

A STUDY OF THE YAZIDIS: AN INTRODUCTION

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By the middle of the nineteenth century scanty information relating to the Yazidis was known to the West. However, our knowledge of these people, their life and creed for long continued to be far from objective and was by no means thorough. The very fact that the Yazidis are an esoteric group, preventing their members from discussing any religious matter with aliens (not of the same faith), may be the foundation of the multiple contradictions found in available source material.

An American anthropologist at the beginning of this century was seemingly convinced by the tales related to him by an Armenian youth whom he trusted. He recounted that the Yazidis eat white rats and cook food with the blood of sacrificed animals.¹ A veteran archaeologist visiting the Yazidi area in northern Iraq mistook common courtesy of his host as part of their belief.² Still earlier a Turkish traveller of the seventeenth century narrated unbelievable and most certainly absurd tales about the Yazidis, no doubt to impress people at home by the uniqueness of his trip. A portion of his narrative is worthy of quoting at length:

They are dirty, with heads full of lice and lice larva. Most are short with indistinct necks, as though their heads arise directly from their shoulders. The Kurds call them "People of the eight moustaches," referring to the fact that they have thick eyebrows, long moustaches and hair growing out of their nostrils and ears. They are dark in color with horse-like teeth. Their son is beardless to age ten and on reaching this age he looks as though he is twenty years old. Their women give birth after one full year of gestation. Dogs are esteemed by the Yazidis and when a woman gives birth the child should be suckled by the milk of a black dog. It is always dangerous to hit a dog. Every house has five or ten dogs. Food is dished out first to the dogs and the family eat what is left over. Dogs sleep with them (in their rooms). All this made the price of dogs expensive, for the value of a black dog might reach one hundred piasters or equal to the price of ten mules. A great

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¹J. Crowfoot, "A Yazidi Rite," *Man*, 1 (1901), no. 122, pp. 145-146.

²A. H. Layard, *A Popular Account of Discoveries at Nineveh*, (New York, 1875), p. 174.

feast is held when a black dog gives birth. When a black dog dies they wash it with onion water, shroud it and take it to the cemetery for burial amid lamentation and weeping. This is followed by a funeral during which they feed other dogs roasted meat (*kabab*).

At the death of a Yazidi the family places dog hairs in his hand. . . . The Yazidis also honour onion and cheese, for these are their main diet. Whoever publically breaks an onion with his fist would be afraid that his head would be split like the onion (by his own people). Strangely, if a wealthy Yazidi dies, his body is washed with onion juice and an onion is planted on his gravesite.”³

Armenian writers considered the Yazidis to have been apostates of the ninth century Armenian church. Rawlinson views them as being of Jewish descent and Grant (an American missionary in Mosul during the nineteenth century) saw them as remnants of the lost tribes of Israel.⁴

The areas the Yazidis inhabit are in Syria, Turkey, and Russia, but the majority live in Iraq where their main shrines are situated, mostly in the valley of Lalish around the tomb of Shaikh Adi, son of Musafir (d. circa 1160) whom they venerate. This group has indeed caught the imagination and interest of visitors and travelers and many writing have appeared about the Yazidis by various authors in different languages and their accounts presented vary radically and often are deeply contradictory. The book of Siddiq Damluji is certainly of utmost importance, although it lacks detail, depth, precision, organization, scholarly attitude, tolerance for the works of other interested writers and contains multiple trivialities.⁵ The reason one must give weight to the account of Damluji and the basis of such first hand information is that he associated with the Yazidis from a very early age. In addition is his friendship with many of their religious leaders, coupled with his blood brotherhood (*karafa*) with the Yazidi princes and the trust they stored in him to preserve their secrets and private matters. It seems that in spite of this strong relationship he was not even able to glance (as it was related by Mayan Khatun, grandmother of the present Yazidi Prince and mother of the former), at the holy Sanjaq (symbol of Taus Helek, “Satan”). Damluji, as he relates, resided in Sinjar (a known Yazidi area in northern Iraq) when he was twenty years old. He says:

³Awlia Chalabi, *Siabi Namesi*, (Constantinople, 1314-1318 A.H. (1896-1900), vol. 4, pp. 61-71

⁴Henry Field, *The Anthropology of Iraq*, Part II, no .1, The Northern Jazira (Cambridge, Mass. 1951), Appendix A, A visit to the Yezides in 1843 by I. Berezin, p. 75; A Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes...with sketches of travels in ancient Assyria, Armenia, Media* (London, 1841).

