

Landlocked Countries: Iraqi Kurdistan

by Geir Sør-Reime

The Kurds is a people that inhabits the border areas between Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran.

Their struggle for their own state is long, and shortly after the end of WWI, the Kurd leader Sheikh Mahmud Barzani attempted to establish a Kurdish kingdom with himself as king.

His first attempt was May 23, 1919. It turned out to be a very short episode as he was wounded in battle June 18 and by the British sent in exile in India. Already during this brief episode, he probably issued two of the four stamps that are known from the Kurdish post-WWI uprising.

These stamps have a common motif, two so-called khanjar daggers in cross. The text reads "The Government of North Kurdistan".



1919/1923 Sheikh Mahmud's 8 Annas stamp

The stamps are printed in black on colored paper: 1 Anna on green paper, 8 Annas on light green paper, 1 Rupee on purple paper, and 5 Rupees on red paper. Probably, only the Anna stamps were



1919/1923 Sheikh Mahmud's 5 Rupees stamp

Two years later Barzani was allowed to return to Iraq and the British hoped that he would organize Kurdish forces as a buffer against Turkey and the Turkish republic's territorial claim on Mosul and Kirkuk in what had become the British dominated kingdom of Iraq. But instead of helping the British, Sheikh Mahmud in 1923 again proclaimed a Kurdish kingdom with the city of Sulaimani as capital and himself as king.

The Brits fought two years to recover the Kurdish areas in northern Iraq, and in March 1924, Sheikh Mahmud fled to Iran.

The 1919 stamps were put into use again in 1923. Probably new printings of the two Anna stamps were made, and the Rupee stamps were added. The Rupee stamps were primarily used as revenue stamps. Even the Anna stamps are found used as revenue stamps. Few genuine copies of these stamps have survived.

There were new attempts to establish a Kurdish state in northern Iraq in 1930 and 1931 and petitions to the League of Nations to recognize a Kurdish state, but this was refused, and the rebellions were smashed.

The Kurds fight for self-determination continued despite the failures after WWI. During WWII the Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani succeeded in establishing Kurdistan as a self-governed area, but Iraqi authorities managed to restore control in northern Iraq after the war.

After the fall of the Iraqi kingdom in 1958, Barzani was invited back to Iraq and managed in 1960 to secure autonomy for the Kurd areas of Iraq. In 1970 a Kurdish self-governing region was organized but the Iraqi central government had the final word, and in 1975 the Kurdish position

was further weakened after Iran and Iraq had entered into an agreement. There are documented numerous infringements against the Kurd population (and other minority groups) by the Iraqi government. A large-scale Arabization was launched in several areas against non-Arab populations, and these continued until the second Gulf War in 2003.

The first Gulf war in 1991 led to the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces from the Kurdish areas and Iraqi Kurdistan became de facto independent. In July 1992, a Kurdish government was established in Erbil, and the city became the capital of the Kurdish region.

The first modern Kurdish stamps were then issued in 1993 for internal use in the Kurdish region. The first issue consisted of three stamps with the same motif: the Saladin University in Erbil. These and later stamp issues were inscribed Iraqi Kurdistan Region (later also Kurdistan Region Iraq).

The first three stamps commemorated the establishment of the regional self-government assembly on June 4, 1992 (on the first printing the date was wrongly given as June 4, 1993). There are several printings of these stamps with varying print quality. The stamps were reprinted with lighter colors and without gum in 1997. On one of these, the date has been corrected to 1992.



Kurdistan 1993 issue hailing the inauguration of the Kurdish national assembly June 4, 1992. 1993 year of stamp issue at top of all stamps is correct. Only the 3d has the correct, 1992, assembly date at the bottom.

No other stamps were issued 1993-97 except a few Iraqi stamps surcharged with new values.

Then, in 1997 two series of each with three stamps

were issued: one portraying Sheikh Barzani, the other the fortress in Erbil.



In 1998 more stamps were issued: one for the national festival, one for the jour-



1998, Birth centenary of journalist Baderkhan

1997 Sheikh Barzani 1 dinar single and on June 13, 1993 locally used cover



nalist and politician Baderkhan, four stamps with nature as the theme, four stamps with Kurdish towns as motives, and four stamps with cultural heritage as the theme. Later, four additional stamps in the nature series were issued.



1998, Kurdish cities



1998 Nature



1998 Cultural Heritage

1999 saw a stamp for the New Year/Spring Festival Newroz, and

the man behind the first, 1919, Kurdish stamps, Mahmud Barzani was honored with a 1999 stamp.

Also in 1999 eight



1999, left, Navroz festival;

right, Sheikh Mahmud



1999 Folk costumes, complete series



1999 Flowers



1999 Tourism, left Government building; right Sherwana fortress

stamps showing Kurdish costumes, and eleven stamps with tourist attractions in Kurdistan as motives. Also, a series of 21 stamps showing flowers and two stamps showing the Government building, respectively the Sherwana fortress were issued,

and finally, the launching of the Kurdish TV-satellite KURDSAT was commemorated with four 1999 stamps (2 shown).



1999 computer conference and tourism



1999 Inauguration of Kurdish TV satellite
To Be Continued