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THE BLOODY SHADOW OF BEDIRKHAN BEG

About the historic relations between the Ezidis and the Kurds on the example of the Kurdish emir Bedir Khan Beg and their impact on the present

THE BLOODY SHADOW OF BEDIRKHAN BEG

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INTRODUCTION

"The enemies fight us, they murder and arrest us. This has always been the case. But why must our own Kurdish brothers support them, and sometimes they were much more cruel than our enemies", an Ezidi quoted by Prof. Dr. Kizilhan in his treatise on historical traumatic events and their influence on subsequent generations¹.

Torture. Terror. Oppression. Discrimination. Stigmatization. Massacres. Genocides. Upon taking a look at the history of the Ezidis, this is the first impression that manifests itself. The Ezidis were alternately persecuted by the Ottomans, the Arabs and the Persians, and those persecutions often culminated in massacres. A number of Kurdish-Muslim tribes and emirs participated in these persecutions^{2,3}; such as the Kurdish emir Bedir Khan Beg along with the Kurdish-Muslim tribes and allies supporting him. He massacred the Ezidis on his own, and sometimes in cooperation with the Ottomans or other Kurdish emirs. Even though we refer to history and thus to the past, one can not conceal that social discrimination and stigmatization of Ezidis continue to exist, especially in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Ezidi shops are avoided in certain areas, they are a target of attacks⁴, Ezidi products are boycotted⁵, they are discriminated in the allocation of jobs⁶, suffer employment discrimination and various Kurdish Mullahs have been stirring up hatred against them⁷.

"The Kurds: one nation?"

The Yezidis, speakers of the same dialect, but despised as 'devil-worshippers', were often considered not to be Kurds by the Muslim Kurds."

Prof. Dr. Martin Van Bruinessen⁸

The constant reference to the Ezidi history is necessary insofar as societal consequences have emerged as a result, leading to great differences both within the Ezidi and Kurdish society. There is a need for clarification. Consequently, various groups have been opposed to each other. The natural call for a strong and solidary community grew as a result of constant persecution among the Ezidis. Strict rules for members of the community, both inside and outside, were the result.

Muslim Kurds of the past excluded the Ezidis from Kurdism - for religious reasons. Especially the discrimination and the massacres of Ezidis by Muslim Kurds pushed a deep wedge between Ezidis and Kurds. Today, there is still no process of coming to terms with the past. Ezidis are often accused of separatism by Kurds when addressing this issue, complicating historical awareness and impeding the work of Ezidis aiming to achieve reconciliation. Many Ezidi activists in Kurdish parties also conceal this history because they fear for their position.

„The Muslim Kurds have excluded the Ezidis from Kurdism. This is the history. “

Prof. Dr. Dr. Wießner⁹

The Ezidis from Turkey, almost all of whom have emigrated, have been particularly reminiscent of the oppression and discrimination by Kurdish Muslims, not the crimes of the Turkish state or the military^{10, 11}.

Over the centuries, an independent Ezidi national character has clearly emerged, shaped by persecution and massacres and in particular by the persecution by Muslim Kurds¹². The manifestation of this has been so strong that some Ezidi groups and organizations¹³ claim a separate nation, strictly separated from Kurdism. Nationalist Ezidis are therefore not a product of confused ideas but the inevitable consequence of massive repression, exclusion and persecution. This is a fact which must be tolerated by both dissenting Ezidis and Muslim Kurds.

"This attitude is based on the collective memory of the centuries-long persecution by Islamic-Kurdish tribes, which Yezidi historians has been worked on for decades"
Prof. Dr. Ferhad Ibrahim¹⁴

Accusing (nationalist) Ezidis of separatism, inevitably causes a confusion of cause and effect on a basis on which no reconciliation can take place. Degradation of Ezidism to "only being a religion" also leads to historical events, which undoubtedly are related to the Ezidi identity/religious confession, becoming marginalized events. The historical events, however, are the reasons for the burdened Kurdish-Ezidi relationship and must therefore be discussed and not tabooed.

