

IZIDIANS AND THE KURDISH HER- ITAGE

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Language, heritage, land and feeling are considered some common components of nationality of peoples. The national identity of the Kurdish people was exposed to deformation in different and various means by chauvinists and executive policies of Kurds' neighbors (Arabs, Persians and Turks). Some of them regarded the Kurdish language as no more than a local dialect taken from another language. Others denied and still deny even the existence of a region called 'Kurdistan'. They controlled and exploited the Kurd-

ish heritage and used various ways to split and weaken the Kurds so as to sever some important parts of their rich and strategic homeland.

Alas, the Muslim Kurds themselves contributed many times in such dangerous plans which deepened their forefathers' wounds, who rejected succumb strongly to anyone and insisted on keeping their original beliefs and language. The Muslim Kurds performed those plans against Izidy Kurds blindly thereby increasing the sorrow of the whole Kurdish people. Izidies were the victims of those dangerous plans in the recent centuries, particularly by their Muslim Kurdish brothers not for doing anything wrong against anyone, but only because they kept their ancient belief and heritage which are originally part of the ancient Kurdish heritage in general.

Accordingly, we ask the following questions:

Who are Izidies? What's their dogma and what do we know about their tragic history? What is their state today and how do they look at their future? What challenges do they face today? What is required from Kurdish nationalists (politicians and officials), corporations, organizations and educated people to do for Izidies whose religion was exposed many times to extermination so as to keep their humanitarian heritage? Does Izidisim deserve all this care? And finally does the collection of Izidy heritage which is

threatened to be lost and knowledge of its dogma contribute in making and showing the origin of the Kurdish identity and its ancient history? We'll try to answer these questions briefly and give a chance to those who are specialized in this field to do their nationalistic and humanitarian duty.

We did our best in the last quarter of the 20th century individually first and later as a group via cultural associations both in and outside Kurdistan to collect and study Izidy religious heritage despite the heavy violent aggression of the then Ba'th regime in Baghdad to deform Izidy dogma and exterminate its nationalistic identity.

Izidies are the prototype of the Kurdish nation and people concerning language, land, clothing, form, feeling, heritage, etc. This originality is confirmed more than once by Mr. Mas'oud Barzany in more than one occasion: "If Izidies are not Kurds, there is no nation in the name of Kurdish people."

Geographical Distribution of Izidies and their Population

Although we don't have a precise formal census of Izidy population, it is clear that most Izidies live in Iraqi-Kurdistan region in the districts of Sheikhan, Sinjar, Hamdania (Ba'sheka and Bahzany), Telkeif, Sumeil and Zakhow.

In Iraq as a whole there is more than half million Izidies; they are about 31000 in Syria but a great number of them

went to Europe recently for reasons known to everyone; forty five thousand in Turkey Republic majority of them were forced to leave for Europe, particularly Germany, for oppressive reasons; in the former Soviet Union, particularly in Armenia and Georgia, Izidies are about one hundred thousand; there are six villages in Iran close to Karminshah in Karmeen district; and there are about ten families in Lebanon.

IZIDY DOGMA IN BRIEF

Although the history of Izidy dogma is ambiguous and confused like a broken series that lost majority of its parts, we can say that Izidies are the descendants of the oldest groups of human beings who lived in Mesopotamia and today Kurdistan. Izidy religion is the oldest Kurdish religion in the area of cradle of civilizations in the east. Izidy dogma preceded Avesta and was even older than the Indo Vida. If it was possible to keep and preserve pre-Zoroastrianism dogmas, Izidy dogma could be considered a sample of the beliefs of Indo Arian peoples. (1) Anyone who studies Izidy dogma and the rites and traditions that Izidies perform in their daily life, he/ she will recognize that it (Izidy dogma) went through many phases whose roots still exist in:

1. The stage of worshiping and sanctifying natural phenomena since Izidies believe that there is a certain god

(owner, Khodan) for each natural phenomenon in the universe such as the 'sun', the 'moon', the 'air', the 'rain', the 'birth', the 'death', 'agriculture', 'animals', etc.

