



The Yezidis: A short community history

Throughout the era of Ottoman rule in Iraq (1517-1918), several military and political campaigns were carried out against the Yezidis in order to either kill them or make them convert to Islam. These campaigns are commonly known in the Yezidi lore as *Firman* (pl. *Firmanat*). The persecution of the Yezidis continued into the eras of the British Mandate (1918-1932) and the Iraqi monarchy (1932-1958), albeit in a less institutionalized fashion. After 1958, once the Yezidi leadership had tightened its contacts with the Kurdish national movement, led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani and later his son Masoud, the

Yezidis were no longer persecuted by the Kurds. The harm they suffered came mostly from the Baath regime, which carried out Arabization campaigns against them, either by political sticks and carrots or by military action. After the fall of the Baath regime, Jihadist organizations started operating in Iraq and, as Islamist groups were making headway into the Kurdish areas, the persecution of the Yezidis resumed with vigor, culminating with the most recent events in Sinjar. Detailed in this timeline is a brief (and merely partial) history of persecutions against Yezidis during the last two centuries

1805

1805 – A series of military campaigns against the Yezidis in Sheikhan and Sinjar, carried out by the Ottoman governor of Mosul, Muhammad Pasha al-Jalili, went on until the early 1820s.



1832

March 1832 – a large-scale military campaign carried out by the Kurdish Emir Muhammad Pasha al-Rawanduzi (“the One-Eyed Emir”) against the Yezidis of Sheikhan. The Yezidis fled to Mosul, but were caught by the Emir’s forces and were all massacred at the gates of the city – some 10,000-15,000 men, according to various estimates.



1844

1844 – A large military campaign by the Ottoman General Hafiz Pasha against the Yezidis of Sinjar, which resulted in the killing of approximately three-quarters of the Yezidi Population in the region.

1872

1872 – Publication of a document by the Yezidi Spiritual Council, which detailed the beliefs and observances of the Yezidi religion, the first officially written document of its kind.



1891

1891 – Period of the Ottoman government’s Advisory Council, which arrested the leaders of the Yezidi community and had them conscripted to the Ottoman army. The council turned the Yezidi places of worship into Islamic religious institutions and forced many Yezidis to convert to Islam.

1891-1893 – The Ottoman Reformist Force under General Ömer Vehbi Pasha, the Sultan’s special envoy, forced the conversion of thousands of Yezidis to Islam, desecrated their holy places, most notably the Tomb of Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir, turning them into madrasas and mosques, and killed hundreds of Yezidis, particularly the community leaders who had refused to convert.

1918

1918 – A massive bombing of Sinjar by the Ottoman air force, following an invitation sent by the Yezidi tribal leader Hamo Shiro to refugees of the Armenian genocide to take shelter in Sinjar.

1935

October 1935 – A heavy attack launched by large Iraqi army forces, following an armed revolt led by the Yezidi chieftains in Mihrikan and Mala-Khalati. The assault ended with the conquest of the Sinjar region, the disarming of the local Yezidi militias, the imprisonment of hundreds of Yezidi fighters and the hanging of all the revolt’s leaders.



1969

1969 – The Yezidi Emir Bayazid Ismail was appointed head of the Umayyad Bureau in Baghdad. The purpose of the bureau was to advance an Umayyad-Arab identity among the Yezidis, based on the idea that the community is named after the Umayyad caliph Yazid Bin Muawiya. The bureau was a means used by the Baath regime in order to sow discord among the leaderships of the Yezidi community and the Kurdish national movement.

1973

August 1973 – The Baath regime’s Arabization policy commenced in the Kurdish disputed areas, including the mostly Yezidi region of Sinjar. During this month, the Iraqi army bombed some 40 towns and villages in the vicinity of Sinjar, confiscated Yezidi lands, and settled Arab tribes in the area.

1975

May 1975 – The Arabization campaign reaches Sinjar and included the evacuation of all Yezidi villages and transferring their residents to collective villages (Ar. “Mujama at Sakaniyya”), effectively shut-out Yezidi ghettos under martial rule. 163 Yezidi villages had their lands confiscated, their wells sealed, and their property taken.

1978

March 1978 – Another streak of Yezidi lands confiscations in Sheikhan and were handed over to the Arab tribes of Al-Hadida and Al-Lahib. As before, the displaced Yezidi population was concentrated in Sinjar, in villages around Sheikhan, next to the villages from which they were driven out.

1987

1987-1988 – Al-Anfal Campaign, launched by the Baath regime against Kurdish insurgents, also killed about 250 Yezidis who fought along with the Peshmerga forces. Hundreds were imprisoned and tortured to death in Iraqi prisons. The Iraqi army destroyed Yezidi villages where relatives of the fighters had resided and forced their resettlement in collective villages built adjacent to the old ones, especially in the Sheikhan area.

2007

February 2007 – A pogrom perpetrated by Muslim Kurds in Yezidi villages in Sheikhan, following the stoning of a Yezidi girl who wished to convert to Islam in order to marry a Muslim man. Several days after the pogrom, 24 Yezidi workers were killed by Al-Qaeda militants on their way to work in Mosul.

2008

July 2008 – A Friday sermon by Islamic preacher, Mullah Farazanda Al-Shirwani of Akra in Kurdistan, called for the elimination of all Yezidis. It was the first public call by a Kurdish-Muslim cleric to kill Yezidis.

2014

August 2007 – A sequence of orchestrated attacks were carried out by Al-Qaeda on the Yezidi villages of Gir Uzeir and Siba Sheikh Khidhir in Sinjar. It was the largest terror strike since the 9/11 attack, after which those main villages were completely destroyed and some 800 Yezidis were killed.

August 2014 – Islamic State (formerly ISIS) troops captured Sinjar and announced that all Yezidis who refuse to convert to Islam will be killed. The Kurdish Peshmerga forces withdrew from the area almost without a fight, causing a mass Yezidi escape to Jebel Sinjar and effectively bringing about the demise of the Yezidi community in Sinjar.