohsen was shocked to hear her refuse, as she was fearful of the rumours of bombings in the city. He stood up and laughed, saying *"don't be silly, Halabja is the Paris of Kurdistan."* This is how I want to remember Halabja.

Opposite page: Everyday outfit from Halabja, as worn in the 1930s-50s. The *Kawa* was donated by Bahi Hami Bagi Jaff. The rest of the costume was worn by Della Murad's mother.

Baggy trousers (*Awal-krass*) are worn under the dress (*Krass*). The trousers are made from any thick fabric, printed or plain. The *Awal-krass* shown here is made from a pink, plain shiny fabric called *Surma*. A thin slip (*Jear-krass*) made of cotton is worn over the baggy trousers. It is usually black or white.

The dress (*Krass*) is made from a fabric called *Krnak* and can also have pink flowers instead of the blue shown. The coat (*Kawa*) is made of a fabric called *Xamak*, a thin cotton fabric. It would be padded with cotton and worn in winter. The corners of the coat would be lifted and placed in the pockets when the wearer was doing domestic work – both for ease of movement and to protect the garment.

The shawl (*Dassmal*) has a triangular shape and is made from a soft net. It is attached in the middle at the back to a hat. The hat (*Fessa*) was decorated with coins and fringing (called *Gulang* or *Qazzaz*). This would be attached to different fabrics (such as *Sarkayi* or an embroidered net fabric) and would be wrapped around the face until secure.
The headpiece is then tied at the back with long strings. On each side of the hat are *Lagera* – two gold strands made from coins. At the front of the hat is a *Parwana*, a piece of gold jewellery designed by the Kurdish Jews from the region. The necklace is called *Lulow-Zengir*. It is a long, thin gold chain, decorated with small gold bars and stones. It is worn across the body.

The belt is called *Peshtweni-Lira*. Made from Ottoman Lira, the number of coins used would depend on the size of the wearer. At the centre of the belt is a large, circular piece, decorated with semi precious stones and three dangling lira. The bracelets (*Bazani kurdi*) are worn by all women in Kurdistan and can be either silver or gold.

Photograph by Richard Wilding

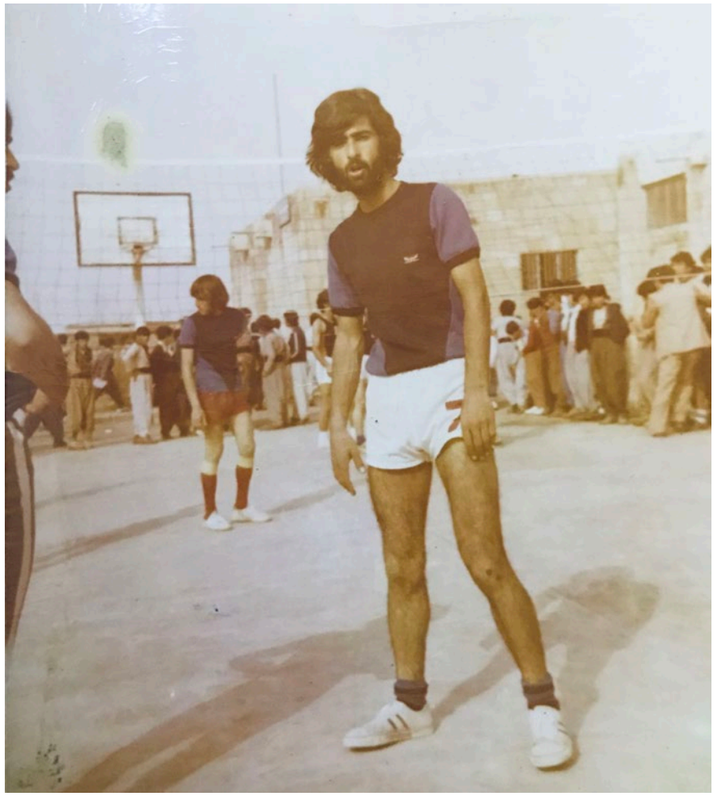
Hama Balla Barz, Former Football Player

At the beginning of 1976, I was chosen as the best player of the School Football League in Halabja. In the same year, I was the champion of the School Basketball League. Such was the beginning of my sporting career, which gave me motivation to always try my best and aim high at various sports. This is one of my earliest happy memories and I will never forget it.

One of the most wonderful things about the Halabja of the past was the generosity and hospitality of its people. The Halabjans always opened their arms to those passing through the city. For many years, Halabja did not have any hotels and even after the first hotels opened, the Halabjans did not want other people to stay in them. Instead, they would invite people to their own homes and serve them in the best possible way. Even if a guest in the city tried to stay in a mosque, the Halabjans would not let them do so and would invite them to their homes. This generous custom existed only in the city of Halabja, it was the pride of Halabja. It shows very clearly how pure and happy our life was back then.

Unfortunately, the Halabja of today is very different to the Halabja of the past. The sport, arts, music, poetry and cultural awareness of our people cannot be compared to how they used to be. Even the local society and people's behaviour changed enormously, becoming as different as night and day. In the old Halabja, all the people were relatives or acquaintances, now they hardly know one another. Even the way the people speak now does not have the love or compassion of the past. Halabja of today is, in short, a ruin, a pale shadow of the city of old, both in my opinion and according to many others.

Still, even if the modern society is much changed, certain features of Halabja have remained. The climate is varied and beautiful. The people of Halabja have always been, and still are, steadfast in their beliefs and will always fight for their causes. The past heritage and culture are not completely extinguished. Invigorating the culture of Halabja will be



a difficult, complex process, and we need an eager, loyal population, as well as a lot of co-operation from the state and from other cities in Kurdistan. Unfortunately, the current situation is not conducive to this, but I hope that in the near future, we will have a chance to help the city regain its cultural standing and return to its former glory.

As for my own life in Halabja, I played for the Kawa Sports Team and in the Halabja Squad between 1976-1980. I also played basketball and track and field at the time, and I was a track and field champion for two years. Even though I do not think I was such a good basketball player, I was still considered a champion and I played for the Halabja Basketball Team. Unfortunately, politics and joining the Peshmerga prevented me from doing more sport.

One of my favourite sporting memories, in addition to my first victory, was the regional annual sports festival of 1977. I participated in four games and for the first time I won in track and field. I got a trophy and many people congratulated me. The best part was when later, as the pupils of our school were coming from the Halabja market to the 'Kani Ashqan' quarter, they all shouted: *"Who is the champion of the field? It is kaka (a title for respect) Hama and we know him!".* It was such a happy day for me!

My football team in those days, the Kawa Team, was quite prominent. They were known as a very good and effective team between the 1960s-1980s, had many successes and were much loved locally. I often played with them, even at their games outside of Halabja, and it was always very exciting! Unfortunately, like so many other things, this team does not exist anymore, and currently the standard of sport in Halabja is very low.

Pomegranate harvest in Miry Sur, close to the Sirwan river.
Photograph by Hemn Kakayi

Dr Mahabad Kamil Abdullah, President of the University of Halabja

What are your earliest personal memories of Halabja?

Most people's strongest memories go back to their childhood, when wishes and desires were simple. Children always remember their own things and keep them alive in their memories; even our dreams when we grow up are those of our childhood. In that way, I am similar to any child. I was also lucky because, as the elder child of my family, I was much loved, and no one ever refused me anything I asked for. One of my earliest memories was walking in the city with my father – I can remember most of the scene that evening, vividly as if in a play. While we walked, I saw a pair of white and red shoes in a shop window. I liked them and asked for them, and the owner, a somewhat older man, smiled and gave them to me. I was so happy that I took off my old shoes and put on the new pair. What I really wish for now is that my childhood would return, and I could walk with my father, but unfortunately just as I no longer have these shoes, so my father is no longer alive, and we cannot go walking together.

What memories of Halabja have been passed down to you from your parents or other older relatives and friends?

Many of my relatives have very unpleasant memories of Halabja: they remember constantly putting their hands over their ears, so as not to hear the sounds of bombs and airplanes and to live in peace. But there are some good memories too. For example, those who were schoolchildren in the 1960s tell me that the schools were co-educational, and boys and girls studied together and were treated equally. When schools held elections to choose student representatives, girls and boys participated equally. Both were also involved in the arts: music, dance, singing, they even staged their own plays. The first play shown at my relatives' school was *Mam u Zin*.

Another point about Halabja is that back in the day, it was a lively intellectual centre. The political life was also quite vivid and could be divided into two factions. One was the Communists, who tried to spread new ideas on equality. They were so popular that Halabja was sometimes called *Little Moscow*! The other faction was the Feudal class, though they were quite different from similar people in other places, as they did not violate their people but rather, they were always 'on their side'.

Could you tell us one story in particular about Halabja as it used to be?

I have not lived in the centre of Halabja for a long time, but the story that always lives with me is the celebration surrounding the Nowruz Feast. Back in the day, celebrating Nowruz was a bit of a symbol of standing against the Iraqi regime and many different related activities were carried out. Whenever I picture Nowruz celebrations, I always think of the love for my country, of how equal men and women are, as well as of the beautiful and colourful Kurdish clothes! When I was little, I sometimes danced with the people but since I was smaller than most, I usually could not continue for a long time. You could always see the hope in people's eyes at Nowruz.

How was Halabja different before Anfal compared to what it is like now?

Before Anfal, Halabja was a city full of love, life, beauty, hope and progress – these were the symbols of the city. Many famous and educated people lived in Halabja, different factories operated throughout, many people worked as tradesmen – it was a lively, bustling place. But within 48 hours on the 16th March 1988 life stopped in the city. The chemical attack was a crime which has affected people's psychology, but also all kinds of economic and social aspects of daily life. People were separated from each other and some are still waiting for their missing children. Even now, life is not stable there, and some families try to leave the city and move somewhere else.

What makes Halabja special?

Halabja is special in a way similar to Hiroshima, and they are considered sister cities because of the chemical weapons attack, which caused the deaths of many innocent people. But there are other things that make Halabja unique. Women have had their rights for a long time in Halabja; they have always participated in manual and agricultural work alongside men. Even in the past, they would have joined political meetings and would have been listened to as much as men. The state of Sharazur was even run by a woman! People paid attention to women and women's education was an important issue.
Many famous poets and thinkers were very proud of their mothers – just think of Sherko Bekas, a famous poet, and the renowned thinker Malla Abdul Kareem Mudaris.
This continues to this day, as currently four women occupy the upper echelons of Halabja society: these include the District Governor or District Commissioner (Kaymakam), the Notary, as well as the President of the University of Halabja. The latter is the first female university president in Kurdistan or Iraq.

Throughout history, Halabja has had all the classical features of a city. The most important building was the Mosque – a place of science, knowledge and education. Even the Arabic word for mosque, *jami'*, is derived from the same root as *jami'ah* (university). Here, in this mosque, many poets and educated people were given the certificate of being a Mullah. Halabja also had a special market which, similar to the malls of today, was the second symbol of how developed the city was, as it brought together people from within and beyond the city and provided grounds for a thriving economy. There was also a public bathhouse, the Pasha Bath, which was regarded as a symbol of a clean and civilised nation.

What aspect of Halabja's culture and environment is particularly important to you? Music, poetry, art, costume, natural beauty, cooking?

What is important to say is that all these were (and are) cherished and important! But for me, having many important poets and writers should be regarded as the ultimate treasure, because through their work, the beautiful history of the city is saved. Literary works also show the difficulties of the nation and the people. Some important literary figures from Halabja include the two brothers, Ahmed Mukhtar Jaff and Tahir Bagi Jaff who, though they belonged to the landed, feudal class, were brought up in such a way that their works reflect the difficulties of the life of their nation. They wanted freedom for their nation, as can be clearly seen in the work of *Masalay Wizhdan*. Interestingly, these two brothers were brought up by a powerful mother, Adela Khanem, who had much authority in the city, in stark contrast to most women in the Middle East at the time.

Halabja, photographed by Gertrude Bell in 1921.
Image PERS_M_029, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University.

