



Yezidism

Between Continuity
and Transformation

Edited by
Khanna Omarkhali &
Philip Kreyenbroek

IRANICA

Herausgegeben von Alberto Cantera
und Maria Macuch

Band 29

2021

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Yezidism

Between Continuity
and Transformation

Edited by
Khanna Omarkhali &
Philip Kreyenbroek

2021

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Book jacket illustration: Yazidi sanctuary near the Syrian border, Sinjar Mountains (Kurdistan, Iraq); © akg-images / François Guénet.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen
Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über <https://dnb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet
at <https://dnb.de>.

For further information about our publishing program consult our
website <https://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de>

© Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden 2021
This work, including all of its parts, is protected by copyright.
Any use beyond the limits of copyright law without the permission
of the publisher is forbidden and subject to penalty. This applies
particularly to reproductions, translations, microfilms and storage
and processing in electronic systems.
Printed on permanent/durable paper.
Typesetting and layout: Kian Kahrom
Printing and binding: Memminger Medien Centrum AG
Printed in Germany

ISSN 0944-1271
ISBN 978-3-447-11800-2

eISSN 2750-4751
eISBN 978-3-447-39269-3

Contents

Abbreviations	VII
PHILIP G. KREYENBROEK & KHANNA OMARKHALI	
Introduction	XI

PART 1

THE IS ATTACK AND ITS IMPACT ON YEZIDI COMMUNITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

MATTHEW TRAVIS BARBER (Chicago)	
A Survey of the Political History of the First Year of the Yezidi Genocide	3
SEBASTIAN MAISEL (Leipzig)	
Testing the Limits of Freedom: Syria's Yezidis in the New Millennium	39
LEYLA FERMAN (Hannover)	
Legal Justice and Yezidi Survivors	63
KHANNA OMARKHALI (Berlin)	
Transformations in the Yezidi Tradition and the Position of Women After the ISIS Attacks: an Interview with Ilhan Kizilhan	95
ESZTER SPÄT (Budapest)	
Displacement, Loss and Transformation: Yezidi Ritual Life in Iraq	107
COSTANZA COPPINI (Berlin)	
Yezidi Cultural Heritage in the Sinjar Region: an Assessment	135

PART 2

DIASPORAS AND THEIR IMPACT ON YEZIDISM

CHRISTINE ROBINS (née ALLISON) (Exeter)	
Fragile Yezidism, Hidden Strength	151
KHANNA OMARKHALI (Berlin)	
The Complexity of the Notion of Honour in Traditional Patriarchal Societies: the Case of Yezidism	181
MARIA SIX-HOHENBALKEN (Vienna)	
<i>We Never Buried Several Generations in One Country...</i> Today's Challenges for the Armenian Yezidi Community	203

THORSTEN WETTICH (Bremen)	
Transformation Processes in the Yezidi Community in Germany.	223
SARA COLLOT (Bologna)	
The Last <i>Ferman</i>	251
ALLISON TAYLOR STUEWE (Arizona)	
Iraqi Yezidi Survivors and the Making of the ‘Good’ Refugee Discourse in United States Media.	285
Selected Bibliography of Works on Yezidis in English From 2000 to 2020 .	311
About the Authors	319

Abbreviations

Journals

AJSLL	American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures
BSAGU	Bjulleten' Srednego Aziatskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
FO	Folia Orientalia
JA	Journal Asiatique
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JKS	The Journal of Kurdish Studies
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
MO	Manuscripta Orientalia
OT	Oral Tradition
RHR	Revue de l'histoire des religions
ROC	Revue de l'Orient Chrétien
SPb JOS	St. Petersburg Journal of Oriental Studies
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft
ZKOIRGO	Zapiski Kavkazskogo Otdelenija Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geo- grafičeskogo Obščestva