We want to elaborate on the example of the Muslim-Kurdish emir Bedirkhan Beg as Bedirkhan Beg clarifies this issue like no other. The reappraisal of such events does not serve, as it is often claimed, to drive a wedge between the Ezidis and the Kurds, but to reconsider and restore the Kurdish-Ezidi relations. Only those who know the past can learn from it.

BEDIRKHAN BEG AND FAMILY



FIG. 1: BEDIRKHAN BEG

Bedirkhan Beg lived in the 19th century and was from one of the oldest and most influential Kurdish noble families of Ezizan/Azizan^{15, 16}. The Ezizan/Azizan were, according to Şerefxanê Bedlisî, originally Ezidis¹⁷. Bedirkhan Beg was one of the emirs of the Kurdish dynasty of Botan, which is why he is also known as Mîrê Botan who ruled over a large area of Botan.

There is different information on the number of his children given the large number of wives and concubines he had. While *Gökçe* states that he had 42 children¹⁸, *Guest* reports of 56 sons and numerous daughters¹⁹. Clarity was created by Kamûran Bedirkhan, grandson of Bedirkhan Beg. His grandfather had 14 women and 99 children²⁰. One of his most famous sons is Emîn Alî Bedirkhan, the father of Celadet, Surreya and Kamûran Bedirkhan, who later played an important role within the Kurdish national movement. The mother of Emîn Alî Bedirkhan and thus

grandmother of the three brothers mentioned, was an Ezidi princess of the Mîr family of the Ezidis, who was forcibly made into one of Bedirkhan Beg's wives in order to offend the Ezidis in their honor. This was confirmed by the Ezidi family member Mrs Wansa Al-Amawy²¹.

In his harem, Bedirkhan Beg was said to have held around 40 Ezidi women whom he had captured as part of his plundering and extermination attempts against the Ezidis of the Botan region²² urging them to accept Islam and subsequently keeping them in his household²³.

It is also reported that Bedirkhan Beg had a strong religious streak²⁴, proved by reports stating that he had he used the Shariah laws e.g. against thieves and cut off their hand and nose²⁵. The well-known radical fundamentalist Resul of the Botan region was a supporter of Bedirkhan Beg²⁶.

Menant writes about Bedirkhan Beg: "Driven by ambition, by religious fanaticism, greedy for power and profit, he was once an ally, once an enemy of the Pasha of Mosul and supported them, as far as it was useful to him²⁷".

Bloodthirsty and as cruel as his uncle, Yêzdan Shêr Beg - known for his barbaric crimes against Christians (Nestorians), Jews and Ezidis - said he "will drink the blood of all Ezidis, Jews and Christians"²⁸. *Guest* reports about the Vice Consul, who was an eyewitness during an incident:

"He was eye witness to the murder, by the Bey's own hand, at different times, of between five and thirty Yezidees, whom this fanatic considered it most meritorious to slaughter. He even offered five hundred piasters [£4.10.0] to whomsoever would bring him a live Yezid, simply for the pleasure of cutting the poor wretch's throat²⁹".



FIG. 2: ŞEREFXANÊ
BEDLİSÎ



FIG. 3: HAWAR
(1932 – 1945)

The grandchildren of Bedirkhan Beg; Kamûran, Surreya and Celadet Bedirkhan, are considered as the founders of Kurdish nationalism of the early 20th century. His grandsons tried, as part of their nationalism policy, to turn Ezidis into Zoroastrians³⁰. Far too often, the Kurds had become entangled in religious disputes. In order to effectively counteract this problem, Kurdish personalities procured a mythological basis for a common identity: Zarathustra. The intention of this policy is basically justified. The way and the method, is not.

Hawar says in one passage: "The Ezidi religion is a secession of the Zoroastrian religion³¹".