How can the culture and spirit of Halabja be revived?

Culture is inseparable from a nation itself and it changes according to time, location, history and events. Culture is a part of the civilization and education of a nation, and also includes its religion and political philosophy. It constantly develops and cannot stay constant, so it is no wonder that some cultural practices of the past die with the passage of time.

Manual arts and crafts are currently at risk of dying out once the older generations who practice them perish, and there should exist some institution or centre aimed at keeping them alive. Just because everyone is focused on being successful and independent does not mean traditional crafts should fade. An example is the making of traditional Kurdish clothes, *Rank u Chogha*, which are sewn from goat wool cloth and worn with a special type of shoe, also made by hand. There are also various elements in the design of buildings and gardens, and all sorts of daily utensils, which are made traditionally, and it would be sad to see the tradition of making them die out.

It is the duty of cultural centres, the media and social media, and of non-governmental organizations to help keep the culture of their nation alive.

Artwork by Awder Osman

Artwork by Awder Osman

Awder Osman, Artist

My memories of Halabja go back to before the chemical attacks. Like any child, I noticed all of the surrounding beauty, the colours, the shapes… Given that my father was an agricultural engineer, nature, flowers, plants and gardens were always part of our house and our lives. Halabja itself is well known for its natural beauty.

Every city has its own, unique features, and Halabja is no different. For me, these have become the ferment that begets all the work that I do. Even by looking at old photographs of Halabja, one can get an idea of how rich the city was. Every city is like an archival album, and an artist, writer or historian can draw so much from it.

I was lucky in the sense that not only have I experienced Halabja prior to the chemical attacks, I have also heard much about its history from my father and my grandfather. Osman Pasha, then the leader of Halabja, was a family friend and neighbour.
My grandfather told me a lot about the literary evenings and salons organised by his wife, Adela Khanem, who invited all of the important artists and poets to their home. Grandfather especially remembered the poets Kuri Ahmed Mukhtar and Tahir Bag, who were quite big characters and key public figures in the city. He also spoke very fondly of the government-owned orchard, where many intellectuals would gather to discuss literature, art and poetry, and of going to see films in the local cinema with his family.

The Halabja of our family stories always sounded like a very open and cultured place.
For me, one of its truly unique features is how many brilliant poets, writers and artists come from the city. Halabja is like a spring in that sense, from which several generations of great artists and thinkers have come and contributed to the wider Kurdish community.
Another notable thing is the position of women, who have always been involved both in rural work and in the life of the city. In Halabja, women have always stood shoulder to shoulder with men and they have always taken part in city administration and leadership – Adela Khanem, already mentioned, is perhaps the greatest example.

After the chemical bombardment, Halabja changed drastically. I would say that in the past, we all had higher hopes, greater achievements and stronger values. There are many reasons for this, but I do not think I will be able to do them justice if I try to describe them here.

My own career as an artist has definitely been influenced by my life in Halabja. I have been steeped in art and beauty since childhood – in a sense, you could say that the decision to become an artist had been made for me before I was born! I remember that even at the time of the catastrophe, when I was a child, I put paint pens and pastels in my pockets. People wanted to save their lives, but I wanted to save the life of my colours... Later, when we were fleeing towards the border, we stopped to dry our clothes from the rain and storm. My father made a fire and he saw me holding onto those paint pens. He slapped me and said: ‘people hold onto gold and money in time of need and you are holding onto the colourful pens in your pocket’! Since then, I knew I had to stick with art through thick and thin, as it is the only shelter from whatever happens in the world.

Nowadays, much of my art is about war and genocide and how it is for those especially vulnerable: mothers, children, even unborn children. I also tackle the topics of nations, nationalism, and humanity. I am always in awe of how much honest, beautiful art exists in the world, and how much of their humanity people can hold onto through art.

The position of an artist in Halabja is just like it is within the Kurdish community more broadly, though perhaps it is also a little different. This is because Halabja has always been a city of art and artists – the community and the artists are very close here. From the earlier modern history until now, art in Halabja held an important position both in the private and public sphere.

Certainly, the political situation has changed how art is practiced and perceived. The many conflicts that our city has gone through have meant that art and artists have adapted to reflect much of this conflict and struggle – I know my own work certainly has. I would not say that there is any style of art that is specifically 'Halabjan', but the effect of the chemical bombardment, of the Anfal and the deep wounds of the Iraq-Iran war can be clearly seen in the work of most Halabjan artists – this is also true of Kurdish artists in general.

Despite the rich artistic heritage of Halabja, until very recently, we have had no dedicated space for the arts, like a museum or a gallery. In 2010, we tried to set up a gallery with the help of the artist Ismail Hassan, hoping it would become a local centre of art and design. Unfortunately, this had to be postponed, but finally we managed to open in 2015. I hope it will be a part of the cultural revival of Halabja, but to be honest, I think we have already said so much about what should and should not be done to revive Halabja, even though no one really knows... To some extent, we have to rely on fate and hope for the best.

Artwork by Awder Osman

Memories of Halabja, as told by Rudaw TV presenter Shaho Amin to Bano Murad Kader

The memories of my childhood in Halabja have always stayed in my mind. Back then, I believed Halabja was the most beautiful place on earth. In the summer, we would sleep on the rooftops and in the gardens, and in the morning, we would wake up to the sound of the cuckoo birds. They would rest on the high branches of the trees, singing us songs of a beautiful morning.

Our house was in the bazaar area and they called it *Saraa*. All day and night I would play on the streets with my friends. In the morning, we were sent to buy fresh bread and we would get into fights over the smallest things on the way. Our parents had to rush in to separate us. To this day, many of them are my life-long friends.

Halabja was a lot more advanced in comparison to today. Many noble families lived there and they were very concerned with the development of Halabja. Women had much more autonomy and foreign culture was not imposed on the people, as it sometimes is today. I have heard from our fathers and grandfathers that this was a town of poets, artists and progressive thinkers. The more recent trend towards socially and intellectually conservative thinking that has come into Halabja has made the city ugly. In the past, I never felt that this way of thinking belonged to Halabja.

In the evening, we would all sit in our gardens filled with roses, orchids, and mina flowers – this is another memory that never leaves my mind. If we planned to visit a family member or a friend in the evening, my mum would send us (the children) ahead to tell them we were coming. These evenings would be filled with cakes and tea and sunflower seeds.

I always used to hope that I would get a big slice of cake, and if the child next to me got the bigger piece, I would get very upset with them and think that they had stolen it from me!

I went to the Shinerwe school, where we would all sit outside, eating sandwiches and luqma qazi and shamil biscuits. For secondary school, I went to the Ahmed Mukhtar Jaff School. I studied a lot, but my grades were never high enough for my parents! During this time, Ms Delkash (Della) Murad taught us biology. She was the daughter of Mahmoud Ali Murad, from one of the well-known families of the city. She has stayed in my memory as she was always kind, calm, and beautiful. Unlike the other teachers, who taught through fear, she was full of kindness and love, and she really stood out among them. She exemplified the qualities that the well-known families of Halabja were famous for.

My mum and dad put me and my young brother in music school, where I studied a little jazz. Both my brothers were good singers. One summer morning, we put on our Kurdish clothes, including the faqiyana and the traditional hat, and we went to Gulan Park to record *Palka Zereena* with the Kirkuk TV channel. Amidst the striking scenery of Gulan, we, young boys and girls, recorded beautiful Kurdish songs. I will never forget this memory.

Halabja was a beautiful, peaceful Kurdish town and it always opposed the Baath regime. Often at night, we would suddenly hear gun shots and the Peshmerga would come into town, attacking the security forces. People always helped the Peshmerga. In 1987, there was an anti-government demonstration in Kani Ashqan; the regime destroyed the area with tanks and helicopters in response.

After the chemical weapons attacks, Halabja was never the same again. Many families left and dispersed: some ran away to Sulaymaniyah, others left the country, never to return. These are my memories of Halabja. Wherever I am in the world today I always recognise the people of Halabja through their big hearts and the love for their culture.

Music of Halabja, Hoshyar Hama Faraj

Even my earliest memories, from my childhood and adolescence, are not free from strife and grief. We are a nation of war and suffering, and Halabja has been no exception.
I remember playing football with my friends on a hot day, when suddenly an aeroplane came, bombarding the city and killing a dear childhood friend of mine. I still have not forgotten this, so filled with grief and distress are these memories!

My father always spoke longingly of the Halabja of the past. He especially remembered the public orchard, which was one of the most beautiful orchards of Halabja, where the poets and writers of the time, not just from Halabja but from all of Kurdistan, would gather to talk, drink and sing. It would be filled with poetry and song until late into the night. Another beautiful place he remembered was the King's house.

Contemporary Halabja is very different from the pre-bombardment city. In the past, people were free to wear whatever they wanted, but now it has to be based on a certain interpretation of Islam. Halabja's arts and culture were much more developed than they are today: the theatre hall was always full, and there were many popular seminars and gatherings. Nowadays, Halabja has become a place of stark political conflict, and the last things on anyone's mind are arts and culture! But in the past, the city was at the forefront of the regional literary and cultural scene, and Halabjans had a strong, local identity - even the language was a little different from the speech prevalent in Sulaymaniyah. Nowadays, Halabja has become a symbol of all Kurds because of the chemical bombardment. If you mention 'Halabja', you have a better chance of being recognised than if you simply say 'I am Kurdish'.

Above and Opposite: The Shinrwé music group

Environmentally, Halabja is very diverse and beautiful, surrounded by mountains on three sides, which give it some pleasantly fresh weather. We have a delicious local cuisine – our most characteristic dish is probably boiled rice with pomegranate vinegar and soup, which you can barely find anywhere else! In terms of poetry, the region was truly pioneering: most great Kurdish poets came from Halabja, such as Ahmed Tayar Beg, Nally and Goran. Some brilliant musicians, such as Omari Khazan and Hama Qutu, also hail from the city.
In the past, we would listen to live music at all sorts of ceremonies and parties. I remember two very capable singers in particular, who could sing without any accompaniment or without microphones, and keep their audience entertained and dancing all night.
These were Khulay Sherali and Ahmedi Shaayar. Later, in the 1970s, the Shinrwé Halabja Music Team was formed, led by Azad Saleh. The group continues to perform to this day.

As a musician, I believe that the music of any place has its own, unique features, and Halabja is no exception. Songs in different cities and regions such as Hawler (Erbil), Sulaymaniyah and others are all unique, though they do have similarities based on geographical proximity and cultural influence. Halabja is located between Hawraman and Sulaymaniyah, so our melodies are a bit similar, and we sing in our own dialect. For me, the most beautiful and special song of Halabja is the song *Balanja gyian balanja*, which is permeated with the spirit of the city and region. The song has been popular before the chemical attack and is sung to this day.

I believe that the arts are the key to reinvigorating the spirit and culture of Halabja.
There is a saying: 'the level of cultural awareness of a city is measured by its art'. We have to build halls for theatre, concerts, seminars and gatherings so that people can participate in culture again: unfortunately, now we do not have a single such venue in the city!

Theatre in Halabja, Kamaran Ahmad

The beginnings of theatre in Halabja are quite humble, dating back to a student play from 1939. The noted intellectual, writer and composer A. A. Shawnem, then a ten-year-old pupil, played the part of 'Nazaneen' in the play *Love and Promises,* produced by her teacher A. B. Hawri. She later considered Hawri's play to be the first proper theatrical performance produced in Halabja. Initially staged at the Sanawi Salahaddin School (now the 'Asri market), it was a great success, and was later performed in Sulaymaniyah.

Following the success of this play, dramatic arts developed significantly in the schools of Halabja. Various school productions were staged during Newroz celebrations in the 1940s. Later, in 1951-1952, Kamal Reemawi, a Palestinian teacher working at the Halabja Intermediate School, prepared a performance of the poem *Ineffective Man*, which he adapted for stage himself.