Other Abbreviations

A	Armenia
Af	Afghanistan
Al	Alevi
a.o.	among others
Ar.	Arabic
Arm.	Armenian
AS	Arabic script
BCE	Before Common Era
ca.	circa
CE	Common Era
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
ch.	chapter
chs.	chapters
CS	Cyrillic script

d.	died
ed.	editor
eds.	editors
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
esp.	especially
et al.	and others
etc.	et cetera, and so forth
f	female
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
IS	Islamic State
ISIS	The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
G	Germany
HBV	Honour-based violence
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	The Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Kur.	Kurmanji
Kurd.	Kurdish
lit.	literally
M	Muslim
m	male
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
No.	number
P	Pashto
p.	page
p.c.	personal communication
pp.	pages
q.v.	<i>quo vide</i>
rpt.	reprinted
RS	Roman script
R	Russia
Rus.	Russian
S	Syria
sic	thus; in full: <i>sic erat scriptum</i> , thus was it written
s.l.	<i>sine loco</i> , without place [of publication]
Sor.	Sorani
T	Turkey
Tur.	Turkish
var.	variant
viz	namely
vol.	volume
vols.	volumes
UN	United Nations
US	United States
unpub.	unpublished
Y	Yezidi

Parties & Unions

BDP	Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi (Tur.), Peace and Democracy Party
DBP	Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi (Tur.), Democratic Region's Party
DTK	Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Tur.), Democratic Society Party
EES	Encumena Êzdiyên Sûrî (Kurd.), Syrian Yezidi Council or
ENKS	Encûmena Niştimanî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê (Kurd.), Kurdish National Council
HDP	Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Tur.), Peoples' Democratic Party
HES	Hevbendiya Êzîdiyên Sûriye (Kurd.), Syrian Yezidi Assembly
HPG	Hêzên Parastina Gel (Kurd.), People defence units, PKK's armed organisation
HPŞ	Hêza Parastina Şingal (Kurd.), Shingal Protection Force
HÜDA PAR	Hür Dava Partisi (Tur.), Free Cause Party
KCK	Koma Civakên Kurdistan (Kurd.), Kurdistan's Communities' Union
KDP	The Kurdistan Democratic Party
PADÊ	Partiya Azadî û Demokrasiya Êzîdiya (Kurd.), Yezidi Freedom and Democracy Party
PDK	Partiya Demokrata Kurdistanê (Kurd.), Kurdistan Democratic Party
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurd.), Kurdistan Workers Party
PUK	The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Kurd.), Democratic Union Party
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
TAJÊ	Tevgera Azadiyê ya Jinên Êzîdî (Kurd.), Free Yezidi Women Movement
TEV	Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk (Kurd.), Movement for a Democratic Society
TJA	Tevgera Jinên Azad (Kurd.), Free Women's Movement
YBŞ	Yekîneyên Berxwedana Şengalê (Kurd.), Shengal's Resistance Units
YES	Yekîtiya Êzdiyên Sûryê (Kurd.), Yezidi Association of Syria
YJA STAR	Yekîneyên Jinên Azad ên Star (Kurd.), Star Free Women's Units
YJÊ	Yekîneyên Jinên Êzîdxan (Kurd.), Êzîdxan Women's Unit
YJŞ	Yekîneyên Jinê Şengalê (Kurd.), Shengal's Women Units
YPG	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (Kurd.), People's Defence Units
YPJ	Yekîneyên Parastina Jin (Kurd.), Women's Defence Units

Introduction

The brutal genocide by the so-called ‘Islamic State’ (IS or ISIS) of the Yezidi community of Sinjar in 2014 gave rise to a prominent discourse in the media on the victimisation of Yezidis, particularly the Yezidi women who were abducted and enslaved. This in turn led to a notable increase in the public interest in the culture and religion of the Yezidis.

Relatively soon after this terrible event, the present editors acted as Guest Editors of the journal *Kurdish Studies*, bringing out a special issue of that journal, *Yezidism and Yezidi Studies in the Early 21st Century* (*Kurdish Studies* 4.2, 2016). When this issue had appeared, we were encouraged by colleagues (notably by the Redaction of *Kurdish Studies*) to make the contents available to a broader public in book form. We agreed that reliable and up-to-date information about recent developments in Yezidi communities should be made available to a broader academic and non-academic public. However, so much important work had been done in the years after the contributions to the *Kurdish Studies* volume were received, that it seemed more appropriate to bring out a sequel, as it were, to that earlier publication — keeping updated versions of the Introduction and one Chapter of the *KS* publication (with kind permission of the Editors), but mostly inviting colleagues whose work had brought to light new information and insights.