⁵Siddiq Al-Damluji, *Al-Yazidiyyah* (Mosul, 1949).

I learnt their language and intensified my association with them and took brothers-in-blood from among them; attended their meetings, clubs, participated in their feasts, funerals, saw for myself their religious rites, even discussed with them diversified matters and I chose to live at Baadri, the residence village of the Yazidi princes for three years.⁶ Thus I was able to be aware of their secrets, hidden affairs and really became a specialist on their religion, and one to whom they often came for counsel and advice.⁷

It seems very likely that Damluji acquainted himself with some of the secret beliefs through a Yazidi friend who was his daily companion for more than thirty years. Apparently this Yazidi asked him not to reveal his name and it was to him that Damluji dedicated his book, "To my friend whose name I will never reveal or (even) whisper in his ears."⁸

Any Yazidi who read Damluji's work or had heard of it criticized it as completely nonfactual and ridiculed the author. This attitude on the part of the Yazidis must not be taken seriously or be allowed to diminish the importance of Damluji's work. One must realize that the Yazidis, even the educated among them, know very little of their own doctrine, though claiming otherwise. Their historic doctrines are in truth fully known to a very few men, probably not more than three or four (Baba Shaikh, Baba Gavan, and Baba Chawish), who are in turn not in agreement with each other regarding the dogma.

The study of Abdul Razzaq Al-Hasani has been plagiarized word-for-word by Hashim Al-Banna.⁹ Of interest in the latter work is that it contains a certification signed by Shaikh Said, son of Shaikh Khidir, spiritual leader of the Yazidis in Sinjar. It states, "... we have undertaken all the corrections necessary and removed the falsehoods exhibited about our religion by some Orientalists and writers of evil intent, and thus the book as it stands now is nearer to fact about our Yazidi faith."¹⁰ One should not dwell on the validity of this certification, however, as it is of no consequence. The doctrine is secret and the signer of the document obviously was well aware of his deceit.

⁶Baadri is a village in the Shikhan area in northern Iraq, near Ain Sifni, around which flows a small river. The palace of the Yazidi Prince is built on a high hill overlooking the village. Baadri is known in Caldaean church history for it was an important town of Bit Nuhdra diocese of Abiabene Patriarchate. Qass Sulyman Sayigh, *Rihla Raditha ila Shaikh Adi wa Al-Rubban Har-mazd, Al-Masriq*, 20 (1922), pp. 831 ff.

⁷Damluji, *op. cit.*, pp. j, k.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. f.

⁹Abdul Razzaq Al-Hasani, *Al-Yazidiyyum fi hadiribim wa madibim* (Baghdad, 1961), latest edition. For the first edition's review see Damluji, *op.cit.*, pp. 374-83.

¹⁰Hashim Al-Banna, *Al-Yazidiyyum* (Baghdad, 1964), p. 11.

In 1934 the American University of Beirut published *The Yazidis Past and Present in Arabic* by Ismail Beg Chol with an introduction by Professor Constantine Zurayq of the University History Department. Some Iraqi critics doubted the authenticity of this work and accused Zurayq of fabrication. Chol was illiterate, they argued, and could not have written such a treatise. Also Chol (who is called Ismailuk by his own group as means of depreciation) did not live the heroic deeds or have the remarkable career one assumes upon reading the book. It seems that Iraqi critics did not study these chapters carefully as in actuality they do exhibit the illiteracy and ignorance of Chol.¹¹

Chol's work is of tremendous significance for it is the first document dictated by a Yazidi believer even though he was unenlightened. The above criticism of the book seems groundless as Chol was still living when the work was published; his sons and daughter, Wansa, a University of Beirut graduate, never denied the verity of their father's words. Upon talking with Professor Zurayq, he recalled the circumstances surrounding Chol's dictation of the manuscript. Chol was a Yazidi Prince at Sinjar; in 1933 he was in financial distress when he fell critically ill. Mr. Dodge, President of the American University of Beirut, took pity on him and had him hospitalized at the institution's expense. When Chol began to recover he dictated these chapters and presented them, as a token of gratitude, to President Dodge. The latter in turn entrusted them to Professor Zurayq for publication.