The Ezidi religion was henceforth regarded as the only true Kurdish religion³², whereupon in the Kurdish magazine Hawar the Kurds were called to proclaim the Ezidi religion³³. Likewise, in the magazine "Roja Nû" (New Day)³⁴. Although the intention of the Bedirkhan brothers was positive in nature, this artificially created connection has caused great damage to Ezidism³⁵. For two decades there has been a dispute within Ezidi society whether and to what extent Zarathustra and his teachings are part of the Ezidi religion. Many scientists discard the Zoroastrian descent theory^{36,37,38,39}, while many political (Kurdish-) nationalist Ezidis continue to insist that they are descendants of Zoroastrians.

The reasons for the revival of Ezidism as the foundation of Kurdistan were traced back by Prof. Dr. Gernot Wießner to the past of the Bedirkhans and their disastrous role in the Ezidi history, claiming they wanted to put an end to their guilty conscience towards Ezidi⁴⁰. However, statements by Kamûran Bedirkhan suggest that the Bedirkhan brothers were solely concerned with Kurdish nationalism, and that Ezidism was best suited as a Kurdish religion. A certain sympathy towards the Ezidis seems nevertheless to have been present⁴¹.



FIG. 4 ROJA NÛ
(2-1988)

„BUT THE EZIDIS AREN'T ZOROASTRIANS. [EZIDISM] IS A DISTINCT RELIGION.“

PROF. DR. KIZILHAN, JAN ILHAN: REWŞA ÊZÎDIYAN Û EFÛXWESTINA DERENG, LÊ GIRING Û BI WATE, 2013

CAUSE OF ANTI-ÊZÎDISM

As non-Muslims, Ezidis faced lots of discrimination in a predominantly Muslim environment⁴² due to the everlasting stigmatization as “devil-worshippers” and “idolaters”⁴³. Within the Islamic dominion, non-Muslims were only granted certain rights insofar as they were owners of a sacred scripture (Arabic: Al-Kitab). Since Ezidis follow an oral tradition and have no holy scripture, they are classed as so-called *harbis* (people who belong to war) according to Islamic law, which means that they were declared outlaws and had to choose between accepting Islam or death. It was allowed to kill Ezidis, their property was looted, and they were kept as slaves⁴⁴. The areas of the Ezidis were officially declared as war zones (*dār al-harb*) by Islamic Fatwas, the killing and conversion of Ezidis as well the annexation of their territories was considered as a religious duty⁴⁵. Countless fatwas were issued against the Ezidis⁴⁶. To kill an Ezidi meant “to give god a sacrifice” for Muslim Kurds⁴⁷, French philologist and orientalist Silvestre de Sacy wrote in his book in 1809.

In regard to Ezidis, Bedirkhan Beg did not differ from the Ottomans who repeatedly offered religious pretexts for the war against the Ezidis and legitimized them with Islamic law⁴⁸. Reports describing Bedirkhan Beg as a just ruler who granted religious freedom to all⁴⁹ did not apply to Ezidis but to Muslims and religious groups which had a holy scripture only. This applied to Christians and Jews only insofar as they did not behave insurrectionally in his sphere of influence, as the example of the Nestorians shows. Ezidis, like Nestorians, were easy opponents of war for him, so he kept fouling them. His anger against Ezidis and Nestorians knew no bounds, *Menant* said about Bedirkhan Beg⁵⁰.

Prof. Dr. Kizilhan writes in his book "Collective Memories" ¹ in the chapter "The Yezidis and the Millet System" (1839-1876):

“The proclamation of the reformed law of Gülhane did not change the situation of the Yazidis. Thus, they were condemned to continue to live as a lawless community and thus remained one of the main targets of the aggression of Muslim Kurdish tribes.

One of the main leaders of Kurdish leaders in the Botan area was Bedirhan Bey. The Yazidi, who were without rights from the perspective of the Islamic legal system, were exposed to the merciless attacks of Bedirhan Bey. So, during a sacrificial feast, he called on Yazidis, whom he had captured, to accept Islam, and killed those who did not accept it with his own hands.”