This adaptation shows the creative development of theatre in this period. Shortly afterwards, in 1955, A. A. Shawnem, now a teacher herself, decided to organise a fully-fledged production of a classic play, complete with elaborate decorations, costumes, and scenography. She chose Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice,* translating it into Kurdish herself. Later, Shawnem was involved in every aspect of the production, not only casting and directing the play, but also making the props, sewing the costumes, and applying the actors' make up. Following the success of *The Merchant of Venice*, A. A. Shawnem, as well as other teachers and artists (chief among them Ra'ouf Yahya), staged more plays throughout the 1950s, both at schools and with youth and adult organisations. *Dew of Loneliness* was especially notable for including many women in the cast.

Between 1961 and 1963, all artistic activity ceased in Halabja due to the political situation in Kurdistan. However, from 1965 onwards, dramatic productions returned to the city. One notable figure of these years was the teacher-actor Taha Khalil, whose work on *The Beggar* and *Zulekha* did much to raise the standard of local theatre.

Throughout the 1970s, professional acting troupes were set up both in Halabja and in Sulaymaniyah, performing across the region. Professional actors and writers oversaw many of the productions; for instance, in 1972, the great artist Osman Chewar set up an acting group in Halabja, performing works of Amin Merza Karim until 1974. In 1976, I starred in a production of *Torch* with another troupe formed by the unforgettable Jamal Mala Qadir. I remember our audiences were always very lively and engaged. You could see the people were really interested in the plays, and our theatre hall was usually packed.

At the same time, theatre was not only a professional pastime: amateur productions were staged by the Sulaymaniyah Workers' Union, led by the actor Makki Abdullah, and youth groups continued to perform as well. Much of the work was politically inclined. For instance, in 1978, the production of *The Matter of Conscience,* written by the local author Ahmed Mukhtar Jaff, was interrupted by Baath Party officials, who perceived it as veiled criticism.

Between the years 1983 and 1988, theatre in Halabja underwent significant development; this can be considered a golden era of local theatre. Both local and foreign plays were produced. Among the latter, Russian drama proved especially popular, with texts by Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Sholokhov translated and adapted by local writers and directors. All this was done in an atmosphere of intellectual ferment, where writers, actors and theatre enthusiasts would discuss and debate their work, often in opposition to local Islamic elites, who disapproved of theatre.

After the chemical attacks, theatrical productions ceased completely in Halabja. The gates of the city theatre were opened once again in 1992 and, since then, many plays have been performed. These are an important part of reviving the local culture and community. I firmly believe that theatre has an important role in society by passing on cultural values, keeping local history alive, and also bringing people beauty and joy.

Women in Halabja, Kazhall Hama

I was born in Halabja in the second half of the 1960s and spent all my early years there: I am a child of Halabja. In 1985, I went to Baghdad to complete my university studies, but I returned to Halabja a year later and stayed there until the chemical attack of 1988.

I have so many bittersweet memories of Halabja. It is the most significant place in my life, it lives in me and through me. It is a city that will be alive in my soul forever.

In the past eight centuries, Halabja grew and developed until it became one of the most beautiful, clean and thriving cities in Kurdistan. However, if we want to talk about its history, we must divide it into two stages: pre- and post-chemical bombardment, because these attacks cleaved the history and identity of Halabja in two. These two sides of Halabja are completely different from each other, in all the political, economic, social, educational and cultural dimensions. Politically, Halabja became a victim of the long-term war between Iraq and Iran. Socially, the fabric of the city was broken completely. The fate of half of the families was death, and the other half were confused and exiled. The contemporary people of Halabja have lost the life opportunities of the past. All the cultural, literary and intellectual institutions were destroyed, and the culture of the city changed irrevocably.

Historically, Halabja was where all the armed movements of the Kurds began, but the history of the city is not just about struggle. Many distinguished Kurdish poets come from Halabja. It was a very open city, where Muslims, Jews, Yarsanis, Christians, and a small minority of Armenians lived together peacefully. To return Halabja to how it used to be,

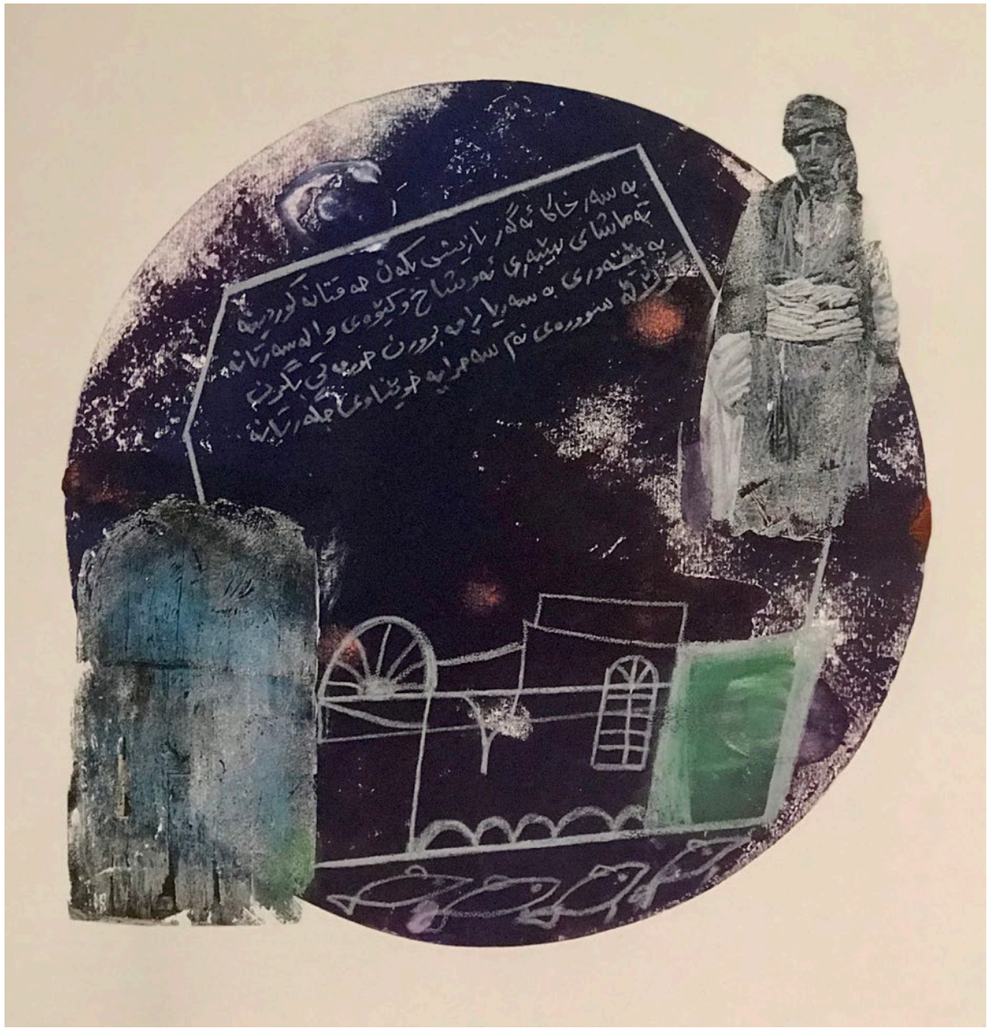
Mahsuma Mohamad Ahmed and Mahmod Ali Murad

Sisters Fatema Mala Karim and Fahima Mala Karim (daughters of the poet Nateq Karim) shown with Ayesha Khan

it is vital that everyone works within their own field, be it poetry, music, art, environment or anything else. All these together can make something beautiful to put Halabja back on its feet.

Many women of Halabja held important roles in the history of the city. Perhaps the most obvious example is Adela Khanem (known to Westerners as 'Lady Adela'), who became the first woman leader in Kurdistan. But there are many less obvious examples: historically, a significant proportion of women were educated, with many holding university degrees. Other, equally important women stayed at home, some working with textiles, others assisting their families in manual work. Politically, women always had a leading role in demonstrations and in the opposition to the Iraqi regime. Many were imprisoned and suffered torture. Even now, compared to other cities, Halabja has many women in the upper echelons of the administration, and a significant proportion of local women are highly educated.

That being said, I have my own opinion about the radical changes to the current position of women in Halabja, which I may not be able to fully explain. Let us just say that certain Islamic currents in politics, though apparent across the world, are particularly prominent in Halabja. In general, though, the treatment of women in Halabja is good when compared to certain other parts of the region. For instance, practices such as femicide do not even exist here – this alone is something.



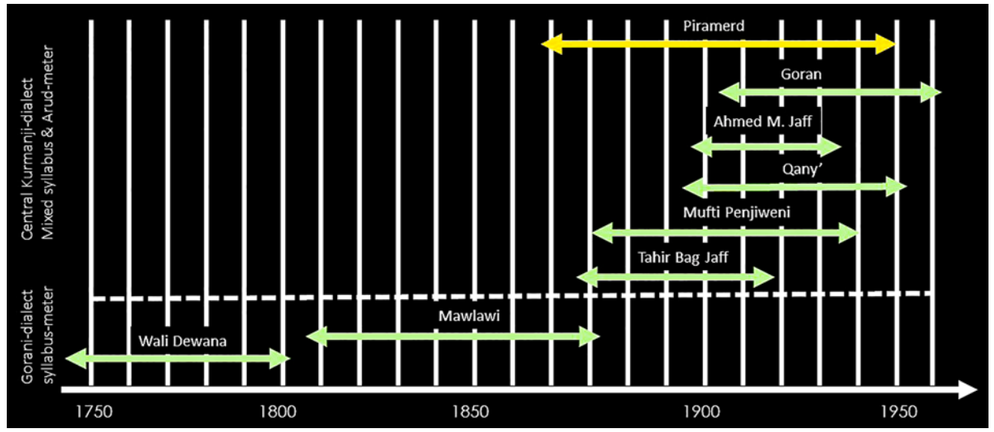
Artwork inspired by Tahir Bag Jaff, Mariwan Jalal

The Poets and Poetry of Halabja, Dr. Rebwar Fatah

To celebrate the Halabja region, I will talk of the life and work of seven poets:

Wali Dewana – (1744-1801), Sayid Sadiq
Mawlawi – (1806-1882), Tawagoza, Darbandikhan
Tahir Bagi Jaff – (1878-1918), Halabja
Mufti Penjiweni – (1881-1952), Penjwen
Qany' – (1895-1965), Penjwen
Ahmed Bagi Jaff – (1898-1935), Halabja
Goran – (1904-1962), Halabja

For each poet, I provide a short biography and a poem to give an idea of their work.
Of course, many more poets lived in Halabja, but I am confident that those I have chosen will give the reader a good idea of the cultural richness of the region, which also produced many prominent intellectual, social and religious figures.



To place them in their historical context, I have plotted the poets' lives on the timeline above. Piramerd – Tawfiq Mahmoud Hamza (1867-1950) – is included, as he was a significant figure in the Kurdish literary an intellectual life in the first half of the twentieth century. Although his name is not usually linked to Halabja, it is difficult to imagine contemporary Kurdish poetry without Piramerd; he is essential to the contemporary Kurdish intellectual life. A poet and a great thinker, he was also a journalist and he had a significant role in archiving Kurdish literature. Without his weekly journal, Zheen (1939-1950) and the precursor, Zhyan (1926-1937), some of the most famous Kurdish poets would not be known to us at all, or else a significant part of their poetry would have been lost.

After death of Piramerd in 1950, Goran took over editing the paper, and subsequently left it in the hands of his wife, Rahma Khan. This was most likely the first time a woman took ownership of a media outlet, not only in Kurdistan, but in much of the region, including Iraq. Later, contemporary intellectuals – Jamil Saeeb, Ahmed Zirng, and Nuri Amin Bag – took over the paper, whose last issue was published in 1963.

Piramerd introduced the poetry of Wali Dewana to the wider Kurdish public by translating it from the Gorani dialect (locally known as Hawrami) to Central Kurdish (Sorani), and publishing the poems in his weekly paper. In fact, the first published collection of Dewana was mostly based on the pieces published in Piramerd's weekly.

