
VLADIMIR KIRICHENKO. IRAQ'S YAZIDIS PAST AND PRESENT

Keywords: Iraq; Kurdistan; Yazidis; Kurds.

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Citation: Kirichenko V. Iraq's Yazidis Past and Present // Russia and the Moslem World, 2022, № 1 (315), P. 105–114. DOI: 10.31249/rmw/2022.01.09

Abstract. The article is devoted to the history and modern situation of the Yazidis in Iraq. The Yazidis were able to maintain their identity despite centuries-long oppressions. The Yazidi community suffered huge damage in 2014 when their place of residence was captured by the Islamic State.

The Yazidis live in the northern and northwestern regions of Iraq. They inhabit the mountainous regions of Sinjar district 120 kilometers west of Mosul, as well as Sheikhan in the northeast of Sinjar district.¹ Also, the Yazidi population lives in the Taklif district, and the villages of Zahu and Samil in the province of Dahuk.²

Most scientists consider the Yazidis an ethno-confessional group of Kurds. At the same time, it should be noted that in recent years, more and more Yazidis consider themselves to be representatives of a separate ethnic group.³ The Yazidis believe in the one God, but in addition, seven more angels are worshipped, the main of which is Malak-Tawus (Peacock Angel).

According to Yazidi traditions, when God commanded the angels to bow down before man, this angel refused to do this, saying that he bows down only before God and will honor only

him. For disobedience, he was expelled from paradise and sent to rule hell. Thousands years later, God forgave him and put him in charge of the angels. In this legend, the influence of Judaism and Christianity is visible. The Yazidis believe that the peacock angel was embodied in the sun. Due to the veneration of the fallen angel (guilty of God), they are often accused of worshiping Satan.⁴ There are two religious sources about the Yazidi cult – the Book of Revelation and the Black Book. Religious orders are handed down orally from generation to generation by spiritual leaders and according to the ideas of the Yazidis themselves have existed for more than five thousand years.⁵ It should be noted that it is impossible to become a Yezidi, and marriage outside the community is prohibited.⁶ They call their language “Ezdkî,” it is very similar to the language “Kurdmanjî” (belonging to one of the dialects of the Kurdish language).⁷

Since the Arab conquest in the 7th century, the Yazidis have been Islamized. Radical Muslims considered and still consider them “devil worshippers” and do not see them as “followers of the Book.” Pulling through oppression and forced Islamization, the Yazidis fled to the mountains, that limited their contacts with other ethno-religious groups.

Until the 7th century A.D. in historical sources, the term “Yazidis” is not mentioned. In the 10th century, the Arab historian Al-Samani (1166) in his book *Al-Ansab* (Genealogies) claimed that the Yazidis were faithful to Yazid ibn Muawiya, the second caliph of the Umayyads. In some communities in the Kurdish regions, this false claim still exists today and is often used as an argument and justification for looting and enslaving the Yazidis. Even now, some Shia and Alevis⁸ believe that the Yazidis are followers of Yazid ibn Muawiya, who killed the sons of Imam Ali Hassan and Hussein, who were supposed to succeed Muhammad. In Turkey, where Alevis were also discriminated, Yazidis had long refused to communicate with other religious communities. Contact between the Yazidis and Alevis has been

established only in recent decades, they currently conduct a dialogue.⁹

The Yazidi society is divided into laity and clergy. The religious hierarchy is a priestly caste led by an emir recognized by religious authority. Most Yazidis are engaged in agriculture, although there are still semi-sedentary tribes.¹⁰ A special role for the Yazidis is played by the figure of the Sufi sheikh Adi bin Musafir,¹¹ who lived in the 12th century. Due to his activities, the Yazidi religion took its final form, absorbing elements of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Islam and other beliefs.¹² His tomb is located in the Lalesh temple 13 km from the city of Sheikhan north of Mosul. Visit of it is considered mandatory for the Yazidis, but the Yazidis do not have fixed pilgrimage time.