2. The conversion to the concept of the existence of one God (Azda, Khoda that is the one Who existed Himself) without denying the role of the owner (Khodan, god). And thus, Izidies became aware of the creator of day and night and all natural phenomena. It is clear from some collected religious texts that Izidies knew Ibrahim Al-Khaleel's era as in the following religious verse paragraph from the hymn of Zaboony Maksoor:

Ibrahim Khaleel was from a true start,
He uttered three letters daily
Till he knew his Lord truly.

3. Concerning the source of 'good and evil' and the concept of Tawoos Malak (Peacock Angel), Izidies differ from Jewish, Christians and Muslims. Izidies believe that both 'good' and 'evil' are from one source, viz, God. They see in every living creature two contradictory forces good (reason) and evil (the soul or psyche which is full of bad intentions). (2)

4. Izidies consider Tawoos Malak (Peacock Angel) Devil in other religions the master of all unifiers (those who sought oneness of God) who didn't kneel down to Adam thereby confirming God's oneness. God created Tawoos

Malak from His light and gave him all His qualities. Hence, T. Malak was the archangel.

5. Izidy dogma believes in Al-Hilul (transformation and transfiguration). Izidies believe that the spirit of man does not die, but moves from body to body till it reaches the stage of transcendentalism and transforms itself in God's self.

6. One of the important qualities that distinguishes Izidy religion from other religions is that it is not a preachy one (it does not accept conversion neither to nor from other religions). Besides, Izidy religion is divided into three major religious classes Al-Sheikh, Al-Pier and Al-Mureed (the commonest). The first two classes are in turn subdivided to the extent that even marriage is forbidden among them as it (marriage) is forbidden among all the three classes altogether.

7. The Izidian pilgrimage (Ka'ba) is the Lalish Valley which is about 65 kms north of Mosul. Izidies still perform some feasts and ceremonies whose roots go back to Sumerian and Babylonian eras such as New Year Feast which falls on the first Wednesday of April each year following the eastern calendar; the Farmer's Feast (Gorka Gai in which Izidies celebrate the return of the farmers and their animals to their houses safely) which was celebrated by Sumerians and Zoroastorians; Congregational Feasts (A'iad

Al-Jama'ia) which occurs from the 6th to 13th of October each year; and Fasting Feast (Ramadan, Izi Fasting) which occurs in the first week of November (eastern calendar) each year. It seems that it is the feast of the death of Methra and his resurrection since the sun is Izidies' pilgrimage (Kubla in Islam) in praying and Methra (the sun).

8. Izidies do not have any messenger or prophet since their religion is meditative and contemplative. They recognize the existence of God through reason only without a messenger or a holy book. Besides, izidies have special ceremonies and rites which distinguish them from other peoples in the world. Unfortunately, they cannot be recounted and analyzed in detail in this limited and brief lecture.

The salient turning point in the history of Izidy dogma happened in the coming of Al-Sheikh Ady bin Musafir Al-Shamy to Lalish Valley, the center of Izidies' gathering. This mystic, pious, faithful religious Sheikh and after him his grandsons, especially Al-Sheikh Hassan, renewed Izidy dogma and dressed it with Al-Kharke (a special religious black) dress and introduced mysticism both of which were common in the area then.

This pious Sheikh brought Lalish Valley (Gali) back to Izidies and then emerged a dangerous turn in the history of their dogma which might be due either to piety or avoiding mischief to a great extent and this needs a detailed study. It

was this historical turning point in Izidy dogma that made Arab and Muslim historians regard Izidies as an astray Islamic group and thus they committed many historical mistakes which we can not shed light on in this brief lecture. They need a detailed clarification because of confusion and ambiguity. Briefly, we can say that Al-Sheikh Ady showed no objection to the two already existing religious classes (Pier and Murid) but added a third class ٱAl-Sheikh, which were confirmed and continued after him by his (Ady's) brother's grandson, Al-Sheikh Hassan who emerged in the field in a religious dress followed by many Murids. He created the system not of a principality but of a state since he had Al-Sheikh Al-Shams as a minister, military leader, the choose of Mergah (religious council), and the system of getting taxes (Al-Jibia). (3)

In Al-Sheikh Ady's era Izidism flourished and the neighboring states were afraid of his authority and power and this was the beginning of the calamities and oppressions of Izidies.