Piramerd, due to his intellectual and social status, was close to many important characters of his time, including Mahmud Pasha Jaff, Sheikh Saeed Hafid and Amin Zaki Bagand, among others. He was on good terms with most of his literary contemporaries, including Mufiti Penjiweni, Qany', the Jaff brothers – Tahir Bag and Ahmed Bag, Sheikh Nuri Sheikh Salih, and of course Goran. When, in 1932, still as a teacher in Halabja, Goran decided to write poetry, he wrote to Piramerd first, sending him one of his poems to be assessed, and asking whether he should keep writing. Piramerd encouraged him to do so.

Zheen significantly contributed to saving the poetry of Qany', Mufti Penjewni, Goran and others. In the 1970s, I have personally helped search Zheen page by page for Mufti Penjiweni's poetry. The exercise was very productive.

Poetry: language and form

The metering of poetry needs to be addressed, as it is common among all the poets discussed. The leading intellectual figures in the Kurdish Baban Principality (1649–1850) were Nali (Mullah Khidir Ehmed Shawaysi Mikayali, 1797–1856), Salim (Abdul-Rehman Begi Sahebqiran, 1800-1866) and Kurdi (Mustafa Bagi Mahmud Bagi Sahebgran, 1809-1850). They introduced the Arabic 'arūz metre to Central Kurdish speakers, and they only wrote in 'arūz. Most likely, they borrowed this from Farsi poetry, rather than directly from the Arabs, as there are differences between Farsi and Arabic 'arūz. Afterwards, all poets writing in Central Kurdish used 'arūz. Later, during the 1920s and 1930s, Kurdish poets started moving away from 'arūz and writing in syllabic metre.

The classic, rhyming Kurdish poetry of the Kurdish Baban Principality possesses different "metres"; these are known in Arabic as "seas" or buhūr (singular bahr). The measuring unit of the "seas" is known as "taf'ylah" (plural tafā'īl) and every "sea" contains a certain number of tafā'īl, which construct the verse - or "bayt" – of the poem. Every bayt ends with the same rhyme (or "qafiyah") throughout the poem. The poems use the AABABA rhyming scheme. In addition, the content is chiefly not unified, in that each verse can have meaning independently of the rest of the poem.

However, Gorani poets chiefly used a metre based on Kurdish folk lyrics. This metre is called "ke'shi birgayy" or syllabic metre. It was used by Besarani (1643 – 1702), Wali Dewana (1744-1801), Mawlawi (1806 – 1882), Masturay Ardalan (1804-1848), Jafayy (1835-1890), Malay Jabari (1806-1876), and many others. They all wrote their poetry in the Gorani dialect, in a ten-syllable metre, as derived from Kurdish folk lyrics. They used a set of two rhyming couplets in the AABB rhyming scheme, though occasionally they would use AABA or ABAB. Unlike the classical Kurdish poets, however, they did not use unified rhyming, i.e. AABABA. It was customary for the poet's name to appear in the poem, usually at the end.

In my transcriptions, I have introduced punctuation to the poets' work. Old poems have always been delivered orally and thus contained no formalised punctuation. Even many modern poets hardly use punctuation. This is, in fact, a common problem in Middle Eastern literature, poetry and prose alike.

I have then translated these poems from Kurdish, my native language. Here I need to clarify the nature of my work: I have not re-created poetry in English; rather I have done my best to keep the soul of the original poetry. Often, I had to change the structure of a poem – shift the line breaks or divide the stanzas to adjust it to the English language. However, whatever efforts I have made, I will always believe that translation is inherently 'unfair': it necessarily dilutes the original poetry, and often takes much of the magic out.

Dr Rebwar Fatah

Dr Rebwar Fatah was born in Kurdistan but moved to live in exile in London in 1982. He has written numerous articles and has given many talks and interviews, in both Kurdish and English, on the socio-political situation of the Middle East. He speaks the main regional languages fluently.

Dr Fatah holds a MSc from the University of London and a PhD from University College London (UCL). Dr Fatah has been fascinated by poetry since he was a young man. He is passionate about language, peace, and free expression.

Dr Fatah is the author of: *My poetry depicts you: An anthology of contemporary Kurdish poetry* and *Souls of the Street: The Art of Street Photography*. Between 1992-1995, he also collected and published the newsletter of Hawkarani Kurdistan.

Wali Dewana (1744/5-1801/2)

Not much is known about Wali Dewana's early life. His date of birth is alternatively given as 1744 or 1826. His father was Kiwekha Mohammed, an influential tribe chief from the Kamalayy clan, though some suggest he belonged to the Mikaylee clan. Since Dewana's childhood, his father insisted on his thorough education, and he was well-versed in religious teachings and poetry. Wali Dewana is buried in the town of Sayid Sadiq, not far from Halabja.

Dewana wrote poetry in rather formal Gorani dialect, distinct from the spoken language. His poetry is in the syllabic verse of folk poetry, not the Arabic 'arūz.

Dewana's poetry was largely unknown until Piramerd published and popularised his work in the first half of the twentieth century. Piramerd translated Dewana's poetry from Gorani into Central Kurdish (Sorani). These poems (both the originals and the translations) were then published in a single volume in 1970. In 1976, Osman Hawrami prepared another publication in both dialects, which was more refined than the earlier collection. Later, Sabir Razi prepared another translation of the original poems to Central Kurdish, and both were published in another anthology (undated).

Much of Dewana's life remains shrouded in mystery. To this day, some believe that he is a mythical character invented by Piramerd, although most consider his existence a well-established fact. It appears that the first manuscripts of Dewana's poetry were delivered to Piramerd by Mullah Abdullah Mariwani (also known as Mullah Abdullah Maledar after his later move to Male'dar in Tawela).

Various years are given to the birth and death of Dewana. I am inclined to agree with Ayoub Kiwekha Rostam, an expert on Gorani language and poetry, on the dates of AH 1157 and 1216. As the months are unknown, and the Hijri calendar does not match precisely onto Georgian years, this would place his birth at AD 1744/45 and his death at AD 1801/02. Rostam also challenged the claim that Dewana was illiterate, going as far as to say that Dewana was a "mirza" – a title at the time given to scholars and intellectuals.

The most important person in the life and poetry of Wali Dewana is his young love Shamsa, usually known as Sham. When Dewana was attending school, his reputation for being a talented scholar spread among the Jaff tribes. Kukha Qadir Shirwan, one of the chiefs of the Mikayyle tribe, sent his daughter, Sham, to be taught by Dewana's teacher. Sham and Dewana fell in love and decided to get married; according to local custom, their families agreed on the union. However, as they belonged to nomadic tribes, who regularly travelled between the plains and the highlands, they agreed to wait until their seasonal return from Kewstan (the highlands). Before this return, a conflict ensued between the two tribes, resulting in Sham's family refusal to support the marriage.

Following page: Artwork inspired by Wali Dewana, Mariwan Jalal

Lovelorn, Dewana never recovered and dedicated most of his poetry to the lost love of his life. In one of his poems, Dewana urges the chief of the Jaff tribe, Kay Khasraw Bag, to help him reconcile the two families. Despite the chief's power and influence, he was not able to help the young Dewana, and the lovers never reunited.

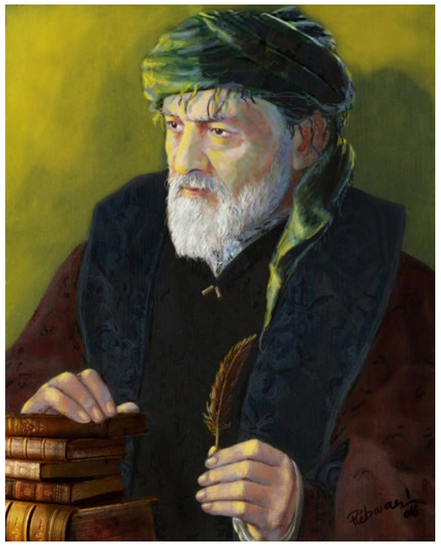
Example of poetry by Wali Dewana

Oh Sham of nights, oh candle of nights
Oh bright Sham, forty candles of night
Oh my life, oh my pure soul
Oh my vision with no sleep
Oh, you are amber-like, soft as lily
Oh the light in the Jaff's Rashmal
Oh, I am like the moth with burnt wings
Oh, I am attached to your soft tresses
You do not visit me, not even once, not even at death's door
Unmoved by my sighs of grief or my grave wounds
You do not ask how I feel for you
Unconcerned with the fire of my emotions
You were unfaithful to me
For you, I am the dark-starred Romeo
The climate of the highlands returned to you
It is a pity you have forgotten me

ئەی شەمی شەوان
ئەی شەمی شەوان! ئەی شەمی شەوان!
هەی شەمی بەشەوق، چلچرای شەوان!
هەی ژیانی من، هەی ڕۆحی ڕەوان!
هەی گڵێنەکەی دیدەی بێ خەوان!
هەی عەنبەرین خاڵ، سۆسەنی کڵاف!
هەی ڕووناکایی ڕەشماڵانی جاف!
هەی من پەروانەی پەڕ سوتاوی تۆ!
هەی من گیرۆدەی زوڵفی خاوی تۆ!
تۆ جارێ نایەی بۆ سەر وەختی من؛
گوێ نادەی بە ئاە، زامی سەختی من.
ناپرسیت ئاخۆ من بۆ تۆ چۆنم!
بێ باکی لە تین قرچەی دەروونم!
بێ مروەتیت کرد هەی شەم دەربارەم؛
من بۆ تۆ قەیسی سیا ستارەم.
هەوای کوێستانت وا بۆ بووەوە؛
حەیفت کرد منت لەبیر چووەوە.

Notes:
Sham is a nickname for the female name Shamsa. Sham also means "candle".
In the first verse, Dewana means "you are the candle of nights". In the first line of the first verse, I kept one Sham and changed the other one to candle.
Chilchira literary means 40 candles; another meaning is 'chandelier'. I think here it simply means 40 candles.
Rashmal was a nomadic Jaff tent made of goat hair. The name literally means "black home", named after colour of the hair. I kept it as it is.

Mawlawi (1806-1882)



Abdulrehim Mullah Sayed Mawlawi was a poet, Islamic scholar and Sufi. His pen name was Madum or Madumi, and he was often known as Mewlewi Tawagozai, i.e. a wise elder of Tawagoz. He wrote in the Gorani dialect.

Mawlawi was born in the village of Tawagoz, in the Jawanro district of Kurdistan-Iran, into a family of noted theologians, who traced their lineage to a 16th-century mystic. His father, Mullah Sayid, was the headmaster of a madrasa in the village of Bejawa, Kurdistan-Iraq. In his early childhood, Mawlawi was taught by his father; he then enrolled in various schools and eventually completed his studies at a school headed by the mufti of Sulaymaniyah (a 'mufti' was a prominent social and religious title).

As a young mullah, Mawlawi settled down near the town of Halabja, attracted to the rich socio-religious life of the region. He was inspired by Sufism and joined the circle of Shaikh Osman Sarajaddin, a spiritual guide of the Naqshbandi Order. He was also in close contact with the Bagzadayi Jaff in Halabja, having established a strong bond with their leaders. He traveled widely in Kurdistan, acquiring a solid knowledge of regional geography and the speech and customs of its diverse tribes. He lived modestly all his life. When his wife died, he wrote several emotional poems in grief.

Seven years before his death, Mawlawi went blind in both eyes. This ultimately killed him – in 1882, he died after he was hit by a branch (which he could not have noticed) when riding home from a funeral. As his work had not been published before his death, it was initially left in quite a disarray. His poetry was first collected, translated into Central Kurdish (Sorani), and published by Piramerd in the first half of the twentieth century. This introduced Mawlawi to the wider Kurdish audience.