Besides the religion, there were also political and economic reasons for the persecution of Ezidis by both Kurdish emirs and Ottomans. The well-known British archaeologist, diplomat and politician Sir Austen Henry Layard reports:

“Yearly expeditions have been made by the governors of provinces into their districts; and while the men and women were slaughtered without mercy, the children of both sexes were carried off, and exposed for sale in the principal towns. These annual hunts were one of the sources of revenue of Beder Khan Bey; and it was the custom of the Pashas of Baghdad and Mosul to let loose the irregular troops upon the ill-fated Yezidis, as an easy method of satisfying their demands for arrears of pay. This system was still practiced to a certain extent within a very few

¹ We thank Prof. Dr. Kizilhan for providing the appropriate chapter on the Yezidis. The book is expected to be published in 2014; Status of the chapter on 07/25/2013

months of my visit; and gave rise to atrocities scarcely equaled in the better known slavetrade⁵¹”.

The Ezidi prince's daughter Aliya Ismael Bayezid writes:

“The Arab historian al-Damlouji states that with their bloody campaigns against the Yazidis, the Ottomans and the Kurdish neighbours wanted, on the one hand, to wipe out the Yezidi faith, but on the other hand, to also take possession of the cultivated land and pastures⁵²”.

As a result of the lootings, persecutions and massacres, the Shingal region became one of the poorest areas⁵³, the repercussions are visible today. The Ottoman ruler Mohammed Pasha Kiritli Ođlu for example plundered 400 donkeys, 10,000 sheep, a few cattle, numerous tents and copper coins during a punitive expedition against the Ezidis in Shingal and enslaved Ezidi women and children, men were beheaded⁵⁴.