Izidy History in Brief

If the history of Muslim Kurds is deformed and of incomplete series, the tragic history of Izidy Kurds, which is full of calamities, is more deformed and mistaken. Sharafnama is considered one of the important sources on Kurdish history. One of the chapters of this book is about

Izidian Dasin Principality. Alas, this chapter was neglected or probably omitted by unfaithful writers whereby Izidies lost a very important source on their history.

Izidy name is mentioned in the resources only when they were exposed to genocide despite the fact that they reacted, revolutionized and upraised against their enemies whenever there was chance and possibility. We'll mention some of them to show the depth of Izidy's tragic history.

1. The campaign of the Abbasid Caliphate, Al-Mu'tasim, in 225 to 226 H. against the prince Ja'far bin prince Hassan, who reacted against the Abbasid attacks twice but his army was defeated in the third at the north of Mosul. Being defeated, prince Ja'far poisoned himself so as not to be taken as a prisoner of war by his enemies. Upon Ja'far's defeat, the Turkmanian leader, Itakh, moved ten thousand Izidy families from north of Mosul and forced them to live in Tikreet.(4)

2. The two campaigns of Mosul mayor, Badra-Aldeen Lu'lua, against Lalish Valley after assassination of Al-Sheikh Hassan in 644 H. in Mosul. The mayor exhumed Sheikh Ady's tomb and killed one hundred Izidy princes.(5)

3. The campaign of Ahmed Milkshah, the Ottoman, against Izidies of Sinjar in which he killed more than sixteen thousand men, took their wives and daughters as prisoners of war, and destroyed their villages.

4. The campaign of Mohammad Al-Rawndouzy in 1831 to 1833 in which he killed more than one thousand Izidies, arrested their prince, Ali Beg bin Hassan Beg and ten thousands of Izidy women and girls, and drove them to his principality capital. None of them escaped death except those who resorted to the caves and mountains.

5- The campaign of the Ottoman General, Omar Wahby Pasha in 1892 who wanted Izidies to embrace Islam by force and stole their Tawooses (Peacock Angels), that is, their religious symbols and indications. It is unforgettable that extreme Muslim religious men (Mullas) issued many wrong religious decrees (Fatwas) in which they made Izidies unbelievers and provoked their neighbours to behave badly towards them such as those decreed by Mufti (Mulla) of the Ottoman Authority House, Abo Al-Siuad Al-Imady, Abdulla Al-Rabtaky, and Mulla Yahya Al-Mizory. Those religious decrees(Fatwas) planted hatred and malice in the hearts of Mslim Kurds and Ottoman supporters against Izidies.

Every people has its own heritage, philosophy, viewpoint about creation of the world, knowledge of the creator, the way of His organization of the universe, the source of good and evil, death, and search for immortality and each expressed them in its own way and language. In this respect, we ask: "What did our Kurdish forefathers leave us in

the field of heritage and ideological innovation since some people say that Kurdish heritage is poor and does not exceed several centuries?" But we can say that Izidy Kurds and also the Kakais (a Kurdish sect) possess an ancient rich heritage in their mother tongue. If it is collected and studied carefully, it will hold its worthy place among mythologies of peoples in the world.

'Zaboony Maksoor', 'Afrendina Duniae', 'Sheikh u (and) Bakir', and 'Sheikho Aqub' hymns are considered some of Izidies' most sacred religious texts. Kakais Kurds also have two similar sacred religious texts. These texts are but outstanding literary samples in Kurdish mother tongue about the Creator, the way the universe and angels were created, and prophecy of appearance of prophets.

Read some paragraphs of the religious texts we collected for the first time and published them in our two published books, Izidiaty and Gundiaty. They were translated into English by Pro. Philip Crainbork in his book, Al-Izidia (thanks to him).

Izidies have their own point of view about Flood and immortality. The search for immortality in Mir Mih epic, Falak and Al-Makadony Alexander are great and glittering texts representing one aspect of ancient Kurdish mythology. There is no enough room in this research to go into details of these topics. But we may refer to them as we will refer to

tens of circulated stories and legends which are full of proverbs and lessons.