In 1882, the year of Mawlawi's death, Piramerd started a job as a civil servant in the city of Sulaymaniyah. He was transferred to Halabja in 1883, where he stayed for three years. At the time, Halabja was a vibrant intellectual centre, famed especially for its poetry. Piramerd was instantly drawn to the poetry of Mawlawi and Besarani. Realising that the poetry of Mawlawi had not yet been collected or collated, he travelled or over Sharazur to do so. In 1935, Piramerd published Mawlawi's collected poems in two volumes. The first volume was called 'Asil' – 'Origin' – and contained original Gorani poetry, and the second, 'R'oh' ('Soul') included the Central Kurdish translations.

After Piramerd, no other attempt has been made to popularise Mawlawi's poetry. As it was written in Gorani, which is not a dialect taught through formal education, the number of people who could understand it inevitably decreased over time. This is further compounded by the fact that, although Gorani is a dialect, Mawlawi used its literary form, quite different from the spoken language. These two reasons made his poetry quite inaccessible to younger generations and no doubt contributed to the lack of promotion.

As a result, no attempt was made to collect all his works until well after his death. Mullah Abdul-Karim Mudarris saved some of it and published a modest volume of Mawlawi's poetry in 1961. These poems were already quite scattered – Mudarris credits the people who provided different poems for his collection as proof. Even then, he did not manage to save all of his work and there is much that has not survived to this day.

Examples of poetry by Mawlawi

The disturbing condition of my body
Cannot be written with my broken pen.
The flood of tears blinds Madum;
I have no options left; I hold on to the pen.

ئەدای پەشێویی حاڵاتی جەستەم؛
دوورەن جە تەحریر خامەی شکستەم،
بەڵام "مەعدووم" هەرس دیدەش جۆش وەردەن؛
ناعیلاج خامەش وە دەسگیر کەردەن.

I am burning in the sorrow of your separation,
But not as much as feeling for your loneliness.
I swear by your death, beloved; I am also on my way.
I will be with you today or tomorrow.
Singer, sing us a song for my inevitable condition!
Butler, pass me a glass, lover is waiting!

سۆچنۆم حەسرەت دەردی جیاییت،
نەک چون بڵێسەی یادی تەنیاییت.
وە مەرگت، دیدەم، هام نە گوزەردا.
منیچ لام لای تۆن ئارۆ یا فەردا.
موتریب، مەقامێ دەردم ناچارەن!
ساقیا، جامێ دۆست ئینتیزارەن!

This year the spring like cold Autumn;
Flowers fall in Madumi's garden and taken him to wilderness.
Perhaps my luck is against the norm
Otherwise when and who has seen Springs drop flowers.

ئیمساڵ نەو وەهار چون خەزانی سەرد؛
بەرگی وەردی باغ "مەعدووم" بەرد پەی هەرد
مشیۆ تاڵەی من خیلاف ئەنگێز بۆ
وەرنە، کەی؟ کێ دی؟ وەهار گوڵڕێز بۆ.

Notes:
These three poems were written for Ambar Khatun

Other poetry by Mawlawi

That is enough, my love, to spiral me down into a whirlpool of sadness.
That is enough to hide like vision of the eyes.
In our union my heart suffering.
How the union differs from separation!
Oh I wish for a khalwat to see you with no concerns.
Except for you, my eyes did not see anyone else.
Heart for seeing you, what khalwat can find.
Even if you are in my eyes, people would still look at you.

ئازیز وەس بووزەم نە گێجاو خەم.
وەس چون بینایی پەنهان بۆ نە چەم.
وەختێ جە وەسڵێچ هەر دڵم ڕێش بۆ.
مشیۆ وەسڵ و فەسڵ فەرقشان چێش بۆ.

ئاخ پەی خەڵوەتێ بدّیام وە بێ خەم
سیوای تۆ دیدەم کەس نەدیام وە چەم
دڵ پەی دیدەنت، کام خەڵوەت سازۆ
تۆی دیدەیچم بی مەردم نمازۆ

Notes:
Khalwat is where the Sufis isolate themselves to worship, similar to meditation.

Tahir Bag Jaff (1875-1917)

Tahir Bag Jaff was born to a noble family of Halabja and educated there. He is buried in Ababyle. His brother, Ahmed Mukhtar Bag Jaff, was also a poet.

Both of Jaff's parents were of noble birth. His mother, Adela Khanem, was the daughter of Qadir Bagi Sahebqran, and his father, Osman Pasha was son of Hama Pasha and grandson of Kaykhusraw Bagi Jaff. Jaff's father was a powerful and influential landowner: he had Sharzur, Garmyan, Penjewn, and much land further towards the Iranian border under his control.

Jaff was a polyglot, speaking Kurdish, Farsi and Arabic, in addition to some English, and was well-versed in poetry. His first volume of poetry was published in 1936, and he wrote in two Kurdish dialects: Central Kurdish (Sorani) and Gorani, as well as in Farsi.

Jaff was an avid member of the local literary scene and corresponded with the Kurdish poet Nari (1874-1994), who lived in Mariwan. A lively man, he also enjoyed hunting and drinking.

Jaff's love life finds a strong reflection in his poems. The story goes that in front of Osman Pasha Jaff's house, there was a water-spring called Kani Nawlla, where local women fetched water for domestic use, as was then customary. Among the young ladies who did so was Shewa, the daughter of Shawlkar, a local Jewish goldsmith. Tahir developed feelings for the tall, beautiful girl, and often waited on his balcony to see her draw water from the spring. Although interfaith marriages were generally taboo back then, Tahir requested his family to ask for Shewa's hand in marriage. Her father, noting their feelings for each other, as well as expecting some protection from the anti-Jewish persecution prevalent back then, agreed. The couple married and had several children. Presently, one of their daughter's lives in London and another one in Tel Aviv.

Tahir immortalised their love in a poem, which later became a very popular local song and inspired a few more. It is one of the most important musical poems of Tahir Bag, if not of all Kurdish poetry.

Example of poetry by Tahir Bag Jaff

The gardens are still, let the nightingales arrive
The heart remains still, and senseless today, oh God! Let the blooming season of flowers arrive
If you care for us, why must we drink the water of mortality?
From your heavenly ruby lips, let us have the life of eternity
I have no more peace, nor existence, I lost my sweet soul
Friends come and mourn me, let us hear their tears of grief
I am the slave of a hair of your tresses, shattered by your magical eyes
Martyr of your sword-like brows; let the time of Jesus arrive
Thank you, God, blanket flowers, destroyed the beauty of Laila
Say, let the Majnun, the leader of the lovers, arrive
The time is joy of beauty, butler, pass me a glass
For glory in the tavern, let Peeri Mughan arrive
Oh the senseless lover, do not be quiet like Tahir
For the joyful heart, let the singers' melodies arrive

چەمەن یەکبارە خامۆشە؛ خرۆشی بولّبولّان با بێ!
دڵ ئەمرۆ مات و مەدهۆشە؛ خوا فەسڵی گوڵان با بێ!
ئەگەر مەیلت لە سەرمانە، چ حاجەت ئابی حەیوانە!
لە لێوی لەعلی جانانە، حەیاتی جاویدان با بێ!
نەماوە حاڵەت و ژینم؛ لە دەستچوو ڕۆحی شیرینم؛
ڕەفیقان بێن بکەن شینم؛ سەدای گریە و فوغان با بێ!
ئەسیری تاری گێسوتم؛ هیلاکی چاوی جادوتم؛
شەهیدی تێغی ئەبروتم؛ دەسا عیسای زەمان با بێ!
بیحەمدیللا گوڵی ڕەعنا، شکاندی ڕەونەقی لەیلا؛
بڵێن مەجنونەکەی شەیدا، ڕەئیسی ئاشقان با بێ!
زەمانە بەزمی ڕەندانە؛ بدە ساقی بە پەیمانە!
لەبەر تەعزیمی مەیخانە؛ بڵێن پیری موغان با بێ!
ئەلا ئەی ئاشقی مەدهۆش! وەکو تاهیر مەبە خامۆش!
لەبەر سۆزی دڵی پڕجۆش، نەوایی موتریبان با بێ!

Notes:
Tahir: the poet; he typically mentioned his own name at the end of each poem.
Layla and Majnun: Majnun and Layla is an old, Arabic love story about the 7th-century Najdi Bedouin poet Qays ibn al-Mullawah and his love Layla bint Mahdi (or Layla al-Aamiriya). The Layla-Majnun theme passed from Arabic to Persian, Turkish, and Indian languages, most famously through the narrative poem composed in 584/1188 by the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi as the third part of his Khamsa. It is a popular poem praising their love story. Lord Byron called it "the Romeo and Juliet of the East."
Peeri Mughan: a character in the classical Persian poetry of Hafid Shirazi. He is an archetype of a spiritual guide leading one towards God.

Mufti Penjiweni (1881-1952)

Mullah Abdullah Tutinchi, best known as Mufti Penjiweni (that is, mufti – Islamic jurist – of Penjwen), was born in 1881 in the village of Bistan. His father, Mullah Karim Bistan, was also a religious scholar.

After his father died, Penjiweni's family moved to a village in Penjwen, where they carved out a difficult existence, as they were left without the family's main breadwinner. Before his untimely death, Penjiweni's older brother Ahmed (himself a budding poet) taught him some literary skills.

Penjiweni lived at a time when the Ottoman Empire was in decay, as western superpowers became more and more entangled in Middle Eastern politics. This, coupled with the influence of the Russian October Revolution, contributed to great social, economic, and political upheaval in Kurdistan. Accordingly, Penjiweni was quite politically active. Despite his religious education, he saw much of traditional religion as an obstacle to social progress and was dedicated to both redefining religion in more rational or socially progressive terms, and to the cause of Kurdish patriotism. In 1946, when the Kurdish Republic was established, Penjiweni attended the raising of the Kurdish flag in Mahabad, Iran, with his friend, the much younger poet Qany'. They both wrote poems for this occasion.

Penjiweni was also a social reformer. A proponent of education for all, he helped introduce a public education system to Penjwen (1935). Locally, he was the first to send his daughter to school and involved her in his business, and he campaigned hard for women's education. As a local community leader, he became a symbol of social coherence: in a small town where two rival religious orders, Qadiri and Naqshbandi, operated, and where there was a significant Jewish community, his leadership provided much-needed direction and unity.

Penjiweni was on good terms with Ahmed Bagi Jaff and Piramerd, and the latter often published his poetry in his magazine, Zheen. In fact, Piramerd was so impressed with Penjiweni's poetry that he would enquire after more work if it was not coming for a long time. In response, Penjiweni wrote two poems specifically to Piramerd. In one of them, he calls the editor:

Oh homeland elder, who is concerned for deprived people
You have supported thousands of us.
As long as I live, I stay grateful to you.
On all occasions, I speak of you.
For a while, my name was absent in "life"
Of course, you are aware of the reasons.

یەکەی وەتەن خەمخواری فەقیر
بۆ هەزار فەقیر بوویتە دەستگیر؛
هەتاکو ماوم سوپاست ئەکەم.

له هەموو لایەك من باست ئەكەم.
بەینێكە ناوم لە "ژین"ا نییە؛
هەڵبەت ئەزانی واستەی چیە.

Note: "Life" is the Kurdish name for Piramerd's paper "Zheen". Here it also keeps its basic meaning of "life".

Unlike the majority of Kurdish poets, Penjiweni did not write any romantic poems. Perhaps this is the reason why his poetry is not sung. Rather, his poems often served as a vehicle for a social message. Even though written in relatively simple language, Penjiweni's poetry was, nevertheless, quite sophisticated and formal, and it made his social and political ideas accessible and memorable.

Penjiweni's works were published in Baghdad in 1941 and 1990, and in Sulaymaniyah in 2016. However, much of his poetry does not survive to this day. Some texts were lost in a powerful earthquake, which hit Penjewn on the 8th of August 1948, others in a fire that destroyed Penjiweni's home.

