

## **YEZIDIS NEW YEAR 6756**

**by Edward C. Corrigan, April 7, 2006 London Ontario**

It is indeed an honour to be invited to celebrate the Yezidis New Year with you. This is year 6756 in the Yezidis calender. The Yezidis are an ancient and proud people from the heart of Mesopotamia, the birth place of civilization and the birth place of many of the world=s religions. For comparative purposes the Yezidis calender is 4,750 years older than the Christian or Western calender. Their calender is 990 years older than the Jewish religious calender. The Yezidis is 5329 years older than the Muslim Calender, currently the year 1427.

There are about 10 Yezidis families in London, Ontario. They are a most interesting minority community. I thank Mirza Ismail for the invitation to this celebration. I have had the privilege of representing Yezidis refugees in the past.

Yezidis are largely based in Iraq but are also found in Syria, Turkey and Iran. There are Yezidis also in Armenia and many have been forced to flee their homeland and many now reside in Germany.

The Yezidi religion is the third largest religion in Iraq after Islam and Christianity. The Yezidis religion was pioneered in Mesopotamia during the Sumerian period four thousand years before BC. It must be regarded as one of the oldest religions in the world, and consequently has greatly influenced mankind=s history. The Yezidis is the historical fore bearer of Judaism and Christianity and Islam. It is contemporaneous to Zoroastrianism and Mithraism.

The Yezidi=s ancient language is close to the Assyrian and Aramaic languages. But, afterwards

and due to the Islamic expansion the Yezidis were exposed to the Arabic influences. Throughout history the Yezidis have been subjected too much destruction and oppression. Their holy books A Jalwa and Musaf Rash@ were stolen. Their Holy Places destroyed.

Because, the Yezidis were different in religion, and had their own separate unique culture, language and political structures they become as victims of various forces that transverse the Middle East over the past 6,000 years. Yet they survive to this day.

The Yezidis were exposed to a policy of expulsion and assimilation and that is why they fled to the mountains and then many migrated to the European countries especially, Germany in the last century from Turkey. They were then followed by Yezidis from Syria and finally from Iraq. As a result of the Iraqi Ba=ath government policy which aimed to replace Yezidis with Muslims of Arabic nationality on Yezidis agriculture lands and driving the Yezidis from their own lands with the aid of an embargo. This campaign severely affected the Yezidi social and economic situation. Their plight has unfortunately been largely ignored by mankind and in particular by the West in recent years.

In the recent years, the Kurdish Question has over shadowed the Yezidis issue. It appears that the Kurds were trying to assimilate the Yezidis and trying to obscure the Yezidi identity as a separate culture.

History shows that the Yezidis religion was pioneered and developed in Mesopotamia, and we

knew also that many other religions were born in same area, like for example, Mithraism and Zoroastrianism. That means, when those religions first came into existence, there were no nations only religious social and political structures that made up the ancient societies that existed in the birth place of human civilization. All Middle Eastern societies and Western civilization owe a profound debt to the religions that sprang from the fertile soils of Mesopotamia.

In terms of human history the concept of nationality is only recent innovation of the last few hundred years. It followed the religious political and social organization that governed most of human kind. Yezidis are from that socio-religious tradition.

It is said that Yezidis religion may be the original Kurdish religion. However, today the Kurds which comprise a nationality are not the same as the Yezidis, although they speak the same language. Yezidis believe in one God without any companion, and the seven Angels. Most of Kurds have become Moslems and were deprived from their Yezidi religion, many by force.

The Yezidis have preserved their religion in spite of the horror of massacres, expulsions and assimilation and forced conversion. That means not all Yezidis are Kurds, but that the Kurds were at one time Yezidis. This point is important in that the Yezidis today are an independent people, religion and culture. They should be recognized as such and protected. They are an important part of our past. They were there at the very beginning of human civilization. Above all they are survivors. There are according to some authorities 650,000 to a million Yezidis

today. Let us hope that the Yezidis continue to thrive and prosper in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as they are an important part of our history and of humanity. To lose the Yezidis is to lose part of our own human heritage.

## Other Notes on Yezidis

Due to the Yezidi religion traditional, the source of Virtue and Evil is from the God. The peacock of Angels AEZAZIL@ is always supporting the God singleness; he hadn=t been thrown out of paradise, and also hadn=t been abused by God. According to the divine power he had participate the seven angels, the Adam and Eve creation, and that is why he refused to prey for Adam and had approved the God advice, in which God had ordered the Angels previously, that the preying is just for him. There are many sacred elements in the Yezidi religion:

- 1- The shame; which means, how the Yezidis must be honest to his work, never do wrong, and to become a positive one in his society.
- 2- Any Yezidi individual must have his brother or sister for afterlife.
- 3- Any Yezidi individual must have his Shiekh and Pir, and yearly his Shiekh and pir must visit him at home for re-new faith due to the Yezidi religion traditional.
- 4- The Yezidis believe is in one God, the seven angels, and that the

virtue

and evil are from God.

5- The Yezidis haven't been permitted to marry outside their faith.

6- Circumcision is a usual rite in the Yezidi religion, and at birth an infant baptize by the Sheikh or the Pir with the water from the white fountain at Lalish is also of the Yezidi religion traditional.

7- Bride and bridegroom select a Sheikh or Pir as brother or sister for afterlife. The religion permits men to have more than one wife, but this is uncommon. Divorce, is permitted also but is very rare.

8- The Yezidi religious year includes four holly festivals: which begins with the first Wednesday of Seleucid calendar in April, and all Yezidis participating this festival, which also called Serisal. The other celebration is at Lalish mainly, from July 18 to 21, which called the feast of Forty Days. The third and principle feast is a last for Seven Days at Lalish, from September 23 to 30. The fourth and most important feast occurs on the first Friday in December, preceded by three days of general fasting.

