

**THE GEORGIAN YEZIDIS.
THE SPECIFICITY OF THE DIASPORA AND ITS RELATIONS WITH THE IRAQI HOMELAND.**

The objective of the project is to prepare the first monograph in English on the Yezidi diaspora in Georgia, including i.a. descriptions of the history of the migration of the Yezidis from Iraq to the South Caucasus, the local religious festivals and practices, cultural activities, ethnic identity, the list of the Yezidi families living in Georgia and the map of the inhabited areas. The planned project is a natural continuation of my previous researches on the culture of the Yezidis.

The homeland of the Yezidis is situated in Iraqi Kurdistan. Their origins date back to at least the 12th century, when the Islamic religious brotherhood *Adawiyya* was established here. It consisted mainly of Kurds, Arabs and Assyrians. In time it took the form of a theocratic community divided into three endogamous castes, subordinated to the secular and spiritual authorities of the 'Prince' and the 'Father of the Sheikhs'. Its founder, Adi ibn Musafir, a descendant of the Arab Umayyad family, was a distant relative of the caliph of Yezid ibn Mu'awiya. The Yezidis believe that both Adi and Yezid are incarnations of God's first of the seven angels, the Peacock Angel (*Tawûsi Melek*), and all the three are worshiped by them. Here lies the reason for the persecutions of the Yezidis, which they have been subjected to for centuries. The Peacock Angel is recognized by Muslims as identical with Satan, and Yezid – as the enemy of Islam and the murderer of the Shi'a leader Hossein. Accusations and persecutions continue to this day and they are the main cause that the Yezidis, wherever they live, are forced to take care of themselves in dealing with non-Yezidis. For centuries, the Yezidis were forced either to accept Islam or to escape from their homeland. Therefore, some of the Yezidi tribes migrated to the Turkish-Armenian borderland and further to Armenia, and then to Georgia, where they began to settle from the 19th century. Unlike the Yezidis living in Armenia, those in Georgia settled mainly in its capital Tbilisi, rather than outside of cities, and rejected the pastoral way of life. They began to forget their language and tradition and became members of a multicultural city.

According to religious principles, the Yezidis were not allowed to use script, so their knowledge and poetry were passed down through the centuries only orally. The violation of this ban occurred on a large scale only at the beginning of the 20th century in the areas of the Transcaucasia subordinated to the Soviets, where the Yezidis were seeking refuge from the persecution of the Ottoman Empire. Here the Yezidis have joined the cultural and academic life and started publishing their own literature. At the expense of rejection of the current tradition, they joined the scholarly life. Three Georgian orientalists (Lamara Pashaeva, Kerim Amoev, Kerim Ankosi) originate from the first generation of the Yezidi scholars of Georgia.

Until the 20th century, the literature on Yezidism was created only by non-Yezidis, and their voice was omitted. I hope that the planned monograph will make their history more widely known, and in particular will help to fill the gap in academic literature about the Yezidi diaspora in Georgia. In spite of the fact that the relations of the Yezidis with Georgia can be dated as early as the 18th century, and that local Yezidi legends indicate even the 12th century, no single monograph has been devoted to their diaspora in Georgia. However, it deserves special attention as it has developed its own specificity and religious rituals and has become an important intellectual center for the whole Yezidism. At the moment, the Yezidis in Georgia, unlike the ones in Armenian, who are closest to them, experience a religious rebirth. In Tbilisi a Yezidi sanctuary is founded, here operate the Spiritual Council of Yezidis, an archive, and the Academy of Yezidi Theology – the first Yezidi institution in the world that aims to teach the Yezidis unwritten principles of their religion, and work on their codification. All these institutions operate in full agreement with the Yezidi authorities in Iraqi Kurdistan region.

The research I intend to carry out (mainly among the Georgian Yezidis) can be described as interdisciplinary, using methods characteristic of Cultural Anthropology (observation, interviews), History (source research) and Oriental Studies (language analysis). The monograph based on such principle, apart from gathering valuable ethnographic data, will also allow to get acquainted with the solutions developed by the Yezidis for many years, to adapt in a different cultural environment, which is rather significant given the contemporary problems faced by Kurdish and Yezidi migrants in Western Europe. The planned monograph may be a valuable source of knowledge not only for kurdologists, ethnographers, ethnologists and historians, particularly for those in the field of Caucasus and religious studies, but also for sociologists, scholars of diaspora studies and organizations dealing with issues on refugees and multiculturalism. My research can become a significant contribution to the dissemination of knowledge about the Yezidis, who have been victims of persecutions for centuries because of misinformation and falsehoods about them. The lack of this knowledge has recently resulted in the genocide committed on the Yezidis in Iraq by ISIS, described by a survivor – Nadia Murad, a laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize. The image of the Yezidis in the eyes of others depends largely on the dissemination of knowledge free from prejudices, the source of which is mainly their own voice.