Another source worthy of remark is the book Antonius Shabli encountered in the library of Mayfuq Monastery (under the number 62), which contains a brief summary of the Yazidi faith. Reportedly, this book was written by a Yazidi who had forsaken his people and embraced Catholicism.¹²

The Yazidi veneration of Satan, being deeply contrary to the current beliefs held by other peoples of the area and the Islamic dogma calling for Satan's curse, are principally responsible for the strange tales common about them. This, together with their obligatory isolation (mostly for self-defense), made the subject of Yazidi faith a sphere of interest to many journalists and writers. A Lebanese reporter gave far-fetched accounts of the Yazidis saying, "I carried my head on a tray and decided to visit the Sinjar," meaning that in spite of great danger he made the trip to this Yazidi area.¹³ He continues along this vein

¹¹Damluji, *op. cit.*, pp. 412-22; Abaas Al-Azzawi, *Parikh Al-Yazidiyyah wa Aqidatibim* (Baghdad, 1935), p. 169.

¹²Antonium Shbli Al-Labnani, *Rihla ila Shamali abnan, Al-Masriq*, 24 (1926), pp. 659-660.

¹³Adna Murad, *Ilirijal Fagat* (Beirut, December 16, 1961), pp. 9-10.

telling that the Yazidi is required to drink the blood of Muslims, does not fast or perform any form of worship. Personally, it is strongly doubted that this man ever visited any Yazidi village. And although the worship of Satan (or the principle of evil), seems strange in today's world, it was not an uncommon practice in antiquity. Tiamat (the personification of evil) was an early Mesopotamian deity who begat a host of other deities in the Mesopotamian pantheon. The term "Anu's (head of the Mesopotamian pantheon) children" was applied to seven demons which the Mesopotamians regarded as most powerful among devils.¹⁴ In ancient Egypt Seth was looked upon as a god of evil and was identified with Apophis (a giant serpent) and Typhon (the destructively strong wind). They believed that Ra (the sun god) was assisted by two devils, one red and one black.¹⁵ In the Hindu pantheon we hear of Mara and Sitala whose personalities bear marked similarity to the Satan of Judeo-Christian and Islamic tradition.¹⁶ It is well known that in Zoroasterianism Ahriman as well as Ahura Mazda was seen as a god. This is true also of Mithraism and Manichaeism. Although the Greco-Roman religion embodied no Satan of the Zoroasterian type some facets of Zeus-Jupiter exhibit what could be termed Satanic character.¹⁷ Greco-Roman deities Hecate and Silvanus carry many attributes of the Zoroasterian type.¹⁸ Islam defines the power of Satan as the force behind all the world's evil, that which leads human beings into all kinds of vice; some Muslim thinkers, however, held a somewhat different view.¹⁹ A few learned men and poets of the Abbasid Period believed that Satan held a powerful position in the heavenly kingdom long before the creation of man, and listed various reasons for his dismissal from grace which are not held by Muslims generally. Certain Sufis refused to curse Satan and Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali regarded him as "Head of the monotheists and leader of the believers." In the opinion of these Muslim intellectuals and Sufis, Satan's refusal to prostrate himself before Adam is but testimony to his monotheism and his conviction that prostration is reserved for God alone. In verse, the Sufi Abu Yazid Al-Bustami addresses Satan,

"Who is Adam in the meantime, and who is Satan without You.
You have attracted all and all love You."

¹⁴H.W.F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon* (New York, 1963), p. 302; Sami Said Ahmed, *Early Ideas of Evil and Devil* (Baghdad, 1970), p. 11-12.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 16-19; J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, 1955), p. 7,2; Samuel A.B. Mercer, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1949), p. 60.