Both Izidies and Kurdish ethnography confirm that despite successive calamities of Izidies and genocide campaigns performed against them, they preserved a great deal of ethnography. If we look at the ceremonies Izidies perform, we can detect that they do them accompanied by music and singing to belittle tiredness and work hardship.

Concerning literature, particularly poetry, Izidies' religious texts-as we know- were formulated in an outstanding poetic style and form just like Zoroastrian hymns. The content of the majority of these texts is divine knowledge, piety and mysticism.

Through our collection of some of those religious texts, we discovered a dead (forgotten) stage of Kurdish literature. We recognized five Kurdish poets with samples of their works eight centuries ago. They lived in Lalish area in the era of Al-Sheikh Ady and his caliphates and even after them. The tombs and temples of some of them are still there (in Lalish) and grandsons of some of them are still alive and known. We would like to confirm that neither those poets' names nor their works have been mentioned in all writing on Kurdish literature except Al-Sheikh Fakhir whose name came in Ibn Timia's religious decree (Fatwa) saying: Izidies do not believe in holy books but follow a system of Aql-

Sheikh Fakhir's hallucinations.

Those five poets were Khidir Zinda, Pier Rashe Hairan, Hasady Al-Tawry, Pise Jam, and Sheikh Fakhry Adia. They emerged five centuries before Malay Jizery, Tairan, Harery, and Ahmedy Khany. Researching and studying this aspect is the duty of those who are specialized in Kurdish literature.

As far as music is concerned, each Izidy religious text is accompanied by a special music tune. Shibab (lute) and Dav (a small open drum) are often considered Izidies' sacred musical instruments. Besides, Kurdish music is rich in the field of singing and composing songs both short and long.

Concerning Kurdish language and vocabulary, Izidies' religious texts (which were rarely influenced by neighboring language, particularly Arabic – the language of the Holy Quran) have been written in pure Kurdish to a great deal thereby preserving hundreds of pure Kurdish vocabularies, unknown to Muslim Kurds. Thus, these religious texts are regarded as a great linguistic source for enriching Kurdish vocabulary. Besides, they contributed and are still contributing of finding closeness among Kurdish dialects since they contain tens of vocabularies which were imagined available and circulated in southern Kurmanjy (Souran) dialect only.

Marriage is a very sensitive issue in Izidy religion. Izidies are not allowed to get married neither to nor from people belonging to other religions and nationalities. Furthermore, Izidy religion is divided into many classes and subclasses in which marriage is forbidden. Each is allowed to get married from his/her own class only. That is why Izidies preserved, to a great extent, the pure Ary blood which is clear in their indications and facial expressions.

In the field of contemporary Kurdish culture, the efforts of Izidy Kurdish pioneering novelists Arab Shamo, Hajy Jundy, Qanaty Kurdo, Jasimy Jaleel and other Izidy writers in Armenia are good evidences of their contribution and they are still contributing in it.

Late in the last century when there was a struggle between Arabic tribes and Ibraheem Pasha Al-Milly, the former offered temptations and official positions to Hussein Qanjo Al-Izidy to stay on non-aligned line but his strong nationalist feeling made him refuse the offer strongly saying: "It is true that I'm Izidy, but pure Kurdish blood runs in my arteries."

Izidies, like Muslim Kurdish, took part in all Kurdish revolutions from 1961 up till now. Therefore, when 1961 revolution failed in 1975, the Iraqi Ba'th regime in Baghdad directed its hatred and malice against Izidies. Thus, the regime forced Izidies to leave their original villages, took

their agricultural lands and gave them to the Arab clans who were the supporters of the regime. It forced Izidies to live in new built collective villages in Sheikhan and Sumeil districts. In Sinjar district the regime devastated more than 156 Izidy villages, destroyed their orchards and forced the inhabitants to live in eleven collective villages of poor conditions.

In the two successive census carried out in 1977 and 1987, Baghdad regime Arabized Izidies deliberately against their will and prohibited them of teaching Izidy religion in Izidy area schools.

Besides, the regime said, in more than one occasion, that Izidies are no more than an astray Islamic group and had some of its mercenary writers denounce Izidy dogma.

