

Kakai Calamity in the Iraqi Disputed Territories

Kristiina Koivunen, Hussain Talabani



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& Hussain Talabani*

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Alert of Genocide!

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*I, Serhang of Dawdan.... I, who is called
Serhang of Dawdan. I wonder the
wilderness with my fellows, I struggle for
the faith of the Kurds.*

*Serhang of Dawdan, a Kakai monk, the 10th century AD
(Seranjam transcribed by Tayib Tahiry, 2007, 54)*

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Foreword

“Sharia judge” of the terrorist organization Daesh (ISIS) described at the beginning of 2014 the Kakais as infidels and atheists. He issued a *fatwa* calling to kill and exterminate them. This happened in Hawija, the Sunni Arab district in Kirkuk. Kakai or Yarsan is an ancient Kurdish religion.

The *fatwa* led to attacks against Kakai villages, where people tried to defend themselves with help of heroic Peshmergas until the 16th of October 2017. Then the Peshmergas were removed from the Iraqi Disputed Territories, the Kakais’ native lands. Since then, the kidnapping and killing of innocent Kakai civilians by Daesh have pushed them to flee to cities.

The atrocities against the Ezidis are hot news in the media. But the ongoing silent deportation of the Kakais from their ancestral homelands is mentioned just in the Kurdish media, if even there. When we started digging into their situation, it soon became evident that there are in Iraq more destroyed than inhabited Kakai villages. The other shocking matter is the length of their annihilation process – it started much before the arrival of Al Qaeda and Daesh. Also, other Iraqi minorities have been oppressed, for example, the Ezidis and Christians, but the international community is aware of their fate.

But there is global silence about the destiny of the Kakais.

When collecting information about the Kakais, we were amazed to see how honored and confident they are despite all atrocities. They have remained faithful to the pillars of their religion which are purity, honesty, humility, and forgiveness. We met people who are positive about the future. They have kept their religion Yarsan, or Ahl-e Haqq, secret since the arrival of Islam to Kurdistan one thousand years ago. But now there is internal discussion in the Kakai community whether it is time to tell outsiders about their religion as the Kakais feel safe in the Kurdistan Autonomous Region. It is a sign of the benefits of the Kurdish self-rule if this huge step will be taken.

Yarsan is a five thousand years old religion. There are also other ancient religions in Kurdistan, but Yarsan has been the dominant religion in huge areas, for example, the Medes Emporium [678 - 549 BC] was Kakai state. Research about the current Kakai culture and philosophy can give information about Kurdishness and be a source for inspiration for Kurdish identity.

This book is Hussain Talabani's idea. 2017, he decided to write about the Kakai tragedy and asked Kristiina Koivunen to cooperate. But she was at that time busy writing about Kirkuk and then came the corona pandemic.

We started in spring 2021 to plan via Messenger this book and to collect information and make interviews. We have written all chapters together and sent them via e-mail from Kurdistan to Finland and back. November 2021 we made together three weeks interviews in Kurdistan.

People around the world, and even inside Iraq, do not know much about the Kakais. We respect the Yarsan principle of secrecy, but with the permission of the interviewed persons, we tell main things about their religion. For understanding the ongoing destruction of the Yarsan faith and the Kakai society readers need to know about them also other things than their big mustaches. Our informants have told basic issues, not deep theological secrets. We have explained to them that we publish the information.

It can sound alarming when some people hide their faith – as if there is something mystical, or even dangerous in it. Instead of hazardous beliefs and acts, we found that for the Kakais religion means respect to nature; all living things are valuable: human beings, animals, and even trees and plants. In Yarsan there is equality between men and women, between sons and daughters. In our current times of global climate change, such attitudes are appreciated. The Kakai philosophy is both ancient and modern, and they have good reason to be proud of it!

June 2022

Kristiina Koivunen, Helsinki, Finland

Hussain Talabani, Silêmanî, Kurdistan

List of abbreviations

<i>Daesh</i>	<i>ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fī 'l- 'Irāq wa-sh-Shām</i> , ISIS
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDP	Internally displaced person
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (Iran)
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
Quds	special forces unit of the IRGC responsible for extraterritorial operations
<i>Wilayat-e Faqih</i>	Theory in Shi'ite Islam according which an Islamic jurist has custodianship over people

PART 1

THE KAKAIS AND THE YARSANS

Kakaism, Yarsan, is an ancient Kurdish religion. Kakais argue that the Medes Empire (678 - 549 BC) was a Kakai state.

Kakaism has been secret for one thousand years to protect itself against Islamic invasion. Now some Kakais are ready to tell about their respect to nature, equality between men and women, and their belief in reincarnation.

Iran wants to make a land corridor to the Israel border via the Iraqi Disputed territories. Kakai villages are destroyed there in Iranian proxy war. There is a danger of a genocide and loss of thousands years old Kurdish cultural traditions.

In Iran Yarsans are assimilated to Shiism by fake claims that five thousand years old Yarsan is a branch of the four thousand years younger Shiite Islam.

A group of men in suits are seated in front of a large, colorful backdrop featuring a pattern of stylized flowers and leaves in shades of blue, yellow, and orange. The men are looking towards the left side of the frame. One man in the foreground is seen from the back, wearing glasses and a dark suit. Another man in the foreground has a prominent mustache and is looking towards the right. The overall scene appears to be a formal meeting or a press conference.

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