Quite often Penjiweni's poetry was socially engaged. Here he writes about the plight of village girls:

Village girls are underprivileged.
They grow green like spring and die yellow like autumn.
Without much hope, concerned with their troubles.
Heart of stone-souls are the causes.
From early age, like peasants,
Labour them in farms and on the plains.
When they are ready to be wedded,
They do not want life, enjoy death.
They are forced to marry someone, although human;
Worse than a monster, out of norms.
Girls' faces depict the sun, figure seedling;
Their fringes are amber-like, cheeks diamond alike.
[...]
The consent of the girl is never taken;
No one cares about her tears.

کچانی دێهات هەناسەسەردن؛
وەك بەهار ئەڕوێن، وەك پاییز زەردن.
هەر نامرادن گیرۆدەی دەردن.
سەبەبکاریان دڵ دار و بەردن.
ئەیاندەن بە شوو بە ئازار و ئێش.
دڵ پڕ لە میحنەت هەناسەهەڵکێش.
ئەیدەن بە کەسێ هەرچەن بەشەرە.
لە دێو خراپتر لە عام بەدەرە.
کچ بە ڕوو وەك ڕۆژ، قامەت عەرعەرە.
پەرچەم عەنبەرین گۆنا گەوهەرە.
[...]
ڕەزامەندیی کچ کەس لێی ناپرسێ.
هەزار هاوار و دادی بە فلسێ.

Despite his religious background and his social status, Penjiweni stopped praying in the local mosque, as he was under continuous pressure from the more religious part of society for strongly defending women's rights and also for rejecting many religious myths.
He was even accused of being a non-believer, which was a very serious accusation in the traditional community at the time.

In the next piece, Penjiweni writes on behalf of his daughter Gelas:

Boys and girls are both share life;
Both seedlings on the land.
As you remember the future of boys,
Just like boys, do not disappoint girls.
I say a few words in your present:
In marriage, do not waste my future.
To your will, do not marry me to a noble man
Marry me to a shepherd to my own will.

کوڕ و کچ هە ردوو بە شداری ژینن؛
هە ردوو نەمامی ڕووی سە ر زەمینن.
وەك پاشە ڕۆژی کوڕ دێنیتە یاد،
کچیش وە کو کوڕ مە یکە نامراد.
چە ند قسە و باسێ ئە کەم عە رزی تۆ:
لە شووکردنا مەمکە ڕە نجەڕۆ.
بە ئارەزووی خۆت مەمدە بە خانێ.
بە ئاواتی خۆم بم دە بـــە شـوانێ.

Qany' (1895-1965)

Mohammed Kabuli, better known as Qany', was born in Mariwan in 1895 and spent most of his life in Penjwen. His father died shortly after his birth, and he was raised by a distant relative, Agha Sayed Hussein, who ensured the boy received a good education.

Qany' was known for his impassioned defence of the lower classes of society, hence his title "the poet of the deprived people". He was a man of great wit, much influenced by the great Hafiz Shirazi. Much like his friend Mufti Penjiweni, Qany' was politically conscious and, influenced by the ideals of the Russian Revolution, he wrote largely to educate the public about the outside world, civil liberties, the class struggle, and the importance of education. He wrote both in 'arūz and syllabic metres, and used relatively simple language, which was appealing and accessible to his target audience: mostly illiterate and uneducated peasants and labourers.

Qany' developed asthma as a young man and, towards mid-1950s, had to stop writing as much as he did in his youth due to health complications. He died in 1965, at the age of 67. He wrote this tetrastich to be engraved on his tombstone:

A leader or a carer has never emerged in Kurdistan
Why Kurds always must be rained with troubles and grieves
If I die, friends, I urge you; engrave on my gravestone:
The martyrdom of people's love, I was, and yet did not see you rise

Qany' did not have a good start in life. His family's properties in Mariwan were confiscated when he was little, and they were expelled from their village. He was the 15th child and the only son. His father died when he was very young, and his mother followed shortly after. Though it would have been common for his paternal uncles to take care of him and his sisters, they were neglected. He later described his solitary childhood, playing in the village during the day and sleeping in the common village bakery, "sertandur", at night.

The story of his rescue from this poverty is that one day, as he was building a mud house on the main road of his village, a noble, wealthy man passed by on horseback and saw him crying. He asked an older man nearby why the child was crying and unattended, to which the elder replied "Cannot you see? Your horse destroyed his mud house", adding that the boy was the son of Sheikh Qadr Sheikhs Saeed Dolash. Upon hearing this, the noble man realized the child was his distant relation and enquired why he was living on the road.
On hearing that the boy's family had died, and his uncles had abandoned him, he adopted him. This man was Agha Sayid Hussein from the village of Chorr in Mariwan.

In his memoirs, Qany' relates how Agha Sayid Hussein washed him and provided him with suitable clothes and, after some time, sent him to a good school to study. In recognition and gratitude, Qany' wrote a poem for him:

God bless the high shrine of Sayid Chorri
When I was little, he changed the route of my life

Example of poetry by Qany'

My life is light and short, my desire broad and deep.
My ideals are literary, my appearance simple.
The flood stream of my imagination is clear and smooth.
It flows whether it is uphill or downhill.
Look among the Kurdish poeple, my poetry covers
Pishdar, Goran, Soran, Jafati, Shirwan and Gezh.
If you observe the dots my pen makes, you settle
They are completely red diamonds and nightlights.
It is time for science; to decide what the world would be!
Yet, illiterate thinks, knowledge is all prayers
Qany' if immoral people prepare their blunt mind,
Take out your tongue, just like sharp sword

عومرەکەم باریك و کورتە، ئارەزووم پان و درێژ.
فیکرەکەم فیکری ئەدیبە و سوورەتیشم گێژ و وێژ.
ئاوی لافاوی خەیاڵم، هێندە ساف و ڕۆشنە،
ئاویاری خۆی ئەکا، بێ فەرقە لای هەوراز و لێژ.
بێ تەماشا کە لە کوردا، دائەپۆشێ شیعری من
پشدەر و گۆران و سۆران، جافەتی و شیروان و گێژ.
گەر لە نوکتەی خامەکەم دیقەت بکەی، ئیقرار ئەکەی
سەربەسەر یاقووتی سوورە و شەوچراغی شوعلەڕێژ
شەخس وەختی عالمە، عالەم بە هەر ئەشیا ببێ!
بێ سەواد وا تێ ئەگا، زانین هەموو دەسنوێژە و نوێژ.
قانعا مونکیر ئەگەر فیکری کولی ئامادە کا،
بێنە دەر تێغی زمانت هەر وەکوو شمشێری تیژ.

Notes:
"Pishdar, Goran, Soran, Jafati, Shirwan and Gezh" are Kurdish tribes and regions.
His name, Qany', is mentioned in the penultimate verse.

Ahmed Bag Jaff (1898-1935)

Ahmed Bag Jaff was born to a noble family, son of Adela Khanim and Osman Bag Jaff. He was the younger brother of the poet Tahir Bag Jaff, whose poetry had great influence on him. Jaff was born and educated in Halabja but is buried in Ababyle.

Jaff married three times. He had no children with his first wife, Habiba. From the second marriage to Rana, he had a son, Afrasiabi (deceased), and a daughter, Shamsa, who resided in Amman, now also deceased. From the third wife, Fatima, he had two daughters, Runak (who lives in London) and Hamida (who lives in Sulaymaniyah). His son, Gandi, now deceased, used to live in Baghdad.

Jaff was educated at home, by some of the best available teachers of his time: for instance, his Farsi teacher was Sileman Bag, the father of the poet Abdullah Goran. It is quite likely that he introduced Jaff to Farsi literature. Like his brother, Jaff spoke Kurdish, Farsi, Arabic, and some English.

More politically engaged than his brother, Ahmed became a high-profile civil servant at a relatively young age. Between 1919-1924, he was the governor of the Halabja District, and in 1924, he became a member of the House of Representatives, i.e. the Iraqi parliament. He was described as a polite, well-groomed, cheerful and very generous man.

Later, Jaff gave up his high-profile post and decided to spend more time on his own – a move which surprised many. On the 6th of February 1935, Jaff was shot by a police officer. He died a few hours later, at the age of 38. The true reasons for his death were never discovered. His death shocked his contemporaries; many wrote poems in grief.

Jaff drew on a range of romantic and patriotic themes in his poetry, all written in Central Kurdish (Sorani). Only one Farsi poem survives him, though he may have written more. He also penned a short story titled *Morality Issue, or How I Became a Noble*. Another story is mentioned in literature but was never discovered.

A short story by Ahmed Bag Jaff

Ahmed Mukhtar Bag Jaff's short story *Morality Issue, or How I Became a Noble* is unique as his sole surviving piece of writing in prose. Over the years, it has proven quite controversial due to its philosophical theme of the influence one's environment can have on personal morality.

It was written in 1935 and first published in 1970 in Baghdad and then in 2008 in Erbil. This edition was prepared by Dr Ihsan Found, a prominent Kurdish scholar, who also wrote the introduction.

In Kurdish literature, poetry is by far the dominant form of expression, and not many examples of prose exist. The only roughly contemporaneous attempt at a short story in Central Kurdish was Jamil Saib's (1887-1950) *In my Dream*, written in 1925. The theme and ideas raised in Jaff's story are very similar to those he discussed in his poetry, and it is possible that he used prose here to give his philosophical ideas more clarity.

Jaff's protagonist, Mam Zorab, is a man born to a simple family. However, despite their humble station, Zorab's father sees the value of education and sends his son to school at an early age (this was unique, as literacy was quite rare at that time). His father dies before Zorab completes his schooling; however, he succeeds in bringing him up with strong moral values.

Much of the story initially contrasts these values with the cruel, corrupt, and unjust world Zorab finds himself living in. The relatives, who look after him after his father's death, abuse him and force him into hard labour, and later kick him out of their house while he is still very young. Zorab tries many jobs, but his strong sense of ethics prevents him from succeeding at any of them, as he clashes with the unjust and immoral people around him. One day, he challenges his boss, after finding out about certain immoral acts he has committed. He directly asks him "How about moral values?", to which the boss replies "Silly man, do not go any further!". Mam Zorab does not heed this advice, either in this situation or when working for many other bosses, each time challenging them for undermining his own ethical beliefs.

Eventually, he moves to a new town and takes up a job as an 'arizaniws' – an official letter writer for those approaching the governor's office. To his surprise, Zorab discovers an organised network of corruption within the official administration. He is assaulted and threatened by them and only escapes through a personal contact who knows of someone within the network that can be bribed. Zorab decides to go along with this and, as the network realises he is a man of some means, he is invited to join.

What follows is a tale of moral decay. Zorab learns the "tricks of the game" and keeps moving higher and higher in the government sector, while gathering wealth through corruption and other immoral means. He justifies his moral decay in this fashion: "However, because the situation of the social environment requires that every person needs to see his own happiness in the hardship of his own follow humans and those who share the same language. I turned a blind eye of morality[…]. Causing damage to your fellow humans, slandering, betraying! All these in this social environment are similar to educational qualification […]. Unless you act in this fashion, hope in progress is hopeless. […]. I started slandering and traitoring […]. In fact, in a very short period of time, I have observed that my respect has increased drastically. Everyone relies on me more than before."

He eventually bribes himself to one of the top civil service jobs in the capital. He returns to his district and realises that two tribes there are in conflict and try to settle the dispute by exchanging some of their women. The women complain about being treated as bargaining chips in a conflict to which they are not part. Due to the influence of the tribes, the local authorities would reject the women's complaints. When Zorab arrives, the women are very happy that the man who represents justice can help them.

The story has many facets; among them Jaff's emphasis is on 'muhit' or social environment, and his belief that 'muhit' changes people. A man with high moral values can become the

most corrupt person as his social environment does not allow him to rise up in the world through legal means and his own merit. Zorab does everything to live up to his moral values, yet he fails. In this 'muhit', one can move up as long as he plays by the 'rules', which are often corrupt. Yet, to the outside world, such man can still represent ethics, morality and justice.