When we answered and defended ourselves via publications and books, the Ba'th regime imposed censorship on them. Furthermore, the regime refused our legal demand for opening a cultural center for collecting and studying Izidy heritage and literature in detail. Thus, our nationalist and religious heritage was about to be lost, especially the religious texts kept orally in the hearts of a limited number of Izidy religious men (Qawals). Despite our insistence for opening an Izidy cultural center, the Ba'th regime always closed the door on our face strongly, chased some of our educated elite, assassinated some while others were obliged to go

abroad or hide themselves in some unknown places.

The successful Kurdish uprising in 1991 and liberation of part of Iraqi-Kurdistan region involved only 10% of Izidy population and the rest remained under the control of Baghdad regime.

We came to the liberated part of Kurdistan region and applied for after consulting our colleagues abroad demanding the support of Kurdish political parties as well as Kurdistan Region Government opening an Izidy cultural center in Duhok under the name of Cultural Lalish Center. After its establishment, the center soon started collecting and documenting Izidy heritage, holding cultural seminars to introduce Izidies and Kurdish ancient heritage, and issuing Lalish Magazine. The cultural activity of the center has had its echo and has been capable of documenting an important part of Izidy heritage, particularly religious texts so as to be available in the hands of the researchers. Similar centers have been opened by our colleagues in Germany like Izidy House for Culture and Religion in Oldenburg city and Izidy Center Outside Homeland. The above two mentioned centers are supervised administratively by a number of educated Izidies holding cultural seminars and issuing magazines. The first center publishes Izidy Voice Magazine and the second publishes Rozh (the sun) Magazine. The former uses internet for the first time to introduce Izidies and document

cultural relations with famous writers and cultural centers in the world. These Izidy cultural centers do their best for reminding Izidiies living abroad to stick to and never forget their homeland (Kurdistan), heritage and dogma of their forefathers so as not to be merged into the European civilization.

Concerning Lalish Center in Duhok city, most of its administrative members left Kurdistan-Region for Europe because of the unsettled political and economic conditions upon the bloody war happened between the two major political parties PDK and PUK in Kurdistan region.

The other members who stayed perform the activities of the Center which we hope to be changed into center of studies specialized in ancient Kurdish heritage and beliefs, and to be enjoined to one of Kurdistan universities.

However, the unsettled conditions in the area, the threat and pressure the occupying states of Kurdistan employ and ambiguous positive stance towards Kurdish problem of which Izidies are part confused us and weakened our efforts of collecting and studying Izidy heritage.

There are more than one million Izidies in Iraq. Only 10% live in Kurdistan while the rest are still under the control of Ba'th regime which confiscated their lands and possessions, forced them to live in compulsory poor collective villages, and prohibited them to study in their mother

tongue and religion.

Briefly, Izidies like the other Iraqi citizens if not more were deprived of the simplest humanitarian rights. Izidies were wronged and oppressed in their religion, nationality, economy and policy. However, the state of Izidies in other states is more miserable to the extent that in Turkey, they were forced to leave their homeland, and only 20% of them remained there.

The religious heritage and oral literature of both Kurds and Izidies that we inherited from our forefathers for centuries were exposed to extermination many times. We say that this inherited heritage is threatened to be lost. Our humble attempts in collecting and studying this heritage whether individually or as a group through the opened centers that we referred to are not enough. Such efforts need an exceptional support from cultural centers, Kurdish nationalist political parties, and cultural centers that take care of humanity heritage in America and Europe so as to be able to know scientifically whatness of this (Izidy) ancient religion in Kurdistan and Mesopotamia. Besides, we will be able to answer the unjust false accusations attached to this religion and correct the historical mistakes committed by western and eastern writers. They were unfortunate since they were not introduced to Izidies' holy religious texts, ceremonies and rites that they performed secretly because of the dif-

difficult conditions of living in keeping this humanitarian heritage generally and as prototype (original part) of Kurdish heritage and its dogma in particular.

We accepted this generous invitation and delivered this simple lecture to provoke the enthusiasts to be cooperative with our call.

Finally, my thanks and appreciation go to the following: Al-Badlees center for Kurdish studies for holding this conference on Kurdish identity; members of Al-Izidians House in Auldonburg/ Germany, especially the chief of the administrative body who prepared travel requirements; Lalish Center; and all those who supported us and attended the seminar.