THE SORAN MASSACRE

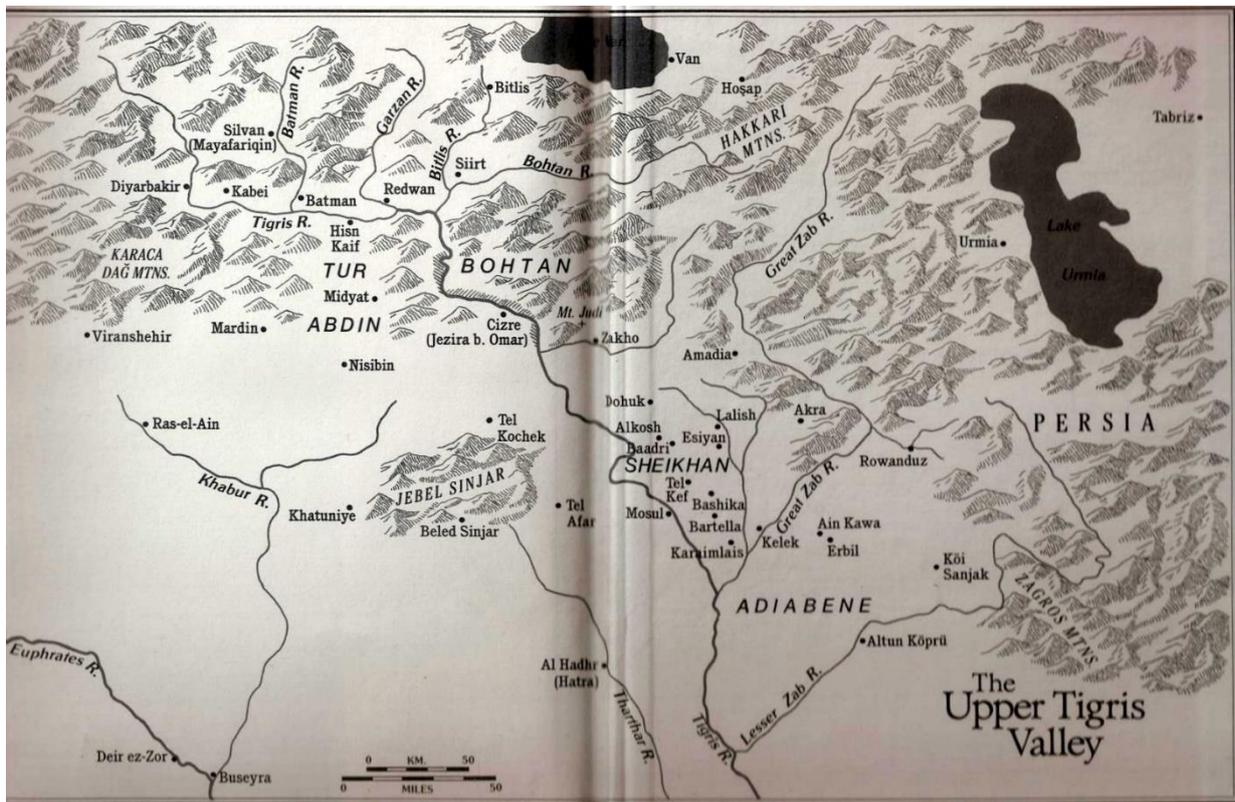
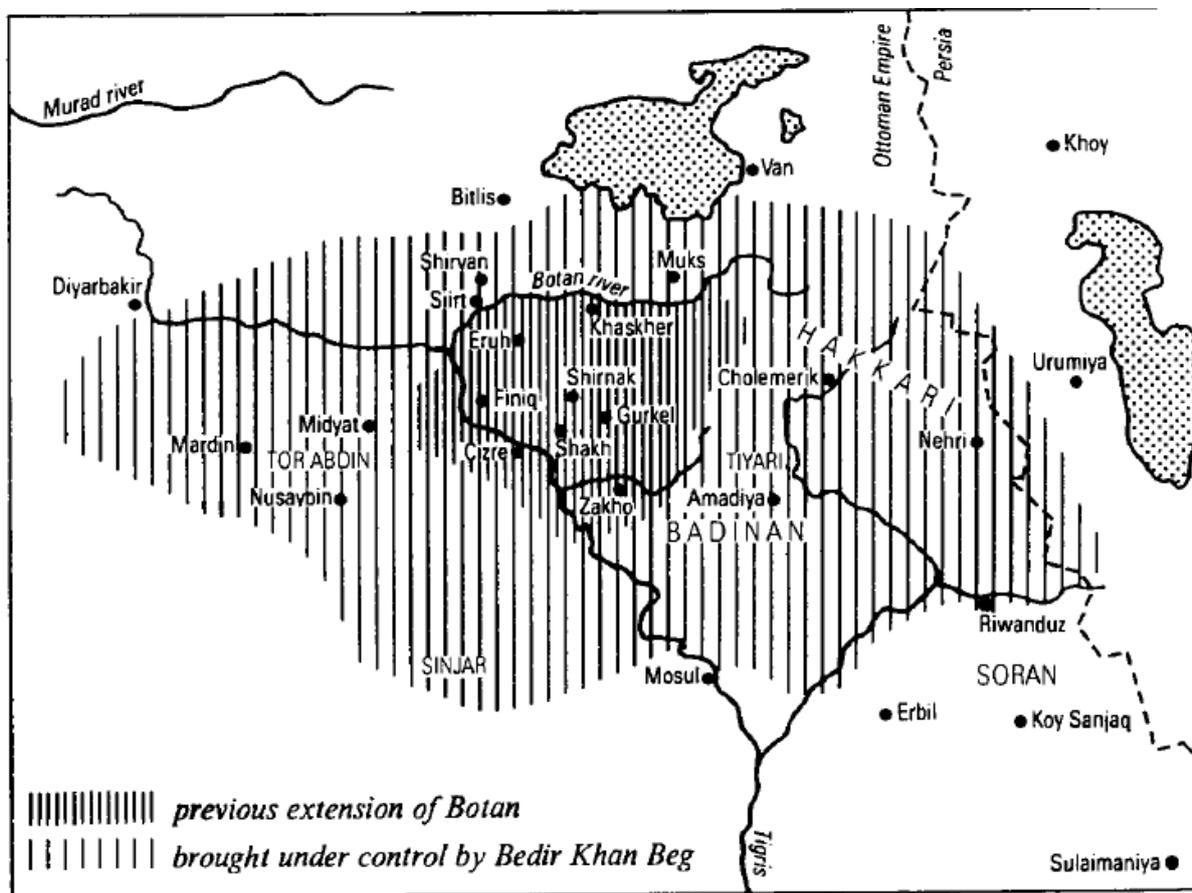