¹⁶Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 83 ff.; Sami Said Ahmed, *Zeus*, (Baghdad, 1970). pp. 33-46.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 91, 97.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 108 ff.

The Muslim Sufi Abu Mansur Al-Hallaj speaks to Satan,
"My disbelief in you is (in itself) a worship, and my mind is convinced of your greatness. Who is Adam in comparison to you, and who else is in the meantime (other than) Satan."

The Abbasid poet Bashshar ibn Burd's verses about Satan may well exhibit a Zoroasterian-Manichaeon impact.

"Satan is far preferred to your father Adam, thus be aware (cautious) oh evildoers be aware. Fire is his substance while Adam is of clay and clay will never attain the eminence of fire. Sun was shining when earth was dark and fire was worshipped ever since there was fire."

Little has been written about the Yazidis in Western languages.²⁰ Their scriptures were introduced to the West long ago and the commentaries by Western scholars are most worthwhile. However, their conclusions vary radically and they also unanimously agree that much of the Yazidi life and faith remain shrouded in mystery. There are several books in Russian regarding these people and their religion.²¹

In April, 1968 I was introduced to an educated Yazidi by a faculty member of Mosul University. This particular Yazidi is acquainted with the tenets of other world religions and in both personal discussion and in his writings he appears to have a real knowledge of his faith. He came from a village in the Shikhan not far from Mosul and designated himself as "General lecturer on Yazidi Religion," claiming that the Iraqi Ministry of Education appointed him to this position and entrusted him with carrying out these lectures in the Yazidi area. He alleged that he attended school in spite of his father's bitter opposition and in so telling displayed old wounds claiming that his father and brothers had shot him because of this. Some time later the same man, apparently forgetting the above version of his story, handed me a small pamphlet he had written entitled, "The Brotherhood between Muslims and Yazidis in the Tradition of Circumcision and Blood." Herein he asserted that his father himself had put him in school and had done this on the advice of his Muslim brothers-in-blood.

This Yazidi, who later became a good friend and even blood brother, related that he had prepared a general study of Yazidism which contains its principles in entirety. On a visit to his village in

²⁰M. Joachim Menant, *les Yezidis* (Paris, 1892); Isya Joseph, *Devil-Worship* (Boston, 1919); R.H.W. Empson, *The Cult of the Peacock Angel* (London, 1928); G. Furiani, *Testi Religione dei Yezidi* (Bologna, vrcjq; Mariam Harry, *Les Adorateurs de Satan* (Paris, 1937); Henry Field and J.B. Glubb, *The Yezidis, Sulubb, and Other Tribes of Iraq and Adjacent Regions* (Manasha, Wisc., 1943); E. S. Drower, *Peacock-Angel* (London, 1941).

²¹Lack of space has necessitated deletion of a comprehensive bibliography by Prof. Ahmed.—Ed.

October, 1968, he allowed me to borrow this manuscript. After a thorough study I found these writings to be superficial, containing much contradiction, filled with legendary tales apparently regarded by the author as historical events. With further study it became clear that the real facts were there, but hidden. At the time I arrived at this conclusion I was in Mecca and wrote him from there expressing this opinion. His reply carried the enigmatic words, "The book which I presented to you contains only one (fact) of the thousands (of facts) of Yazidism." I met him again in July, 1969, at which time he informed me that he had written yet another manuscript which was even more elaborate and detailed than the first and invited me to his village. I accepted and in mid-August, 1969 found myself again in his village. He presented the second work which I took with me. Upon examination I found that subjects treated in the first work were dealt with here in almost contradictory terms. Lengthy sections of Yazidi scripture (he claimed to be the only person to have seen its original text) quoted in the first work were again quoted but with variation of wording and content. Of importance, however, was the mention in the second manuscript of the founder of the Naqshabandi way of Sufism who died about 150 years ago. This led me to the conclusion that the scripture the Yazidi claimed to have seen must have been written about 1834. Upon further study, I came upon a passage wherein the author alleged that this scripture mentioned King Lugai Zagizi a Sumerian monarch who ruled about the middle of the third millenium B.C.). The scripture propounded that this king prayed in Umma and defeated his neighbour King Urukagina of Lagash. This was convincing evidence that the alleged Yazidi scripture is either nonexistent or was written a few years previously, most likely by my Yazidi friend himself, as he does possess slight familiarity with ancient history, major world religions, and ethics. Furthermore, my Yazidi friend is undeniably an ambitious man.