9- The universal ethics and morality principles of Yezidi religion incorporates; the Justice, Loyalty, Truth, Right and Wrong, Mercy and Love,

Virtue and Evil, and Souls live on through Transmigration.

Sheikh-Adi whose tomb at Lalish, is the great re-newing (prophet) of the Yezidi religion who links the reality and faith with the last Yezidi=s recorded history. He was born in Beat BAlfar in Lebanon, and come to Lalish and act many Sofi and miracles work and was capable to collect the Yezidi people around him there, and as a fact of Yezidi believes, he carried a secrets from God to lead them and be their missionary. According to fact that every one may cater to his religion and who will not do that for his religion, will not do for the other religion and that is why Yezidism didn=t accept others to enter their religion and have no missionary intentions. Inside the Yezidis, there are many stratum, which mean Shiekh, Pir, and Murids, and named caste groups.

The Sheikhs are sub-divided into three major branches@ Adani, Shamsani, and Qatani @. The Pirs are also sub-divided into forty-two different families, but the Murids are forming one stratum only. These caste groups are not allowed to have a marriage each from another. That means, Adani can=t marry from Qatani and consequently Shamsani from Adani and Qatani. The same things with the Pir=s families, but the Murids are only one stratum though they can marry from any Murids only. It is sharply divided into these groups and every one completes the other to form the Yezidi religion. The marriage out side the faith is

forbidden, and also the acceptance from other religions are not allowed that, is why this religion is locked one and haven't a missionary intentions.

Because we are Yezidis, the most ancient society and religion in Mesopotamia, and refused to be Muslims under the military attack forces, therefore those attacks took an eradication attitude towards the Yezidi society. When the Islamic movement was in the earlier days, Yezidis had been attacked and severely suffered especially during "Aumerbin Al-khatab" era. But, when the region became under the Ottoman Empire control, the only change thing towards the Yezidis was Turks replaced by the name of Arab. The Yezidism as other religions may contain many nationalities (Kurds, Arabs, Turks, and Persians). The word that the Yezidis are Kurds only is quite false, because the word Kurds express the nationality but the word Yezidi is expressing a religion and here is the difference so most of the Kurds, who had become Muslims, were documentary a part of the Yezidi religion.

The religion language is not the only religious detecting element. Therefore, if the matter is due to the religious language, the Kurds must be Arab because Quran A the Islam holly book@ is in Arabic. Also, the Yezidis sacred books AJalwa and Mosaf Rash@, had been written in ancient Yezidi language and recently were written in Arabic. The most fanatic forces, which carried out

massacres and annihilate the Yezidi society, were from fanatic Kurds leaders, while accusing Yezidis non-believers. The Kurds after entering Islam religion become the most Yezidi=s effective enemies. The uneven power obliged the Yezidis to leave their fertile lands and villages and flee to the mountains to have more protection. This flee created more historical hate to the Kurds and it was consequently, increased the illiteracy and poverty of the Yezidi society. That means the Yezidis were the only victims of the sequences of Islamic rulers whether they were Kurds, Arabs or Turks, and they had been killed,

looted, house burned, female and children hostages, and finally they had been obliged to pay sympathy just for protection and security. According to this simple introduction, we would like to focus on some documented facts of anti-Yezidi actions, which were written by Islamic authors:

- 1- In 630 AD. The Moslems started waged against Yezidis and they killed and abducted several people.
- 2- In 637 AD. Another waged was begun against Yezidis, which cost them burning and destroying areas.
- 3- In 980 AD. Yezidis were surrounded from all directions by Moslem armed units in Hakkari and promised mercy if they surrender. The Moslem units didn=t

keep their promise by crucifying the Yezidis between Mosul and Malta road. This event was cost Yezidis massacre and thousands were forced to change their religion.

4- In 1107 AD, and due to AFars-Name@, about 50,000 Yezidi families were eradicated during the Islamic expanded era.

5-In 1218, Mangols leadership Hulagu Khan reached the area and because of the strong resistance by Yezidis against his troops, they tried to kill and destroy whatever faced them.

6- In 1254, Conflict was happened between Bader Al-Din Lolo@Mayor of Mosul@, and

Yezidi leader named Sheikh Hassan. Then Bader al-din=s men captured Shiekh Hassan they abducted and executed him and hanged his body at the front of Mosul gate without clothes to be seen by the other Yezidis. This event led to start war and due to uneven power the Yezidis were obliged to leave their own lands, villages, temples, and fled to the mountains. Every thing behind them was burned, looted, and eradicated to the ground. Then he sent his armies to dig the Shiekh Adi grave at Lalish, and took out his bones from the grave and

burned it in front of the Yezidis who had been collected to see the event.

7- In 1414, A leader from Persian region named A Jalal Al-Din Mohammed bin izidin yousif Al-Halwani@, with armed groups attacked Yezidis in Hakkar mountains. This leader was Shafee in faith, and Prince Aizdin al-bakhti@ from ibn Aumer Island, and the Kurdish Tawakal from Sharanish supported him. They collected the Kurds tribes and armed them to come with the prince Shamsaddin Al-Jadakley and they all moved towards Hakkar Mountains to fight Yezidis. They killed most of the Yezidis from Shiekh Adi=s followers and they reached Lalish temple and dug the Shiekh Adi=s grave and took out his remained bones and burned it in front of Yezidis hostages.

8- In 1585, one of the Kurd leaders named A Ali Saidi Beg from Botan province@, attacked Yezidis in Sinjar and killed more than 600 individuals and abduct most of the girl and women, and his soldiers used them for prostitution in front of the Yezidis captured soldiers.

9- In 980-981, Hakkar, the yezidi region was opposed to Islamic Kurdish military units. They surrounded the Yezidis from all directions and promised them sympathy if they surrender. When they agreed, the Moslems didn=t keep their mercy and took them as hostages for a long time and killed most of them between Mosul and Malatya and the others were forced to be Moslems.