FIG. 5: MAP OF EZIDI SETTLEMENT AREAS (GUEST)

The Soran massacre is one of the bloodiest episodes of Kurdish-Ezidi history and took place in the spring of 1832. Under the leadership of Mîr Alî Beg, Ezidis gained great strength in their traditional settlement area in Sheikhan, which made them a thorn in the side of the Kurdish Emir Bedirkhan Beg and the Kurdish Soran Emir Muhammad Pasha Rewandûz (also known as Mîrê Kor - the Blind emir because he was blind in one eye). However, Bedirkhan Beg and Muhammad Pasha Rewandûz had entered into a power struggle with each other⁵⁵ before their religious hatred against Ezidis united them^{56, 57}.

In an alliance they attacked the Ezidis in Sheikhan in 1832⁵⁸. Although the Ezidis stubbornly resisted, they could not sustain their resistance for a long time against the numerically far superior forces of Bedir Khan Beg and Muhammad Pasha Rewandûz and were crushed⁵⁹. The Muslim Kurds killed the population, looted and burned the villages⁶⁰. The Ezidis tried to save their lives by fleeing towards Shinga⁶¹. On their flight, however, they were stopped at the gates of Mosul by the Tigris River, whose bank had overflowed in the spring due to the melting ice⁶² and stood between the saving banks and the fleeing Ezidis. Only a few managed to cross the Tigris River, many stayed behind and were caught by their Muslim persecutors⁶³. About 12,000 fleeing Ezidis were killed by the approaching Muslim Kurds^{64, 65}.

The captive Ezidis were beheaded by the order of Bedir Khan Beg and Muhammad Pasha Rewandûz and their heads were thrown into the river. At Tiyar, about 10,000 Ezidis were massacred by order of Bedir Khan Beg. Women and children were captured as slaves⁶⁶.



Map 8. The emirate of Botan at the period of greatest expansion (1846).

FIG. 6: EMIRATE OF BOTAN (1846)

Menant further reports that the massacres of Bedir Khan Beg and Muhammad Pasha Rewandûz outweighed the cruelty of the Turkish pashas against the Ezidis^{67, 68}.

Prof. Dr. Celîlê Celîl: "In the spring of 1832 over 50,000 soldiers [of Muhammad Pasha of Rewandûz] crossed the great Zab and reached the villages of the Ezidis. They killed many of them, the survivors fled. Some of them in the mountains of Judi, Tur Abdin and Sinjar, others on the tops of the adjacent hills, in caves and valleys, others tried to flee towards Mosul. The governor of Mosul, however, feared emir Mîrê Kor and therefore destroyed the bridge to Mosul, so that the Ezidis could not cross the river to Mosul. The soldiers of Rewandûz overtook them on the hills of Qoyinceq and killed all the Ezidis within a few days. The Ezidis repeatedly

wished to have talks with emir Rewandûz, but he refused. He called on his soldiers to continue the war [against the Ezidis] until there was not a single Ezidi left. They did not only kill but covered the water wells and set the trees on fire. Ultimately, he cut off the [Ezidis] from the outside world^{69c}.

The Ezidi Prince Alî Beg was captured by Bedirkhan Beg's forces, deported to Rewandûz and tortured to death there⁷⁰. Due to the alliance of Bedirkhan Beg and Muhammad Pasha Rewandûz, it was not always clear to many writers whether Bedirkhan Beg or Muhammad Pasha Rewandûz had killed Prince Alî Beg. It is clear, however, that both have contributed their part to this massacre.