Repressions of the Yazidis also took place in Turkey and Iraq. They especially intensified under the Ba'ath party regime in Iraq (1968–2003). The Baath regime tried to Arabize the Yazidis by imposing an Arab identity, which led to a split among the Yazidis. Those who accepted the idea of the Arab origin of the Yazidis followed Bayazid al-Umaoui, whom the authorities officially appointed as the emir of the Yazidis in 1980, another group remained faithful to the previous leader of the Yazidis¹³ – Mir Tahsin-Beg.¹⁴

In the 1970s, Mir Tahsin-Beg joined the armed groups fighting for the autonomy of Kurdistan, after which he left Iraq. He was in exile until 1981, when the Iraqi authorities granted him amnesty, after which he returned to his homeland. In 1992, with the help of the United States and its allies, the Kurds gained autonomy. A border was actually established between Iraqi Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq, and part of the Yazidi areas (the location of the Lalesh temple and a number of nearby villages) fell under control of the Kurdistan administration. The emir's family decided that the head of the Yazidis who ended up in the Kurdistan administration would be Kheri-Beg, brother of Mir Tahsin-beg, and Tahsin-beg himself would remain the emir of the

Yazidis under the control of the Iraqi authorities, and would retain control over Lalesh.¹⁵

In 1975, Yazidis from villages in the region of Mount Sinjar were forcibly resettled. The campaign was carried out "as part of the modernization of the Yazidi lifestyle." Nevertheless, small farmers were not provided with modern agricultural equipment, and their resettlement points did not receive the necessary irrigation. They had to be hired as laborers in neighbouring areas belonging to Arab tribes. In the end, under pressure from the Baathists, more than 90 per cent of the Yazidis changed their ethnicity and registered as "Arabs."

According to some reports, the Ba'ath government forced the Yazidis to engage in hostilities against Muslim Kurds. The captured government documents included in the 1998 Committee on Human Rights report describe the Yazidi military units that participated in Operation Anfal¹⁶ in 1988–89, which were used to "persecute and attack" Muslim Kurds. The Ba'ath government had previously persecuted the Yazidis. For example, 33 members of the Yazidi community of Mosul arrested in July 1996 are still missing.¹⁷

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 changed the socio-political situation in the country. Sunni Arabs lost their privileged position in the country's political institutions. The Sunnis negatively perceived the fact that representatives of religious minorities were involved in working at US military bases or joined the new Iraqi armed forces.

The Americans could not ensure the security of northern Iraq. Through this region, foreign jihadist fighters easily entered Iraq. In 2007, radical Islamists kidnapped and killed Yazidi workers in Mosul. In April of that year, unknown militants killed 23 Yazidis in the Kurdish city of Bashika.¹⁸ In the same year, 796 Yazidi civilians were killed and 1,562 injured in the cities of Kahtania and Jazeera in northern Iraq. As a result of the explosions, more than 1000 Yazidi families became homeless.

In August 2007, more than 200 people died as a result of a terrorist attack in two Yazidi villages.¹⁹

As a result, there has been an escalation of the tension between the Yazidis and Sunnis since 2003, as evidenced by letters and leaflets condemning the Yazidis as “unfaithful.” In the first half of 2008, at least 5 Yazidis were killed in Sinjar. On December 7, 2008, two Yazidis were killed in a wine store in Mosul. On the night of 14 December 2008, unknown persons shot dead a Yazidi family in their home in Sinjar.²⁰

As previously noted, until 2014, the Yazidis were mainly concentrated in the Sinjar region of northern Iraq. In total, about 600,000 people lived there. On August 3, 2014, IS forces moved into the Sinjar region, while Peshmerga (the armed forces of Iraqi Kurdistan) retreated, depriving the Yazidis of protection. The terrorist organization occupied Sinjar. Almost 200,000 Yazidis fled to Mount Sinjar, but were quickly surrounded by militants. As a result of this operation, it became known that hundreds of Yazidis died of heat, dehydration, malnutrition and suicide. After all, American, Iraqi, French, Australian and British forces were able to drop humanitarian aid, while Syrian Kurdish forces (YPG) opened the corridor between Mount Sinjar and Syria, allowing people to flee. IS fighters kidnapped women and girls to sell them into slavery, sent boys to ISIS training camps and executed men and elderly women.