Given the profound and rapid changes that took place in Yezidi communities in the wake of the IS brutalities, and the fact that other historic changes were taking place in, or connected with Yezidi Diaspora communities, we divided the articles into two groups. The first part contains articles about the IS attack and its impact on Yezidi communities in the Middle East (BARBER, MAISEL, FERMAN, OMARKHALI, SPÄT and COPPINI). The second part is entitled ‘Diasporas and their impact on Yezidism’ (ROBINS (née ALLISON), OMARKHALI, SIX-HOHENBALKEN, WETTICH, COLLOT, STUEWE).

In the first part, the chapter by MATTHEW TRAVIS BARBER offers an overview of the history of the genocidal attack by IS during the first year, also offering important insights into both geopolitical and local factors that influenced its outcome. SEBASTIAN MAISEL, one of the few specialists on Syrian Yezidi communities, describes the situation of the Yezidis in Syria. LEYLA FERMAN, a legal expert, discusses the efforts of IS victims to get some legal redress, and the problems they encounter. An interview by KHANNA OMARKHALI with intercultural psychologist and Iranist, JAN ILHAN KIZILHAN, concerning the suffering and treatment of Yezidi women who were enslaved by IS and managed to regain their freedom, first appeared in the *Kurdish Studies* issue, and is here repub-

lished with significant additions that describe further developments in this field. Another crucially important aspect of post-2014 Yezidism is the way the ritual life of the community was affected by the genocide. ESZTER SPÄT, who has done a great deal of fieldwork among Yezidis in Northern Iraq, presents her important findings here. Finally, COSTANZA COPPINI, an archaeologist whose research focuses on the Near and Middle East, gives an overview of the destruction of Yezidi shrines by IS, and describes a project aiming to rebuild them.

The second part of the book begins with a thought-provoking article by CHRISTINE ROBBINS (née ALLISON). Seeking an answer about the oft-heard notion that ‘Yezidism is dying’, ROBBINS shows the fragility, but also the inherent strengths of Yezidism. KHANNA OMARKHALI then discusses the way traditional notions of ‘honour’ are perceived by young Yezidis with some references to Pashtuns in the German diaspora, implicitly contradicting the wide-spread misconception that such issues are particularly related to Yezidism and tend to lead to ‘honour killing’. Throwing new light on the developments in the Yezidi community of Armenia, a large part of which has been forced to migrate to other parts of the former Soviet Union, MARIA SIX-HOHENBALKEN discusses the challenges currently facing these Yezidi communities. THORSTEN WETTICH’s painstaking and illuminating study describes the recent history of the Yezidi diaspora in the German ‘Land’ of Lower Saxony. The article fills a lacuna that has been felt by many, particularly in Germany. This contribution is followed by SARA COLLOT’s fascinating study of the attraction of certain ideologies for Yezidis who were forced to seek asylum in Europe and ended up in camps on the Greek island of Lesbos. Finally, ALLISON TAYLOR STUEWE offers a fascinating insight into the way Yezidi survivors in the United States seek new ways of defining their religious and social identity, symbolised by their idea of ‘the good Yezidi’.

At the end of the book a selected Bibliography is presented which contains the works referred to in the text, and also a survey of relevant English-language literature on Yezidis that appeared from 2000 to 2020, which illustrates the main trends in Yezidi Studies.

On Yezidism and its Study in the West

Apart from the fact that Yezidis are born into their communities and are known to be Yezidis by both in- and outsiders, what binds the community together is primarily what the ancient *Qewls* (religious hymns) call their ‘tradition’ (*sun-net*) – a concept which includes both what Westerners would call their “culture” and what we might call their ‘religion’. Most traditional Yezidis hardly distinguish between these two, though the younger generation increasingly does. For the benefit of those readers who have not been concerned with the ‘religious’