10- In 1245-1252, the Hulagu campaign reached its utmost cruelty and killed most of the Yezidis who were driven by swords.

11- In 1640-1641, the yezidi villages near mosul were looted and the other villages were attacked by AAhmed Pasha, the othman governor of Diarbaker@ , with 70,000 strong armed forces and the Yezidis lost many of their people.

12- In 1648, in this year, Sheikh merza revolted against the Othmans for Mosul controlling, because Muslims beheaded his two brothers previously. This accident excited the Van=s mayor from Turkey AShamsi Pasha@ to revenge and attack Yezidis in mosul with large well armed force under his leader and the Yezidis were obliged to withdraw and they lost the battle. Shiekh Merza was captured, beheaded and hanged in Mosul by the Van Mayor.

13- In 1715, Hassan Pasha the Othman governor in Baghdad with huge armed soldiers attacked the Yezidis in Sinjar to punish them. The uneven battle forced the Yezidis to flee to Khatonya region in Syria. Hassan Pasha handed the area leader to the Arab tribes, and then they also attacked the Yezidis severally.

14- In 1733, Ahmed Pasha AOthman@ destroy many yezidi villages in Zab river area and mass killings were committed. This was followed by another one under

the leader of Hussein Pasha to complete destroying Yezidis villages and enforced the other 3000 remains to be Muslims and their villages were looted and leveled to the ground.

15- In 1743, Nadir Shah, Persian leader, guide his troops towards the yezidi villages near the Big Zab river, west to Mosul about 30 kms. They looted the villages and captured most of them as hostages and killed the remained that refuse their orders. This means the Yezidi existence there for along time.

16- In 1752, An Othman pasha named ASulaiman Pasha, attacked yezidis in sinjar. His campaign of killing and destroying lasted for two years, which cost yezidis more than 3000 people and more than 500 female were taken as hostages.

17- In 1767, An Othman Pasha named AAmin Pasha, he was the Mosul Mayor, sent his Son guiding strong-armed troops to fight and loot yezidis in Sinjar. He ordered the yezidis leaders to bring 1000 sheep, when they brought only 800 sheep, he became angry and ordered his men to attack them and killed large number of them.

18- In 1771, Bedagh Beg Aone of yezidis leaders from Sheikhan region, revolted against Othman Mayor of Mosul, because of his invitation the yezidis to be Moslems. The Mosul Mayor allied with Bairam Beg A Moslem Kurdish leader,

they killed Bedagh Beg and most of his men.

19- In 1774, The Othman Mayor of Mosul ASulaiman Pash@, attack yezidis in Sinjar area. The yezidi villages were looted and destroyed.

20- In 1779, The Othman Mayor of Mosul sent once more his military units to yezidis area in Sinjar. They killed many and looted their villages.

21- In 1785, The Othman Mayor of Mosul AAbdel Bagi@, attacked the yezidis in Sinjar to punish them. The Moslem attacked units were defeated, then they allied with Arab tribe leaders for more yezidis punishment.

22- In 1786/1787, conflict event was raised between yezidi ruler Cholo Beg and Kurdish leader of Imadiyah. Cholo Beg was lost the battle and many yezidis were killed.

23- In 1789/1790, Ismael Beg, Prince of Imadiyah killed Cholo Beg from prince family, and crowned one of Cholo Beg relatives named Khanger Beg instead. Khanger Beg was obliged to be retired and Hassan Beg, the Son of Cholo Beg was re-crowned instead. The last one revolted the Imadiyah prince Kifbad, and then escape to Ibn Aumer island. Therefor, Kiad Beg sent his brother Baha Al-Deen Beg with unit armed to fight Hassan Beg, but Baha Al-Deen lost the battle and

many of his soldiers were killed. The ruler Kurd of Imadiyah caught and hanged him later.

24- In 1792/1793, the Othman Mayor of Mosul, Mohammed Pasha Al-Jalili, destroyed and burned eight yezidi villages in Sinjar area.

25- In 1794, the Mosul Mayor regained the attack on a village from Sinjar area called Mehran to punish yezidis but he failed and lost the battle.

26- In 1795, the Ottomans sent Sulaiman Pasha, with the aid of Kurd prince named Abdullah Beg Kahin and Abdulrahman Pasha prince of Sulaimania AKurdish government, to Sinjar yezidi=s area. They looted, burned down, and destroyed the villages, also abducted 60 women and confiscate 650 of domestic animals.

27- In 1799/1800, Abdul Aziz Beg Al-Shawi, the Mayor of Baghdad destroyed and burned down 25 yezidi villages in Shie Khan area. Women and children were abducted and 45 persons were executed, and their heads were brought to Baghdad as a kind of traditional of those days of battles win.

28- In 1802/1803, the Mosul Mayor, Ali Pasha decided to control Sinjar area administration. While his armies attacked the yezidis from the north, and by Arab tribes from the south. This lasted for months and several yezidi villages

destroyed and fields were burned down, and they lost the battle. The yezidis accepted the Othman administration, but most of them were obliged to change their religion to Islam. The battle was begun in 1807 and 50 yezidi villages were destroyed again.

29- In 1809/1810, Sulaiman Pasha Gatel, the Othman Mayor of Baghdad attacked the yezidi area in Sinjar. His units looted Sinjar itself and Mehrkan and other yezidi villages, besides killing many yezidis.

30- In 1832, the yezidis subjected to the most severe event as mentioned by H.Layard p.276. In 1832, Bader- Khan Beg AKurdish Prince of Botan@, controlled Shikhan yezidi area administration, and took the yezidi leader Ali Beg a prisoner, tortured and killed him, and right now the area named in his name AShallal Gully Ali Beg@, in north of Iraq. The area was burned down and looted, all Moslems Kurds were allied and committed unprecedented massacre of yezidis as

non-believers people. Many of the remained of yezidis who tried to pass the Tigris river for escape to Sinjar area to avoid capture, were followed by the Moslems and they threw themselves into the river near Mosul. Most of them couldn=t swim either sunk or captured to face his fate of killing or to change his religion to be Moslem.