Example of poetry by Ahmed Bag Jaff

Wake up!
Wake up, Kurdish people, it is late, sleeping is harmful!
The entire history of the world has witnessed your generosity and culture
Go, struggle, noble people who are without support and oppressed
Speed up in cutting the long road in front of you
Educate yourselves, as education shields you from your enemy's sword
Every moment and epoch are as effective as your armours and shields
Do not just give up on this beloved land for anything
Its dust is like precious stones, and like kohl to darken your eyes
Even if you walk proudly on the land, you deserve it
Look at the mountains: you are protected by their shade
Do not just walk over it, as if it is not insignificant
The poppies of this wilderness are the blood of your heart
It has been long since this homeland has been the slave of illiterate hands
Through science today is the chance for you to fight
The expression of "Ahmed" today is: people, be mindful
Learn that the stones of these mountains are your diamonds and jewels

لە خەو هەڵسن دەرفەتێ میللەتی کورد خەو زەرەرتانە!
هەموو تەئریخی عالەم شاهیدی فەزڵ و هونەرتانە.
دەسا تێکۆشن ئەی قەومی نەجیبیی بێکەس و مەزڵووم!
بەگورجی ببڕن ئەو ڕێگە دوورە وا لەبەرتانە.
بخوێنن، چونکە خوێندن بۆ دیفاعی تیغی دوشمنتان،
هەموو ئان و زەمانێ عەینی قەڵغان و سوپەرتانە!
بەخۆڕایی لە دەستی بەرمەدەن ئەم خاکە مەحبووبە،
کە تۆزی وەک جەواهیر سورمە و کوحلی بەسەرتانە!
بەسەر خاکا ئەگەر نازیش بکەن حەقتانە کوردینە؛
تەماشای سێبەری ئەو شاخ و کێوەی وا لەسەرتانە.
بە بێقەدری بەسەریا ڕامەبوورن حورمەتی بگرن؛
گوڵاڵە سووڕەی ئەم سەحرایە خوێناوی جگەرتانە.
دەمێکە ئەم وڵاتە وا ئەسیری پەنجەیی جەهلە؛
لە سایەی عیلمەوە ئەمڕۆ ئیتر نۆبەی زەفەرتانە.
زوبانی حاڵی "ئەحمەد" هەر ئەڵێ، وریا بن ئەی میللەت!
بزانن بەردی ئەم شاخانە ئەڵماس و گوهەرتانە.

Notes:
This is a very well-known poem. To this day, it is often used in inscriptions aimed at promoting education, especially the third verse.
Ahmed: the poet; this links the poem to its author.

Abdullah Goran (1904 – 1962)

The poetry of Abdullah Goran (1904 – 1962) has greatly influenced the works of many Kurdish poets who came after him. From his pioneering use of metre to the sheer volume of his output, there are many reasons that make him one of the best-known and most influential Kurdish poets of the 20th century. Goran was the first one who almost completely deviated from the Arabic 'arūz rhythm. Furthermore, while his contemporaries usually gave up poetry at various stages in their lives, Goran kept writing until his death. Critics agree that his style was particularly well-suited to tackling crucial subjects of life and making them particularly striking to the reader.

Goran was born in Halabja, Sulaymaniyah, and studied in Kirkuk. Halabja was an intellectual centre at the time, dominated by the noble Bagzaday Jaff clan, perhaps the most liberal and open clan of the time. They established socio-political links with the British at the turn of the 19th century, which was quite early in the region. Their diwakhan – guest room – attracted intellectuals and literary figures from around the region.

Goran's ancestors were nobles from Miran Bagi, originally hailing from Mariwan in the Kurdistan region of Iran. A'nayat Bag, son of Amanullah Bag, moved the family to the Qaradagh region of Sulaymaniyah. When he died, his son Abdulla, Goran's grandfather, moved to Halabja, as the family regarded themselves to be descendants of Jaff. On the way, Abdullah Bag's brother and mother died of illness, but the remaining family, including Goran's father, settled in Halabja. Goran had two brothers and one sister. The sister, Shamsa, and one of the brothers, Ali, died young, his father died in 1919, and his second brother Mohammed was killed in 1921, when Goran was a student in Kirkuk. He had no choice but to leave his studies and return home to look after his mother. As a result, the period between 1922-1925 was particularly difficult for Goran.

Still, before 1921, Goran had access to education, which was not widely available to most. Typically for an intellectual of his generation, he was introduced to religious studies at a young age. He was taught at home by his father and in the local mosque, known as Pasha, in Halabja. His father, Sileman Bag, was an expert in Farsi language – he worked as a Farsi scribe (Katib Farsi), which was a rare skill at the time. Later, Goran became increasingly familiar with other regional literature and languages, such as Arabic, Turkish and English. Before Goran, poetry was overwhelmingly written in a language only understood by the intellectual elite. Goran and those who drew inspiration from his work challenged this by writing in a simpler language, accessible to most people, while also keeping their style sophisticated and artistic. In doing so, they laid the groundwork for the establishment of a new school of Kurdish poetry. A testimony to how popular Goran's work was is that many of his poems have been turned into songs, which are sung to this day.

Goran became a teacher in Halabja in 1925 and stayed in this job until 1937. Afterwards, he moved to Sulaymaniyah to take on a post as a civil servant. He remained in this job until his first arrest in 1951.

As a member of the Iraqi Communist Party, Goran was quite active politically. This led to his imprisonment in 1951, when he was detained for six months and released in 1952. After Piramerd's death in 1950 and Goran's release from prison, the latter took over editing the Kurdish journal *Zheen* (Life).

On the 17th of November 1954, Goran was arrested again with a group of civil activists in Sulaymaniyah and was sentenced to one year in prison and one year of suspended sentence, which he completed on the 12th of September 1956. On the 17th of November 1956, he was arrested due to his views on Israel's attack on Egypt and was sentenced to three years in prison. However, he was released after the 1958 revolution, on the 10th of August.

In early 1959, he became the editor in chief of the journal *Shafaq* (Dawn), later known as *Bayan* (Morning). He was appointed as a lecturer at the department of Kurdish Language and Literature at the University of Baghdad in 1960.

In 1962, Goran was diagnosed with gastric cancer. He was treated in Baghdad and in Moscow, then returned to Sulaymaniyah. He died on 18th of November 1962 at the age of 58.

Goran published two poetry collections in his lifetime: *Paradise and Memory*, and *Tears and Art*, both in 1950. His complete works were published posthumously in 1980, including both previously published poems and some unpublished work.

Goran not only composed but also translated poetry and he was gifted in various literary forms. Some of his prose was published in various Kurdish journals and magazines. He translated poetry from Arabic, Farsi and English, including works by Omar Khayyam *(The Rubaiyat*) and Oscar Wilde (*The Happy Prince*), in addition to many poems in Arabic, from Khalil Gibran's *Yesterday* to Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi's *Rise* or Mahdi Jawahiri's *Martyr Qayis*. He also translated a few pieces from Turkish. Goran's work as a translator inspired his poetry – he was influenced by English romantic poetry in particular; for example, his long poem *For the Nightingal*e is inspired by *To a Skylark* by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822).

Goran's poetry can be divided according to the themes it raises. His political poetry, mostly written for specific occasions, has much historical value. However, the themes of his main work follow the titles of his collections: *Nature and Emotions*, *Tears and Art* and *Heaven and Memories*. He wrote extensively on nature and love, always linking them to human emotions and to philosophical questions: What is life? What is death? What associates humans with nature? In that sense, Goran was a true humanist.

Examples of poetry by Abdullah Goran

A group of mountains, hostile and high;
Embracing the blue sky.
The white snow covers its crest;
The jungle is dense and valley quiet.
The streams with still water:
Walking never ends in the twisty mountain roads.

کۆمەڵە شاخێك سەخت و گەردن کەش؛
ئاسمانی شینی گرتۆتە باوەش.
سەرپۆشی لووتکەی بەفری زۆر سپی،
بە دارستان ڕەش ناودۆڵی کپی.
جۆگەی ئاوەکان تیایا قەتیس ماو:
هەر ئەڕۆن ناکەن پێچی شاخ تەواو.

Note:
The natural beauty of the Halabja region and its surroundings were a key source of inspiration. In his poem *A Visit to Hawram*, Goran's affection for the nature of the region is apparent.

Goran's poem *For Morning Glory*, which he says was inspired by English poetry, shows his concern with death:

Tears stream out of my eyes, colourful morning glory;
Why do you die so early? What are the reasons for you creases?
The sun has been out for only a moment, why are you so quietly,
Die! Please, O' flower, patience for God's sake!

Patience for God's sake! Stay for another moment until my life!
Just like a day of the mid-Winter, escape the morning clouds!
I am a fellow of your journey, too; I also die!
The creator, just like you, has not been very kind to me!

Like you, my stay is brief; my spring is short with no rest;
I head towards annihilation like you and the rest of nature;
Just like summer rain is fast disappearing life;
Evaporation is the result, just like dew on leaves!

بە کوڵ گریان لە چاوم دێ، گوڵی لاوڵاوی ڕەنگاوڕەنگ!
لە بەرچی سیس ئەبی وا زوو؟ چییە ئەسبابی ژاکانت؟
هەموو تاوێکە ڕۆژ هەڵهاتووە، بۆ چی وەها بێ دەنگ،
ئەژاکێی؟ تۆخوا، ئەی گوڵ، سەبر، دەستم بە دامانت!

سەبر تۆبی خوا! تاوێکیتر ڕاوەستە، تا عومرم،
وەکو ڕۆژی چلەی زستان لە هەوری مەینەت ئاوا بێ!
منیش هاوڕێی سەفەرتم، ئەی گوڵی لاوڵاو منیش ئەمرم!
منیش خیلقەت وەکوو تۆ، وا نەبێ زۆرم لەگەڵ چا بێ!

منیش، وەك تۆ بەقام کورتە و بەهارم تیژ و کەم فرسەت؛
گەشەم مەیلە و زەواڵە چەشنی تۆ، چەشنی هەموو دنیا؛
وەکوو بارانی هاوین زوو فەنایە عومری بێ مروەت؛
تەبەخخور مایەیە، هەیهات، بە چەشنی شەونمی سەرگیا!

Goran celebrates nature in *Beauty With No Name*, where he writes:

In the entire sky, only morning star,
Excites beautiful feelings in my heart.
A small instrument creates one thousand and one tunes;
The sweetest one to my ears is the quietest.
A clear water-spring shines in the moonlight;
In its bottom, diamonds of sand and pebbles shiver,
Is more appealing to me than the endless sea;
Whose waves roll and crash to the shore in the sunlight.

لە هەموو ئاسمانا، ئەستێرەی بەربەیان،
ئەخاتە دڵی من هەستێکی سپی و جوان.
لە تەختێك هەڵدەستێ هەزار و یەك نەغمە؛
ئەوەیان شیرینتر دێتە گوێم زۆر نزمە!
کانییەکی ڕوونی بەر تریفەی مانگەشەو؛
لە بنیا بلەرزێ مرواریی زیخ و چەو؛
جوانترە لە لای من لە دەریای بێ سنوور؛
شەپۆلی باتە بەر تیژگی ڕۆژ شڵپ و هووڕ.

He often linked the beauty of nature to human beauty, as in *Woman and Beauty*:

I have watched stars in the sky!
I have picked flowers during spring-times!
My face was sprayed with dew of trees!
I have watched mountains during sunset!
A rainbow after a heavy rain
has curved against the shining sun.
[…]
The throat of recorders and strings of violins
Have given many sweet tunes!
These are all beautiful and delightful;
Enlighten paths of life:
But even nature would never be
Bright without lover's simile!

بە ئاسمانەوە ئەستێرەم دیوە!
لە باغچەی بەهار گوڵم چنیوە!
شەونمی درەخت لە ڕووم پژاوە!
لە زەردەی زۆر کەل سەرنجم داوە!
پەلکەزێڕینەی پاش بارانی زۆر،
چەماوەتەوە بەرامبەر بە خۆر.
[...]
لە گەڕوی شمشاڵ، لە تەلی کەمان،
گەلێ هەڵساوە ئاوازەی جوان جوان!
ئەمانە هەموو جوانن، شیرینن؛
ڕۆشنکەرەوەی شەقامی ژینن!
بەڵام تەبیعەت هەرگیزاوهەرگیز،
بێ ڕووناکییە بێ بزەی ئازیز!