Although the two manuscripts given me by this Yazidi are filled with contradictions and false tales, they are the first writings by a Yazidi who remains to this day firm in his faith. Upon comparing the two manuscripts, their study and evaluation in the light of traveller's reports and other available works of scholars, the manuscripts have proven themselves to be of great assistance in reaching important conclusions regarding Yazidism. Hereafter the author of these manuscripts will be referred to as 'My Yazidi friend.' His actual name cannot be given as he is bound by his faith to preserve its secrets. Should his fellow Yazidis identify him, his life would be in utmost danger.

The foundations of Yazidism are historically more remote than

many at first thought. Various aspects of Yazidi daily life reflect clear Mithraic-Zoroastrian influence. Their homes have no toilets or sewers; these are taboo and may well be regarded as a remnant of the Zoroastrian taboo against contamination of the earth, e.g. the Zoroastrians abstained from burying their dead but rather placed the corpse on mountains or in caves so as not to corrupt the life-giving earth. There is also some indication of Hindu-Buddhist, Christian, and even Babylonian aspects expressed in Yazidi Doctrine.

The very isolation of the Yazidi area, particularly the remote Valley of Lalish, where the principle shrines are located, has much to do with the crystalization of their beliefs. The two manuscripts of my Yazidi friend attribute the origin of the faith to a figure named Malak Salem. It seems very likely that the Yazidis themselves are totally ignorant about their origin and created a founder in order to make their religion conform more closely to the patterns of other faiths. Malak Salem might well be identified as the Archangel Gabriel or perhaps Malaki Sadiq, the King of Jerusalem mentioned in the Old Testament as a contemporary of Abraham.

It has been suggested by some that Yazidism represents an extension of Mithraism which was predominant in the city of Hatra, the ruins of which lie near their area in northern Iraq. Ahriman, the god of evil, as it is argued, was also revered in Mithraism.²² This theory, though reasonable, ignores the clear and obvious impact of other religions on Yazidism as seen in its present form. The Mithraic rite of bull sacrifice was also an integral part of the Babylonian cult.²³ The Yazidi celebration of the New Year Festival was likewise a major Babylonian religious holiday.²⁴

Yet another theory propounds that the Yazidis were originally Manichaeans believing in dualism and that their initial belief in six deities faded gradually until they retained conviction only in God and Taus. This line of reasoning hypothesized that God fashioned all and Taus (Satan) who directs the affairs of all creation for God is himself responsible to God alone.²⁵ This belief inhibited the pleasures of life, asked that believers assume poverty, simplicity, and submission and demanded that one-seventh of the individual's life span be spent in fasting. This particular conjecture goes on to say that Muslims failed

²²Taufiq Wahby, *The Remnants of Mithraism i Hatra and Iraqi Kurdistan and its traces in Yazidism, the Yazidis are not Devil Worshipers* (London, 1962).

²³Sami Said Ahmed, "Characteristics of Ancient Mesopotamian Religious Thought," *A.M.E. Zion Quarterly Review*, Vol. 70 (1967), no. 3, p. 125.

²⁴Carl Brockelmann, "Das Neu Jahrfest der Jesidia," *ZDMG*, 55 (1901), pp. 388-390; Henri Frankfort, "A Tammuz Ritual in Kurdistan," *Iraq*, 1 (1934), pp. 136-145.

²⁵Jean Spiro, "Les Yezidis ou les Adorateurs du Diable," *Extrait du Bulletin de la societe neuve a Teleoise de Geographie*, T. XLL, pp. 275 ff.

to convert the Yazidis until the advent of Shaikh Adi who was able to rally them under the standard of Islam and established an Adawite way (*tariqa*) at Lalish. And Lalish itself was transformed into a center for religious teaching.