31- In 1833, the Kurdish ruler of Rawanduz known as Mohammed attacked the yezidis at Aqra area according to a religious mandate from Mulla Yahya Al-Muzuri @Kurdish Moslem religious leader@. They killed 500 of yezidis in the upper Zab area. Then Aqra area was administrated by Ismael Pasha, who withdraw up to Zikar mountains and then attack Sinjar area and killed many yezidis.

32- In 1838, the Othman Mayor of Diarbeker attacked the yezidis in Sinjar area and killed many of them. In the same year, the Othman Mayor of Mosul Tayar Pasha attacked Jaddala area in Sinjar ordering them to pay taxes and sympathy to the Othman authorities. Tayar Pasha visited the area and sent mediators to the yezidis in Mehrkan village to hear their complains. The yezidis killed his mediators, then he tried to revenge and destroyed the area. The yezidis withdrawn to the caves and tried to harm the enemies through ambushes. When Tayar Pasha felt that great loss of his army, he returned back to Mosul and a period of peaceful was achieved in the area.

33- In 1892, the well known attack on yezidis by Othman leader Omer Wahbi Pasha. The yezidis were subjected to a new persecuted action and the Othman leader wanted them to accept either to be Moslems or they might pay taxes or face destruction. But, the yezidis leaders refused their orders and therefor, Omar pasha allied with the Moslem Kurds against the yezidis and their armed units entered Sheikhan and Sinjar areas. This accident, cost yezidis about

15,000 people who accepted Islam to push the revenge and massacre. It is well documented that, when his units entered the yezidi areas they looted every thing and committed mass killings, and then they attacked the Shaikh Adi Pilgrimage in Lalish and took away its sacred things into Mosul. Then this pilgrimage place converted into Islamic school for 7 years. In 1893, and after many protested letters and demands to the Othman authorities especially from the Christian people, Omer Wahbi Pasha was recalled to the Othman capital.

34- In 1906, Mr. Saddeeq Al-Dammalogi, the mayor of Mezory area and the author of the Yisidism book, received an order from Mayor of Mosul to kick yezidis out from the lalish temple and use it as Islamic school. He took with him Islamic Kurdish teacher named Salem Afandi and four Kurdish students. While, he is negotiating with yezidi=s prince and persuading him to obey the order, one of the students shout the Islamic mid-night prayer and here every thing was ended and the yezidis were left the temple for a year.

35- During the First World War (1914 to 1917), the yezidis felt that it was a good opportunity to get rid of the Othman Moslems terrorism and they embraced more than 20,000 Armenian people who suffered severely during their previous living there in Turkey.

These anti-yezidi actions were all documented by Islamic authors and there are

much more than this. The evidence of the yezidis number is more than two million people during the period (1700-1800). Because of those military attacks their number was lacked and decreased to about one million now all over the world due to the horror annihilating massacres and their fled to the mountains for protection and miserable history.

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The London Yezidis community is having a New Year celebration, year 6756 in the Yezidis calender, this Friday April 7, 2006 starting at 7:00 pm until midnight. The event is being held at the London Ukranian Centre 247 Adelaide St. South in London. There will be traditional Yezidis dance group preforming, traditional Yezidis food and a Zoroastrian musical group is coming from Toronto to play. This is a unique opportunity and ancient religious/ethnic group from the Middle east. They are largely based in Iraq but are also found in Syria, Turkey and Iran. There are about 10 Yezidis families in London. Yezidis are being invited from around South Western Ontario. Yezidis are expected from Buffalo.

They are a most interesting minority community. This is an excellent opportunity to do a story on them maybe as part of your series on multi-culturalism and the London mosaic. Mirza Ismail is the leader of the local Yezidis community and organizer of the event. His telephone number is 951-8017. I have represented Yezidis refugees in the past and they have asked me to give a short talk at the event. I will be there a little late as I have to be at another event, an Arab Israeli who is a member of the Israeli Knesset, which starts at 6:00 pm at the University. The contact person for that event is Fadi Hamdani his cell phone number is 701-0183.

Please feel free to contact me about this event. I am attaching a report from the Christian peacemakers about the Yezidis to give you some additional back ground information.

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### Yazidi

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\* E-l, Ila-h "God"

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edit

The Yazidi or Yezidi (Kurdish: Êzîdî) are adherents of a small Middle Eastern religion with ancient origins. Yazidi belong to the minor of the three branches of Yazdanism. Due to the traditions of secretiveness when stating their true confession, estimates vary, but a rough figure says that today in Kurdistan still close to one third of the population are yazdanism followers.

The other two more populous branches are Alevism and Yarsanism, which differ from Yazidism by recognizing islamic taqqiyya (dissimulation). The three branches are geographically split and mutual contacts are rare. They are primarily ethnic Kurds, and most Yazidis live near Mosul, Iraq with smaller communities in Syria, Turkey, Iran, Georgia and Armenia, and are estimated to number ca. 500,000 individuals in total. There are also Yazidi refugees in Europe.

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## Origins

The origins of Yazidism are ultimately shrouded Middle Eastern prehistory. Although the Yazidis speak Kurdish, their religion shows strong influence from archaic Levantine and Islamic religions. Their principal holy site is in Mosul, Iraq. The Yazidis own name for themselves is Êzîdî or Êzîdî or, in some areas, Dasiî (the last, strictly speaking a tribal name). Some scholars have derived the name Yazidi from Old Iranian yazata (divine being), while others say it is a derivation from Umayyad Caliph Yazid I (Yazid bin Muawiyah), revered by the Yazidis as an incarnation of the divine figure Sultan Ezi (this is no longer widely accepted). Yazidis,

themselves, believe that their name is derived from the word Yezdan or Êzid meaning God. The Yazidis' cultural practices are observably Kurdish, and almost all speak Kurmanjî (Northern Kurdish), with the exception of the villages of Baiqa and Bahazane in Northern Iraq, where Arabic is spoken. Kurmanjî is the language of almost all the orally transmitted religious traditions of the Yazidis. Thus, religious origins are somewhat complex.

