

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’, ROBINS 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’