NOTES ON THE YEZIDI RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM

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Despite its unique and the extremely original character, Yezidism reveals a number of striking parallels with other syncretic religions, in particular, with the heterodox Shi’ a sects. A part of these parallels are certainly the common elements, derived from the Islamic Mysticism and, probably, Gnostic teachings (for some Extreme Shi’a doctrines, like the Isma’ili, the latter is quite certain: they have been formed under a direct influence of the Christian Gnosticism). As to the proper Extreme Shi’a elements in the Yezidi religion, they can be the result of a later influence.

The Extreme Shi’a sects, generally known as Ghulāt (qulāt-i ši’ a), are distinguished, at least formally, by their specific attitude towards ‘Ali (i.e., ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Fourth Caliph, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet), glorifying him as an object of worship, as of supreme worth. However, in some of them, ‘Ali is rather a fairly marginal figure, with the obvious traits of an epical hero. Among these sects, the largest number of parallels with Yezidism is found with the Ahl-i Haqq (People of the Truth) and in the religion of the Zazas.

One of the main analogies is, first and foremost, the religious institution of “Brother and Sister of the Next World”,1 as well as a number of common characters (‘Ali, Fatima, etc.) deified by the heterodox Shi’ites and marked in Yezidism.

With regard to the Ahl-i Haqq in Iran, one of the sect’s autonymics is Yāresān (the Iraqi Ahl-i Haqq are named Kākāi)2, while the Yezidi self-denomination is Ėzdixāna, i.e., “the abode of the Yezidis”. The term Yāresān is perhaps going back to yārestān, “the abode of those in

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2 Kākā (kā, gāgū, gā, etc.) is a common term (along with bārādār, bīrā, etc.) for “brother” in the vernacular Persian, as well as in Kurdish, Guranī, and Luri. As to the name of the sect, it may be conditioned by the Christian influence (see W. Ivanow, The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan, Leiden, 1953: 56).
love (with God)”, with the suffix "-stân" indicating “place”, and yâr “beloved”. The formation of these two terms, Ėzdîxânâ and Yâresîtân, in fact, is based upon one and the same principal concept—the idea of community as the abode (home) of co-religionists (the faithful).

Like the Yezidis, the Ahl-i Haqq must have spiritual masters—with the latter these are pîrs and dalîls from among the hereditary caste of religious leaders or seyyeds, thus shaping the xândân, or families, comprising the spiritual tutors and their disciples from among the caste of laymen or murûds.

The similar hierarchy, social structure of society and the institution of spiritual tutorship is also observable among the other heterodox Shi’ites, the Alevî Zazas.  

Parallels are also traced in the cosmogony of the Ahl-i Haqq and of the Yezidis: The One God, the primeval Creator initially created a pearl, which contained all elements of the Universe.

In the religious doctrine of the Ahl-i Haqq there are seven images—hafttan, being effectively analogous to the seven avatars of Malak-Tawus in the Yezidi religion.

In both cases, they are the seven great angels; particularly visible is the position of the four angels governing the four elements: fire, water, earth, and wind.

The concept of the seven angels penetrated to Yezidism from the Biblical-Muslim tradition; in a very similar form and functional meaning it occurs in the religious beliefs of the Extreme Shi’a sects in general.

In Gnostic tradition, too, there is an idea of the Seven Creator Angels, though associated with the Seven Days of Creation, the latter being a matter of interpretation only.

Of special interest is the problem of reincarnation.

In the contemporary Yezidism the concept of tanûsux (reincarnation, re-embodiment) is somewhat vague—it is existent, though not

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