In regions of Ninawa province, Islamic State militants committed numerous atrocities against religious figures of Iraqi minorities and conducted a systematic campaign to expel and destroy entire religious communities.²¹ In August 2014, the UN announced the highest level of emergency in Iraq due to the humanitarian crisis caused by the Islamic State (IS) in the north of the country. After the IS attack on Sinjar, Kurdish officials announced a critical situation in the city of Duhuk, as 150,000 displaced people arrived there.²² Since the occupation of Sinjar, at least 5,000 Yazidis have been killed. Many mass graves were found.²³

In March 2015, the Iraqi Council of Ministers declared IS crimes against the Yazidis genocide, but Iraq's domestic legislation does not include provisions on war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.²⁴

On January 28, 2019, the Head of the Yezidis around the world, Mir Tahsin-Beg, died. Several candidates fought to become the new leader of the Yazidis. The main pretender was Hazem, the eldest son of Tahsin-Beg. His main competitor was Hazema Kamiran-Beg, the son of Mir Kheri-Beg, married to the daughter of Tahsin-Beg. In the end, with the support of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Hazem was actually appointed leader of the Yazidis.²⁵

When he was proclaimed the head of the Yazidis, the new head of the Yazidi community, Mir Hazim Tahsin-Beg, promised to support the Yazidis of Shingal (or Sinjar), who are still suffering from the displacement and destruction of the city, after the Islamic State captured the city in 2014.

The new leader also promised to create a new community council and give seats to the Yazidis of Sinjar. The same refers to the already existing Spiritual Council, which discusses theological issues.

"We will create a Yazidi council, and Yazidis from Sinjar will make up 60per cent of its composition," the new Yazidi leader said. "We will also expand the spiritual council so that ordinary people and religious figures of Sinjar can join it," he added.²⁶

In October 2020, an agreement was concluded between the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan regional government on Sinjar.

In Sinjar, Nineveh Province had two administrations in the past, one was appointed by Erbil²⁷ and the other by Baghdad. In addition, this area is crowded with armed forces fighting for increased influence, including representatives of the Kurdistan Workers Party, Sinjar resistance units, detached forces of national mobilization, as well as federal authorities and Kurdish militants of Peshmerga.

The agreement was considered by the UN mission as "the first and important step in the right direction" for the region, which saw the genocide carried out by the Islamic State against the Yazidis in 2014. "The agreement will directly give a boost to the return of displaced families to their homes and ensure their stability in their areas," said Bashir al-Haddad, deputy speaker of the Iraqi parliament. However, the Agreement was criticized by some Yazidi representatives.²⁸

It should also be noted that a number of Iraqi Shiite deputies expressed strong discordance with the Agreement. So, member of the Iraqi parliament Ahmad Kanani, along with four other deputies, said, after a visit to the area: "We are against this deal, like the residents of Shingal (Sinjara-ed.)," Kanani said. "This agreement between Erbil and Baghdad will only end with death of the boys from Shingal."

Under the Erbil-Baghdad agreement, the Iraqi Government will have to establish new armed forces enlisted from the local population and to expel fighters from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and associated groups. Shiite deputies insist that units of the Popular Mobilization Forces²⁹ remain in the area.

At the same time, Shiite spiritual leader Sinjara Mahmoud al-Araaji expressed his support for the deal. In his opinion, the agreement will help "to return peace and stability to this area, and people will be able to return to their homes peacefully."³⁰

On August 16, 2021, Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kazimi visited the Sinjar district and the mass graves of the Yazidis killed by Islamic State terrorists there in 2014. During the visit, the politician said: "We will work to create a museum to memorialize the martyrs of this place, including children, women and brave fighters who defeated terrorism on behalf of the goodwill of the whole world."³¹

For centuries, the Yazidis were persecuted. Despite this, they retained their unique religion and culture. The 2014 lodgment of the Yazidi district of Sinjar by IS terrorists ended in disaster for the community. We can only hope that the infrastructure of the region will be restored as soon as possible and that the Yazidi refugees will return home.

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ANDREY BELINSKY. “AT HOME AMONG STRANGERS”*
MIGRANTS IN GERMAN POLITICS.

*Keywords: Germany, migrants,
integration policy, CDSS / CSU, SPD,
“Union 90 / Greens.”*

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Citation: Belinsky A. “At Home among Strangers”*
Migrants in German Politics // Russia and the Moslem World,
2022, № 1 (315), P. 114–121. DOI: 10.31249/rmw/2022.01.10

Abstract. The article examines the participation of various groups of migrants in the political life of Germany. It is noted that initially the authorities and politicians of Germany, which judged from the temporality of foreign workers' stay in the country, were not interested in their social and political integration. However, the growth of the migrant community and the liberalization of legislation on citizenship made political parties change their position gradually. First, the Union 90/Greens, and then the rest of the political parties, began to work actively with various groups of migrants. Nevertheless, the number of citizens of Germany with migrant roots among the deputies of the Bundestag or in*

* “At Home among Strangers, a Stranger among his own” c.