The religion of the Yazidis is a highly syncretistic one: Sufi influence and imagery can be seen in their religious vocabulary, especially in the terminology of their esoteric literature, but much of the mythology is non-Islamic, and their cosmogonies apparently have many points in common with those of ancient Iranian religions. Early writers attempted to describe Yazidi origins, broadly speaking, in terms of Islam, or Iranian, or sometimes even pagan religions; however, publications since the 1990s have shown such an approach to be over-simplistic.[1]

The origin of the Yazidi religion is now usually seen by scholars as a complex process of syncretism, whereby the belief-system and practices of a local faith had a profound influence on the religiosity of adherents of the Adawiyya Sufi order living in the Kurdish mountains, and caused it to deviate from Islamic norms relatively soon after the death of its founder, Sheikh Adî Ibn Mustafa who is said to be of Umayyad descent. He settled in the valley of Lalis, (some thirty-six miles north-east of Mosul) in the early 12th century CE. Shaeikh Adî himself, a figure of undoubted orthodoxy, enjoyed widespread influence. He died in 1162, and his tomb at Lalish is a focal point of Yazidi pilgrimage. During the fourteenth century, important Kurdish tribes whose sphere of influence stretched well into what is now Turkey (including, for a period, the

rulers of the principality of Jazira) are cited in historical sources as Yazidi.

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Religious beliefs

Malak Ta=us, the peacock angel

Malak Ta=us, the peacock angel

First and foremost, the Yazidi have a highly cryptic religion, and might in fact be crypto-pagans.

That is, they have had to suppress and hide many aspects of their religion from the dominant

Muslims around them. Thus, only the initiated actually know the full theology, even among the

Yazidi. In 'going cryptic', they have adopted Arabic terminology, and thus refer to their leaders

as 'sheiks', for example. They have also come under criticism by Muslims for not being a 'People of the Book', and in response to that have stated that they do, in fact, have two holy books.

Whether this is more cryptic covering or genuine religion is only known to the Yazidi initiates.

In the Yazidi worldview, God created the world, which is now in the care of a Heptad of seven

Holy Beings, often known as Angels or heft sirr (the Seven Mysteries). Pre-eminent among these

is Malak Ta=us (Tawûsê Melek in Kurdish), the Peacock Angel, who is equated with Satan or

Devil by some Muslims and Christians. "The reason for the Yazidis reputation of being devil

worshippers, is connected to the other name of Malak Ta'us, Shaytan, the same name as the

Koran's for Satan." [2] However, according to the Kurdish linguist Jamal Nebez, the word Taus is

most probably derived from the Greek and is related to the words Zeus and Theos, alluding to

the meaning of God. Accordingly, Malak Ta'us is God's Angel, and this is how Yezidis

themselves see Malak Ta'us or Taus-e-Malak ([3], page 21).

Yazidis believe that Malak Ta=us is not a source of evil or wickedness. They consider him as the leader of the archangels, not a fallen angel. Also they say that the source of evil is in the heart and spirit of humans themselves, not in Malak Ta=us. The active forces in their religion are Malak Ta=us and Sheik Adii. The "Kitêba Cilwe" (Book of Illumination) which claims to be the words of Malak Ta=us, and which presumably represents Yazidi belief, states that he allocates responsibilities, blessings and misfortunes as he sees fit and that it is not for the race of Adam to question him. Sheikh Adii believed that the spirit of Malak Ta=us is the same as his own, perhaps as a re-incarnation. He is believed to have said : "I was present when Adam was living in Paradise, and also when Nemrud threw Abraham in fire. I was present when God said to me: (You are the ruler and Lord on the Earth). God, the compassionate, gave me seven earths and throne of the heaven."

Yazidi accounts of creation differ from that of Christianity and Islam. They believe that God first created Malak Ta=us from his own illumination (Ronahî in the Kurdish) and the other seven archangels were created later on. God ordered Malak Ta=us not to bow to other beings. Then God created the other archangels and ordered them to bring him dust (Ax) from the Earth (Erd) and build the body of Adam. Then God gave life to Adam from his own breath and instructed all archangels to bow to Adam. All archangels obeyed except Malak Ta=us. As God inquired, Malak Ta=us replied, "How can I submit to another being! I am from your illumination while Adam is made of dust." Then God praised him and made him the leader of all angels and his deputy on the Earth. Hence the Yazidis believe that Malak Ta=us is the representative of God on

the face of the Earth, and comes down to the Earth on the first Wednesday of Nisan (March/April). Yazidis celebrate this day as the New Year's day. God created Malak Ta=us from his illumination (Ronahî) on this day. Yazidis argue that the order to bow to Adam was only a test for Malak Ta=us, since if God says something then it happens (Bibe, dibe). In other words, God could have made him submit to Adam, but gave Ta=us the choice as a test. They believe that their respect and praise for Malak Ta=us is a way to acknowledge his majestic and sublime nature. This idea is called "Knowledge of the Sublime" (Zanista Ciwaniyê ). Sheikh Adii has observed the story of Malak Ta=us and believed in him.[4]

Yazidis believe that good and evil both exist in the mind and spirit of human beings. It depends on the humans, themselves, which one they choose. In this process, their devotion to Malak Ta=us is essential, since it was he who was given the same choice between good and evil by God, and chose the good.