It has been also proposed that Yazidism is a worship of Light and represents a triumph over Persian dualism. Thus, Taus Melek symbolizes the victory of light over evil.²⁶

The majority of present Arabian writers argue for the Islamic origin of the Yazidis. Azzawi is convinced that the Yazidis mentioned by Al-Sam'ani (d. circa 1166) in his work *Al-Ansab* and Ibn Qutaybah in *Al-Ikhtilaf fi Al-Lafd*, are ancestors of present Yazidis. He took for evidence the accounts of Sharaf Khan Al-Badlisi in his *Sharafnameh* where he reported that many Kurdish tribes who were the main source of manpower for the Omayyads returned to northern Iraq after the fall of the Omayyad Dynasty but remained loyal. Many members of Omayyad royalty lived among these Kurds and were greatly influenced in succeeding years by Sufi beliefs up to the arrival of Shaikh Adi to the area.²⁷

The Islamic origin of Yazidism was the subject of a series of articles by Diwaji. The core of his argument is that Yazidism passed through four stages in its historical development, being Islamic Omayyad from its inception. The first stage began before the migration to Lalish as an anti-Alid (House of Ali, fourth successor of Mohammed) faction supporting Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah. In the second phase Yazidism transformed into an Adawite (after Shaikh Adi) way of Sufism. The third is represented in the career of Hasan, Adi's nephew, who after a withdrawal of six years, came forth openly with the book *Al-Jalwa li Arbab Al-Khalwa*. In this work Hasan set forth the pillars of Yazidi doctrine and for the first time set them aside from Islam. He introduced extremism (*ghilu*) and other tenets which were in sharp contrast with the principles of Islam. In the fourth stage Yazidism departed completely from Muslim creed; the preclusion of learning, the embodiment of Jewish, Christian, pagan, Kharijite and Sabaeen thought and the imposition of secrecy were assimilated at this point.²⁸

In a lecture delivered at the Qalam Club in Baghdad in 1957, Sayyid Sadiq Kammunah argued that the Yazidis were originally followers of Mohammed Ibn Ali Al-Shalmaghani (also known as Ibn Abi

²⁶Max Horten, *Die Philosophie des Islam*, (Munchen, 1924).

²⁷Azzawi, *op.cit.*

²⁸Said Diwaji, *Mansha Al-Aqidah Al-Yazidiyyah wa tatawwirihua*, *Al-Risala*, vol. 12 (1944), Noms. 557, 558, 559, 560, pp. 213 ff, 231 ff., 255 ff., 269 ff.

Al-Azaqir), the known extremist of the middle Abbasid period. This argument is difficult to substantiate.

A bird's-eye-view of the overall political situation in the Middle East on the eve of Shaikh Adi's migration displays the Fatimids in power, turmoil and tension, Crusader assaults, Muslim encounters, and a weak Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad who was too debilitated to protect himself. In this period of instability emerged the ambitious Shaikh Hasan. He is Shaikh Shams Al-Din Abu Mohammed Al-Hasan, son of Shaikh Abi Al-Mafakhir Adi II, son of Shaikh Abi Al-Barakat, nephew of Shaigh Sharaf Al-Din, son of Musafir. He laid down the lasting foundations of Yazidism. Shaikh Hasan was a Sufi who held a passionate belief in reincarnation. It is altogether probable that he imposed veneration of himself upon his followers and initiated precepts which were in conjunction with their pre-existing religious traditions. He assured the faithful that their very substance differed radically from other races and that they must refrain from intermingling in order to retain their purity and sublimity. Shaikh Hasan may have compromised with on-going cults of the region among which was the sanction given to the principle of evil, part of the Mithraic-Zoroasterian-Manichaeen doctrines. He perhaps saw advantage in such adaptation and compelled his followers to offer respect and sacrifices in this deeply-rooted rite. In this manner he secured the patronage of the Shamsanies (probably the group Hasan had compromised with). Apparently Shaikh Hasan was drawn to the Mazdakite conviction of free access to worldly desires and thus abandoned many constricting religious obligations. One may deduce that the achievements of Hasan were successful in that the Yazidis still cling vehemently to their faith in spite of suffering, massacre and persecution through the ages.²⁹ Thus Shaikh Hasan completed the edifice whose foundation was laid by Shaikh Adi. The Yazidi caste system imposes succession of authority and heavy obligations upon their society. It may well be that power was originally a monopoly held by the Shamsanies, but with the arrival of the Omayyad wave, duties were divided between the two groups. Regulations were set forth defining the subjection of Yazidi individuals and burdening them with taboos in order to protect their own supremacy for generations to come.