Story of a star

In the evening, in the sunsetting sky,
A star radiates, vivid and sweet.
Surrounding is the blue ocean, and alone
Views the evening around the world.
Its glow depicts the shape of lighteyes.
Its shivers, the smiles of red lips.
Like a flower, decorating a beauty's hair,
No eye would be tired of looking at it.
I am one of these viewers, too,
Whose heart engaged in these evenings' beauty.
I stand on a hill opposite her;
Benumbed her smile my drank views.
It would be dark, other stars in the end
Throw away veils in front of the world.
But now she gently, downwards
Slips, very dim, until reaches the edges.
The thirsty lips of the mount sucks her like a drop.
Oh my broken heart, the death of landing kills her.
The attractive story of this star
In which soul does not move sadness!

بەسەرهاتی ئەستێرەیەك

بانگی شێوان، لە ئاسمانی خۆرنشین،
ئەستێرەیەك ئەجریوێنێ، گەش، شیرین.
دەوروپشتی دەریای شینە و بە تەنیا،
سرنج ئەدا لە ئێوارەی ڕووی دنیا.
لە پرشنگیا هەیە شێوەی چاوی کاڵ؛
لە لەرزینیا زەردەخەنەی لێوی ئاڵ!
وەك ئەو گوڵەی ئەیدا لەسەر نازداری،
تێر نابێ لێی هەر چاوێ بۆی ئەنواڕێ.
منیش یەکێ لەو تەماشاکەرانەم؛
دڵ گیرۆدەی ئەم جوانیی ئێوارانەم.
لەسەر گردێ بەرامبەری ئەوەستم؛
کەیلی بزەی ئەبێ سرنجی مەستم.
تاریك دایە، ئەستێرەی تر بەرودوا،
فڕێ ئەدەن چارشێو لە ئاستی دنیا.
بەڵام ئێستا ئەو ئەسپایی، بەرەوخوار،
هەڵ ئەخلیسکێ، کزکز، ئەگاتە لێوار.
لێوی تینووی کەل وەك دڵۆپ ئەیمژێ؛
ئەی داخەکەم، مەرگی نیشتن ئەیکوژێ.
ئەم ئەستێرە، بەسەرهاتی دڵگیری،
لە کام ڕۆحا نابزوێنێ زویری.

Following page: Artwork inspired by Story of a Star, Mariwan Jalal

Wildflowers of Halabja

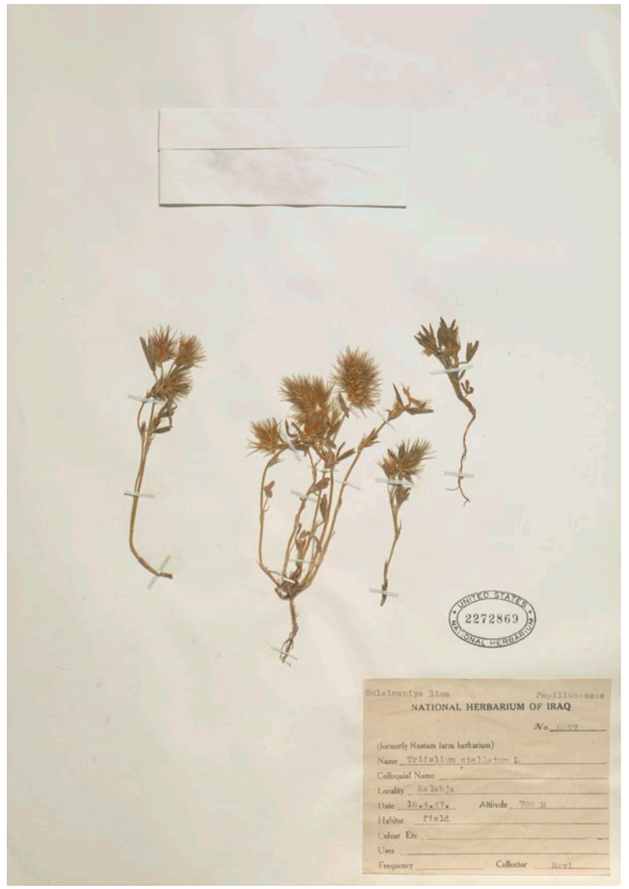
The Kurdistan region harbours at least 6,000 plant species, approximately 2,500 of which are endemic. The extreme contrasts in altitude (from the Mesopotamian plain to mountain peaks of 3,600 metres), rainfall (mean annual precipitation varies from 200 to 1500 mm) and temperature (mean annual temperatures ranging between 0 to °25+ C) give rise to great biological diversity. Kurdistan is considered one of the world's richest sources for medicinal, aromatic and edible plants.

The wildflower specimens shown on the following pages were gathered in the countryside around Halabja by the botanist Ali Al-Rawi in 1947 and are now held by the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

Clover
Trifolium nigrescens Viv.

Flower specimen gathered in Halabja by Ali Al-Rawi, 1947
Courtesy of the United States National Herbarium (US)

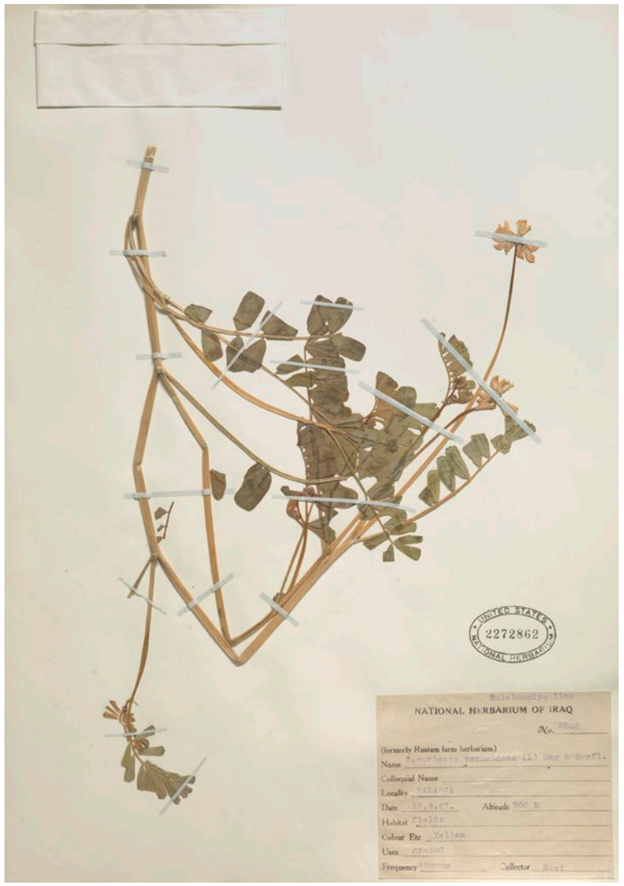
Photograph by Dr Ori Fragman-Sapir



Star clover
Trifolium stellatum L.

Flower specimen gathered in Halabja by Ali Al-Rawi, 1947
Courtesy of the United States National Herbarium (US)

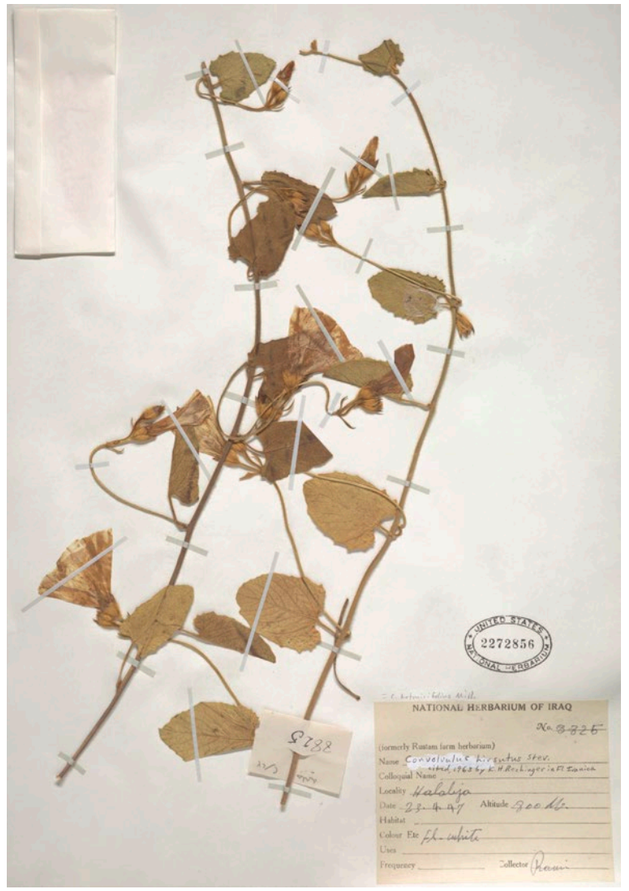
Photograph by Dr Ori Fragman-Sapir



Goat pea/ Hatched vetch
Securigera securidaca (L.) Degen & Dörfl.

Flower specimen gathered in Halabja by Ali Al-Rawi, 1947
Courtesy of the United States National Herbarium (US)

Photograph by Dr Ori Fragman-Sapir



Convolulus
Convolvulus betonicifolius Mill.

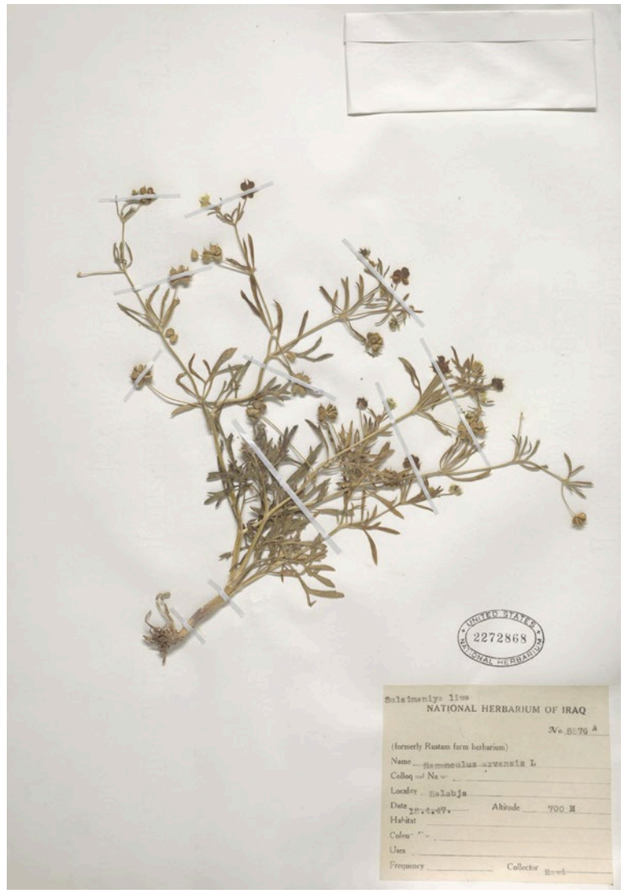
Flower specimen gathered in Halabja by Ali Al-Rawi, 1947
Courtesy of the United States National Herbarium (US)

Photograph by Dr Ori Fragman-Sapir

Five lobed bindweed
Convolvulus pentapetaloides

Flower specimen gathered in Halabja by Ali Al-Rawi, 1947
Courtesy of the United States National Herbarium (US)

Photograph by Dr Ori Fragman-Sapir



Corn buttercup
Ranunculus arvensis

Flower specimen gathered in Halabja by Ali Al-Rawi, 1947
Courtesy of the United States National Herbarium (US)

Photograph by Dr Ori Fragman-Sapir

Artwork by Awder Osman

Back cover artwork by Mariwan Jalal