Yazidis, which have much in common with those of the Ahl-e Haqq (in western Iran), state that the world created by God was at first a pearl. It remained in this very small and enclosed state for some time (often a magic number such as forty or forty thousand years) before being remade in its current state. During this period the Heptad were called into existence, God made a covenant with them and entrusted the world to them. Besides Malak Ta=us, members of the Heptad (the Seven), who were called into existence by God at the beginning of all things, include Sheikh Adii Ibn Mustafa, his companion Shaikh Hasan, and a group known as the four Mysteries, Shamsadin, Fakhradin, Sajadin and Naserdin. The Yazidi holy books are the Kitêba Cilwe (Book

of Revelation) and the Mishefa Res, (Black Book).

Two key and interrelated features of Yazidism are: a) a preoccupation with religious purity and b) a belief in metempsychosis. The first of these is expressed in the system of caste, the food laws, the traditional preferences for living in Yazidi communities, and the variety of taboos governing many aspects of life. The second is crucial; Yazidis traditionally believe that the Seven Holy Beings are periodically reincarnated in human form, called a koasasa.

A belief in the reincarnation of lesser Yazidi souls also exists. Like the Ahl-e Haqq, the Yazidis use the metaphor of a change of garment to describe the process, which they call kiras guhorîn in Kurdish (changing the garment). Alongside this, Yazidi mythology also includes descriptions of heaven and hell, and other traditions incorporating these ideas into a belief-system that includes reincarnation.

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### Yazidism and Zoroastrianism

Yazidis believe that Zoroaster was a Yezidi who left them. When he returned they did not accept his religion. It is evident from Iranian history that Zoroaster came from the people who lived around Lake Urmia. He remained on Mt. Ararat for two years and then returned to his people as a prophet preaching a new religion. He spent ten years recruiting converts among the people around Urmia, but his efforts drew only one person to his beliefs. Finally, he went to the

Persians, among whom he found fertile ground for his teachings [5].

R. Reshid writes that during the 6th century BC, Zoroastrianism spread to the land of the Medes, but did not become dominant due to the powerful indigenous religion. Later, when Zoroastrianism gained strength, those who remained faithful to the old religion were called by the Zoroastrians as Deva Yasna meaning the Slaves of Dew, where Dew represents an angel. According to a number of Kurdish researchers, with some variations "Deva Yasna" has survived among the Kurds. The word dasni which is the name of a tribe of Yezidi Kurds and was the name of a Yezidi principality, is a variation of "Deva Yasna." Throughout history all Yezidis have been called "dasini." [6]

According to the Kurdish scholar Tawfiq Wahbi, during the 4th and 5th centuries BC the majority of Kurds east of the Zagros, Cizir, Botan, Kirkuk, and those in the mountains of southeast Kurdistan were not Zoroastrians. The last emperor of the Medes, Rishti Vega-Azhi Dahak, killed Zoroaster, ruled his followers and overthrew Vishtaspa. His army reached the southwest of Afghanistan. During that attack, the army of the Medes inflicted cruelties on Zoroastrians. No doubt this explains in large measure why the Zoroastrians equated the name Azhi Dahak with oppression and cruelty.

Yezidis believe their religion to be ancient and to predate Islam by at least a thousand years. Although some foreign scholars maintain that Yezidism began with Sheikh Adi and view him as its founder, no Yezidi accepts this claim. In fact, Yezidis believe that prior to accepting Islam, all

Kurds belonged to Yezidism.

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## Organization

Yazidi society is hierarchical. The secular leader is a hereditary emir or prince, whereas a chief sheikh heads the religious hierarchy. The Yazidi are strictly endogamous. This tradition of endogamy has allowed the Yazidi and other non-Islamic minorities to survive within Dar al-Islam. In addition, members of the three Yazidi castes, the murids, sheikhs and pirs, marry only within their group.

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## Religious practices

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## Prayers

Yazidis have five daily prayers: Nivêja berîspêdê (Dawn Prayer), Nivêja rojhilatînê (Sunrise Prayer), Nivêja nîvro (Noon Prayer), Nivêja êvarî (Afternoon Prayer), Nivêja rojavabûnê (Sunset Prayer) [7]. The worshipers should turn their face toward the sun, and for the noon prayer, they should face toward Lalis,. Such prayer should be accompanied by certain gestures, including kissing the rounded neck (gerîvan) of the sacred shirt (kiras). The daily prayer services must not

be performed in the presence of outsiders, and are always performed in the direction of the sun.

Wednesday is the holy day but Saturday is the day of rest. There is also a three-day feast in December.

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### Pilgrimage

The most important ritual is the annual six-day pilgrimage to the tomb of Sheikh Adii in Lalish, north of Mosul, Iraq. A sacred microcosm of the world, as it were, it contains not only many shrines dedicated to the koasasa, but a number of other landmarks corresponding to other sites or symbols of significance in other faiths, including Pirra selat (Serat Bridge) and a mountain called Mt. Arafat. The two sacred springs are called Zamzam and Kaniya sipî (The White Spring). If possible, Yazidis make at least one pilgrimage to Lalish during their lifetime, and those living in the region try to attend at least once a year for the autumn Feast of the Assembly which is celebrated from 23rd of Elul to 1st of Tishrei (September). During the celebration, Yazidi bathe in the river, wash figures of Malak Ta=us and light hundreds of lamps in the tombs of Sheikh Adii and other saints. They also sacrifice an ox, which is one reason they have been connected to Mithraism, in addition to the presence of the dog and serpent in their iconography. The sacrifice of the ox is meant to declare the arrival of Fall and to ask for precipitation during winter in order to bring back life to the Earth in the next Spring. Moreover, in astrology, the ox is the symbol of Tishrei.