Undoubtedly Islam is the strongest influence upon the life and creed of the Yazidis, but they are not "Ascetic Muslims who believed that the imamate be in Yazid who was right and that they inherited (national), religious, and Sufi traditions... which have separated

²⁹Damluji, *op.cit.* pp. L-O.

them from the rest of the Muslims and led finally to new principles which affected and corrupted the very essence of their Islam.”⁸⁰ Or, as phrased by another, “Here we have before us an innovation split from Islam. To prove this one must notice the outward behavior of the Yazidi before studying his religious beliefs. The climate of Islam appears in names, dating, refraining to portray the human face, circumcision and others. In addition to blood sacrifice, honor paid to saints and the tradition of the pilgrimage to Mecca. . . and Arabian expressions rarely found among the Kurds. . . the revered saints are known Muslim Sufis; their religious texts all have strong relationship to Sufi language and thought. It also shows similarities with Muslim spiritualism in radical conceptions concerning the origin of the universe, man, embodiment and final return of Satan to his original abode.”⁸¹

My Yazidi friend boasts that Yazidism is the mother of all Eastern religions, that it was the faith of Abraham and the true Islam. Or, as he paraphrased, “The path begun by God for Salem, son of Shamsan whose mission was expanded (through the grace of) Taus, king of the sun.”

Although the Yazidis exist in great poverty, they are generally hospitable, courteous and respectful of others. They are diligent workers and many of their youths have managed to advance themselves into a new way of life, attending schools and becoming teachers and government functionaries in spite of the fact that the vast majority of them are from castes banned from formal education.

Most of the present Yazidi generation show disregard to many of the doctrinal obligations. The fact that Yazidi youths now attend school and that their acquisition of even a small amount of formal education is in itself a blustering blow to one of the main Yazidi tenets. Today Yazidis intermingle freely with members of other faiths and discuss with them religious as well as secular matters. A good example may be seen in the fact that a Yazidi of the shaikh caste at the village of Bashiqa near Mosul analyzed for me what he thought to be the reasons behind the extraordinary strength exhibited by the princely and shaikh castes. His allegations surely strike a strong blast against Yazidi traditions. The behavior of Said Beg, the former Yazidi Prince and father of the present leader, constituted flagrant disobedience to Yazidi obligations. These were clear instances of the generally widespread irreligious attitudes among those who are given leadership to supervise and be responsible for the welfare of the entire nation and

⁸⁰Azzawi, *op.cit.* p. 7.

⁸¹Toma BaBwa Al-Dominkani, *Al-Yazidyyah, Al-Mashriq*, 55 (1961) pp. 243-244.

guard the faith. With certainty Yazidi doctrine stipulated that these leaders be of high moral standards to enhance the duties laid upon them and set an example for other members of the community. Contrary to this, Said Beg squandered lavishly on himself the tithes and income intended for the repair of Yazidi shrines, for feeding pilgrims to the holy valley and for assistance to the needy.³²

Chanter Husain, son of Chanter Adu, after returning from a trip to Russia reported to his fellow chanters that Yazidism is degenerating in the Soviet Union. He was quoted as saying that shaikhs have no significance in Yazidi society in the U.S.S.R. and have few functions and little authority; they receive no tithes or offerings. All Yazidis in Russia attend public schools and associate freely with non-believers. Furthermore, when some devout Yazidis filed a petition for government aid to repair the Shrine of Shaikh Sajadin in the village of Karwansra, the government responded by demolishing the building to the ground.³³

³²Damluji, *op.cit.* pp. 331-341.

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 310-314.

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