



Focal Points

the College of Arts & Sciences
Tennessee Technological University

Vol. 11, NO. 2

A Newsletter Supported by the Terry Martin Stonecipher Fund

August 2006

Special Issue: the Award for Research and Creative Activity

Research and creative activity is celebrated in the College of Arts & Sciences through a newly+established faculty award. The award recognizes a significant research publication or creative project appearing during the previous two years and receiving expert critical review at the regional (i.e., multi-state), national, or international level. A faculty committee, chaired by the Associate Dean, selects the annual recipient, and this year the winner is **Professor Michael Gunter**, Department of Sociology & Political Science. In the following essay, Professor Gunter describes the research upon which the award was based.

Jack Armistead, Dean



have enormous consequences for U.S. foreign policy in general and the war against terrorism in particular. The Kurds also are playing a very important role in Turkey's candidacy for membership in the European Union (EU), a process which would bring a large moderate Muslim state into this modern Western entity and put the lie to the inevitability of the clash-of-civilizations scenario. Since the Kurds also sit on a great deal of the Middle East's oil and possibly even more important water resources, the Kurdish issue will become even more important in subsequent years. Therefore, a work such as mine has proven extremely valuable for scholars, government practitioners, journalists, and the intelligent lay public.

Michael M. Gunter, *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2004)

Introduction

Based on my internationally established reputation as an authority on the Kurds, I was asked to compile this dictionary as part of a continuing series dealing with all the independent states in the world. My volume is the first in a new sub-series of these dictionaries dealing with various peoples and cultures, which do not have their own independent state. Indeed, the approximately 25 million Kurds in the world are the largest such people or nation in the world without their own independent state.

Although a large majority within the mountainous Middle East where Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria meet, the Kurds have been gerrymandered into being mere minorities within the existing states they inhabit. These existing states, of course, mortally fear that Kurdish secession will destroy their territorial integrity. Therefore, these states attempt to suppress Kurdish self-consciousness and assimilate the Kurds. The desire of many Kurds for independent statehood or at least cultural autonomy within the states they now inhabit has led to an almost continuous series of Kurdish revolts since the creation of the modern Middle East following World War I. Taken together, this situation constitutes the Kurdish problem or question.

Since the end of the Gulf War in 1991 and the creation of a de facto state of Kurdistan in northern Iraq—and even more since the overthrow of the Saddam-Hussein regime in Iraq in 2003—the Kurdish problem has become increasingly important in U.S., Middle Eastern, and international politics. For example, the Kurds are playing an extremely important role in the attempt to construct a democratic federal Iraq. The success or failure of this project in Iraq will

Summary

Despite being called a dictionary, my work is actually a one-volume encyclopedia consisting of several hundred



Michael Gunter in Iraqi Kurdistan



Gunter at a girl's school
in Rawanduz, Kurdistan

entries dealing with Kurdish history, politics, economics, language, literature, religion, and culture, among others. Thus, my work lists important and useful information on leading Kurdish political, scholarly, literary, and cultural personalities both living and dead. My dictionary also includes entries on specific countries, groups, and events as they have influenced the Kurds. Further entries analyze Kurdish literary works, language, rugs, water and oil resources, economics, social events, and religions, among many other subjects. No other such scholarly source exists.

To compile this work literally took an encyclopedic effort on my part. I read an enormous amount of material, traveled to many locations to interview various people and study different situations, and corresponded with many other scholars and government officials. Some of the authorities I interviewed included the current president of Iraq (Jalal Talabani), president of Kurdistan-Iraq (Massoud Barzani), prime minister of Kurdistan (Nechirvan Barzani), and general secretary of the Kurdistan Workers Party of Turkey (Abdullah Ocalan), among many others. Very few scholars in the world could have completed such an effort. Clearly, it was a distinct honor to be asked to compile such a work. In a real sense, this work is the culmination of more than 25 years of scholarly work on the Kurdish issue.

In addition to the several hundred entries from a to z, my dictionary also includes a lengthy introductory es-

say, an extensive bibliography, maps, a preface, historical chronology, and a list of acronyms. Frankly, my dictionary dwarfs my other scholarly articles I have written in the past two years in such prestigious peer-reviewed journals as *World Affairs*, *Orient*, *Middle East Policy*, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, and *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, among others. I feel that my dictionary (encyclopedia) is a much more important, peer-reviewed scholarly work which has also brought positive recognition to TTU.

Evidence of Expert Critical Review

The *Middle East Journal* is the leading scholarly publication in the world dealing with the Middle East. Indeed it is a distinct honor even to be reviewed in this journal. The review of my dictionary in the *Middle East Journal*, 58 (Summer 2004), p. 514, declared that "the value of this work is its timeliness. The . . . articles and book bibliographic entries are well organized. . . . Anyone

interested in the history of politics of the Kurds and the current politics of the Middle East will want to have [this book] within reach."

The prestigious *American Reference Books Annual (ARBA)*, Vol. 36, 2005, p. 172, wrote that my

work was "brilliant and committed. . . . This work [also] provides good maps and a fantastic bibliography." *Choice*, October 1, 2004, said: "An eminent and prolific scholar, Gunter provides a useful introduction, a large bibliography, a short chronology, and some maps. . . . It is a fine ready reference source. . . . Recommended." During the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association in Washington, D.C. from November 19-22, 2005, my dictionary was prominently displayed at the entrance to an enormous book fair. The publisher informed me that my dictionary had received much critical acclaim at the book exhibit and had been

purchased by most major research libraries as well as a number of scholars and journalists.

Indeed, in part because of this dictionary, I was interviewed nationally on the morning edition of National Public Radio about the Kurdish situation in Iraq. This national NPR interview brought a great deal of positive scholarly recognition to TTU. In addition, my dictionary helped lead me to receive invitations all expenses paid to address the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in London, the EU Parliament in Brussels, Belgium, and meet with the highest officials in Kurdistan-Iraq on the Kurdish issue.



Gunter conferring with the Minister of
Higher Education in the
Kurdistan Regional Government



Gunter with the Sheikh of Barzan
in Barzan, Kurdistan



Focal Points is published once or more per year by the College of Arts and Sciences at Tennessee Technological University, a Constituent University of the Tennessee Board of Regents. The newsletter is designed to foster community within the college and to inform friends and alumni.
TTU: /An EEO/AA/Title IX/Section 504/ADA university 294-527-05

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