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## Festivals

The Yazidi New Year falls in Spring (somewhat later than Equinox). There is some lamentation by women in the cemeteries, to the accompaniment of the music of the Qewals, but the festival is generally characterized by joyous events: the music of dehol (drum) and zorna (shawm), communal dancing and meals, the decorating of eggs. Similarly the village Tawaf, a festival held in the spring in honor of the patron of the local shrine, has secular music, dance and meals in addition to the performance of sacred music. Another important festival is the Tawusgeran (circulation of the peacock) where Qewals and other religious dignitaries visit Yazidi villages, bringing the senjaq, sacred images representing the peacock and associated with Malak Ta=us. These are venerated, taxes are collected from the pious, sermons are preached, and holy water distributed. The greatest festival of the year for ordinary Yazidis is the Cejna Cemaiya (Feast of the Assembly) at Lalish, a seven-day occasion. A focus of widespread pilgrimage, this is an important time for social contact and affirmation of identity. The religious center of the event is the belief in an annual gathering of the Heptad in the holy place at this time. Rituals practiced include the sacrifice of a bull at the shrine of Shaikh Shams and the practice of sema.

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## Purity and taboos

The Yazidis' concern with religious purity, and their reluctance to mix elements perceived to be incompatible, is shown not only in their caste system, but also in various taboos affecting

everyday life. Some of these, such as those on exogamy or on insulting or offending men of religion, are widely respected. Others, such as the prohibition of eating lettuce or wearing the color blue, are often ignored when men of religion are not present. Others still are less widely known and may be localized. The purity of the four elements, Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, is protected by a number of taboos. Against spitting on earth, water, or fire, for instance. These may reflect ancient Iranian preoccupations, as apparently do the taboos concerning bodily refuse, hair, and menstrual blood. Too much contact with non-Yazidis is also polluting. In the past Yazidis avoided military service which would have led them to live among Muslims, and were forbidden to share such items as cups or razors with outsiders. Auditory resemblance may lie behind the taboo against eating lettuce, whose name *koas* resembles Kurdish pronunciations of *koasasa*.

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## Customs

Yazidi are dominantly monogamous but chiefs may have more than one wife. Children are baptized at birth and circumcision is common but not required. Dead are buried in conical tombs immediately after death and buried with hands crossed.

Yazidi are exclusive; clans do not intermarry even with other Kurds and accept no converts. They claim that they are descended only from Adam. The strongest punishment is expulsion, which is also effectively excommunication because the soul of the exiled is forfeit.

As a demiurge figure, Malak Ta=us is often identified by orthodox Muslims as a Shaitan, a Muslim term denoting a devil or demon who deceives true believers. In Islam, a common deception by shaytan is to assign partners to Allah. Thus, the Yazidi have been accused of devil worship. Because of this and due to their pre-Islamic beliefs, they have been oppressed by their Muslim neighbors. Such oppression of Yezidis was exceptionally harsh during the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

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## Myths

The tale of the Yazidis' origin found in the Black Book gives them a distinctive ancestry and expresses their feeling of difference from other races. Before the roles of the sexes were determined, Adam and Eve quarreled about which of them provided the creative element in the begetting of children. Each stored their seed in a jar which was then sealed. When Eve's was opened it was full of insects and other unpleasant creatures, but inside Adam's jar was a beautiful boy-child. This lovely child, known as son of Jar grew up to marry a houri and became the ancestor of the Yazidis. Therefore, the Yazidi are regarded as descending from Adam alone, while other humans are descendants of both Adam and Eve.

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## Recent history

It is alleged by some that during the regime of Saddam Hussein, Yazidis were considered to be Arabs and maneuvered to oppose the Kurds, in order to tilt the ethnic balance in northern Iraq, but this cannot be entirely substantiated. It is known, however, that the Yazidi's unique identity, despite being ethnically Kurdish, was in fact used by the Baathist regime to isolate one from the other. However, both groups fought against Baathist troops, often in joint Peshmerga units. Since the 2003 occupation of Iraq, the Kurds want the Yazidi to be recognized as ethnic Kurds to increase their numbers and influence.

Historically, the Yazidis are a religious minority of the Kurds. Purportedly, they have existed since 2000 BCE. Estimates of the number of Yazidis vary between 100,000 and 800,000, the latter being the claim of their website. According to the same site, Yazidi refugees in Germany number 30,000.

Felekna Uca, a Kurdish Member of the European Parliament for Germany's Party of Democratic Socialism was the world's only Yazidi parliamentarian until the Iraqi legislature was elected in 2005.

In her memoir of her service in an intelligence unit of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division in Iraq during 2003 and 2004, Kayla Williams (2005) records being stationed in northern Iraq near the Syrian border in an area inhabited by "Yezidis". The Yezidis were Kurdish-speaking, but did not consider themselves Kurds, and expressed to Williams a fondness for America and

Israel. She was able to learn only a little about the nature of their religion, considering it very ancient, and being concerned with angels. She describes a mountain-top Yezidi shrine as "a small rock building with objects dangling from the ceiling", and alcoves for the placement of offerings. Local Muslims considered the Yezidis to be devil worshippers.

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Views of outsiders, fiction and stereotypes

As the Yazidi hold religious beliefs that are mostly unfamiliar to outsiders, many non-Yazidi people have written about them and ascribed facts to their beliefs that have dubious historical validity. For example, horror writer H. P. Lovecraft made a reference to "... the Yezidi clan of devil-worshippers" in his short story "The Horror at Red Hook".

A fictional Yazidi character of note is the super-powered police officer "King Peacock", of the Top 10 series (and related comics). He is portrayed as a kind, peaceful, character with a broad knowledge of religion and mythology. He is depicted as conservative, ethical and highly principled in family life. An incredibly powerful martial artist, he is able to destroy matter, a power that he claims is derived from communicating with Malak Ta=us.

The Yazidis, perhaps because of their secrecy, also have a place in modern occultism. G. I. Gurdjieff mentions Yazidis several times in his books *Meetings with Remarkable Men* and *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson*.

This is a view from Secret Doctrine-II by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky:

"Yezidis (Arabic) [possibly from Persian yazdan god; or the 2nd Omayyad Caliph, Yezid (720-4); or Persian city Yezd] A sect dwelling principally in Kurdistan, Armenia, and the Caucasus, who call themselves Dasni. Their religious beliefs take on the characteristics of their surrounding peoples, inasmuch as, openly or publicly, they regard Mohammed as a prophet, and Jesus Christ as an angel in human form. Points of resemblance are found with ancient Zoroastrian and Assyrian religion. The principal feature of their worship, however, is Satan under the name of Muluk-Taus. However, it is not the Christian Satan, nor the devil in any form; their Muluk-Taus is the hundred- or thousand-eyed cosmic wisdom, pictured as a bird." (the peacock)

Yazidism has also been claimed as an influence on Aleister Crowley's Thelema. More notably, Anton LaVey drew upon the Yazidis for his own philosophy, LaVeyan Satanism, (e.g. The Law of the Trapezoid) in "the Satanic Bible" and "Satanic Rituals". In addition, The Order of the Peacock Angel, an obscure secret society based in the London suburb of Putney loosely based its rites on Yazidi beliefs as well.

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Iraq's Yezidis: A Religious and Ethnic Minority Group Faces Repression  
and Assimilation

25 September 2005

By Christian Peacemaker Teams in Iraq

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in Iraq recently met with members of the Yezidi Academic & Cultural Association and the Yezedi Political Movement for Reform and Progress. The Yezidis are very concerned because they feel they are being forced to assimilate into Kurdish culture and identity. They experience injustice in very specific ways, from elections tampering, to threats, to constitutional questions. They fear that their rights as a separate culture and ethnicity will disappear in the new Iraq.

The following is a summary of their experience and concerns, as told to CPT.

### History:

The Yezidi community is indigenous to Iraq, with religious practice dating back to the Sumerian period in Mesopotamia, circa 2000 BCE. They are a unique ethnic group, with a religion, language, and culture distinct from the Arab and Kurdish cultures among whom they live.

According to Islamic belief, they are classified among the "unbelievers," and have been attacked by religious extremists at different times in their history. In 1700 CE, Yezidis numbered more than one million, but today there are only about 650,000 Yezidis in Iraq, 90% of whom live in Kurdish-controlled Northern Iraq near the city of Mosul.

Under the pro-Arab Saddam regime, Yezidi towns and villages suffered from repression and neglect. Often they lacked basic services such as water, electricity, healthcare and education. As a result, they found themselves in a severe state of poverty and illiteracy. In addition, Saddam's regime required the Yezidis to register themselves as Arab in ethnicity. They resisted this classification, wanting to maintain their unique cultural identity.

### Current Problems:

After the 2003 invasion, the Yezidis placed high hopes in the creation

of the new Iraq, and fought successfully for their inclusion among the cultural and religious groups protected by section 1, article #2 of the new constitution. They dreamed of sharing in the freedom and democracy of the new Iraq.

However, they report that they are experiencing similar repression and forced assimilation, this time under the power of the Kurdish political system. Some of the incidents they report include:

- \* Kurdish authorities forcing Yezidis to register as Kurdish.
- \* Peshmerga troops control Yezidi areas near Mosul.
- \* Yezidi political leaders receive threats, and one was assassinated in the spring of 2005.
- \* Two competing Kurdish political parties are preventing development projects in Yezidi areas. Apparently \$12 million was approved for projects in Yezidi areas in Sinjar, but a political leader in Mosul intervened and blocked the projects from moving forward.
- \* The Yezidi representatives specifically accuse Kurdish government

officials of diverting funds slated for the Yezidi town of Sinjar (pop. 20,000) to a smaller Kurdish village (pop. 1,000). The Yezidi representatives reported that the government funds wells to be drilled in Muslim villages, but does not drill wells in higher-populated Yezidi areas. In addition, Yezidi areas suffer from a lack of schools. In the village of Al Jazeera (pop. 25,000) there are only two elementary schools and six teachers for 1,000 students. Students must go to school in three different shifts. There is no secondary school.

#### Elections:

During the elections in January 2005, Yezidi villages experienced interference and injustice. Yezidi representatives reported that some Yezidi villages received no ballots. Other villages that received ballots did not receive the boxes in which to place the ballots. In other areas, the promised buses for voter transportation failed to appear. In one place, the polls opened from 11AM to 2PM only. In other places, ballot boxes were found stuffed before voting even started. Yezidi leaders submitted claims concerning these incidents to a UN representative, Kurdish leaders, the Iraqi president, and the independent electoral commission in Iraq.

#### Constitution:

Yezidis are mentioned as one of the minority religious groups protected by section 1, article #2 of the new constitution. However, the Yezidi representatives report that the name 'Yezidi' is misspelled in its Arabic form. It is misspelled in such a way that it is identical to the name of an Islamic tribe that exists in Yemen. The Yezidi representatives feel that this is a deliberate attempt, by political leaders, to blur the ethnic and religious lines between Arab and Yezidi and Islamic and Yezidi. They fear assimilation, and demand recognition as a separate ethnicity, neither Arab nor Kurdish. In addition, they request the right to have a quota established of independent Yezidi representatives (i.e. not from Kurdish political parties) to ensure that Yezidis are represented in the new Iraqi Council of Representatives.

#### Yezidi Hopes:

As the October 15th deadline for approval of the new constitution approaches, Yezidi cultural and political groups are reaching out to the international community. They request that the international community put pressure on the Iraqi government to:

\* Allow Yezidis to identify themselves as Yezidi in ethnicity, not as Arab or Kurdish.

\* Recognize Yezidis' political and religious rights by protecting these rights in the constitution (with their name spelled, in Arabic, as they would choose to spell it):

?????? ????????

\* Establish a quota of independent Yezidi representatives (i.e. not from Kurdish political parties), so that there will always be Yezidi representation in the Iraqi Council of Representatives (Iraqi Parliament).

Contact:

For more information or to establish contact with the Yezidi community in Iraq, please contact:

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