All settlement areas of the Ezidis in Sheikhan were looted and then burned down⁷¹.

Many Ezidis feared another extermination campaign by the Kurdish emirs and fled to Russian territory in the Caucasus⁷². The Ezidis, who still live in Armenia, Georgia and Russia, are the descendants of those who fled the Kurdish emirs. Later, there should be two more emigration waves of the Ezidis to the Caucasus.



FIG. 7: MUHAMMED PASCHA REWANDÛZ

INCIDENT IN 1836 AND THE NESTORIANS

When the Pasha of Baghdad, Reshid Pasha, waged war with a well-equipped army against Bedirkhan Beg in the Cezîra Botan region in 1836, the majority of the Ezidi population was killed and enslaved^{73, 74}.

Bedirkhan started joining many Muslim tribes to massacre over 10,000 Nestorians:

“In July 1843, a coalition of Kurds from the Ottoman districts of Bohtan, Hakkari and Rewanduz under the direction of Bedir Khan Beg and Nurallah Beg, ransacked almost all of the Nestorian Christian villages in the Hakkari mountain region of Ottoman Kurdistan (southeast of Lake Van spanning what is today the border between Turkey and Iraq), killing up to 10,000 Nestorian Christians and enslaving many who were left behind⁷⁵”.

For Bedirkhan Beg, the weakening of the Christian population was also a weakening of the Ezidis in the region because the Christians were allies of them, and they supported them^{76,77}.

„Homeless, bereaved [Nestorians] refugees sought safety in Mosul, comforted by sympathetic Yezidis on their way.”

Guest, John S.: “Survival among the Kurds. A History of the Yezidis”, 1993, p. 87

BEDIRKHANS MASSACRE AGAINST EZIDIS IN TURABDIN IN THE YEARS 1840 - 1844

In the years 1840-1844 Bedirkhan Beg attacked the Ezidis in the Tur Abdin region over and over again⁷⁸. The Ezidis of that region had a strong tribal structure, and they took an active part in the political process⁷⁹.

One of the most momentous attacks took place in the year 1844 when Bedirkhan Beg attacked the Ezidis with a large troop. He wanted to force them to accept Islam. Those who refused were arrested and killed⁸⁰. Seven villages converted to Islam out of fear.

"In 1844, the ruler of Botan, Bedir-Khan Bey, attacked the Yezidis in Tur Abidin. He used force to convert them into Islam. Those who rejected Islam were arrested and killed. Altogether seven villages surrendered and accepted to be converted into Islam: "The executioners suddenly appear like thunder and under the cry of the people they push the wooden pegs so hard that it came out from the back of their Yezidi victims. The bodies had to lay on soft ground for several days with pegs still stack in them⁸¹".

A cruel ritual by Bedirkhan Beg against the Ezidis of the Tur Abdin region is described by *Guest*:

„Bedr Khan Beg was in his heyday, acclaimed by his courtiers as the scourge of infidels and the greatest Kurd since Saladin. [...] The Yezidis, bereft of civil rights under Islamic Law, were special objects of his zeal. Rassam reported that at the feast of Bairam, when Moslems celebrate Abraham’s ritual sacrifice of Isaac by slaughtering a sheep, Bedr Khan Beg would round up Yezidis for a grisly ceremony where those who refused to embrace Islam were sacrificed by his own hand. Others, too frightened to answer, were charitably deemed to have assented and were placed in the emir’s household⁸²“,

One of those captured Ezidi women was a princess from the royal family of Ezidis⁸³, Bedirkhan Beg took to his wife. With this woman Bedirkhan Beg also had children, the mother of Emin Ali Bedirkhan Beg and thus the grandmother of the brothers Celadet, Kamûran and Surrya Bedirkhan.

The second major migration wave of Ezidis from this area to the Caucasus took place during the 1840s⁸⁴. In 1897, 14,726 Ezidis were registered in Transcaucasia⁸⁵.

“Amazingly, the little community at Lalish had outlived the Abbasids, the Mongols, the Black Death and the visitations of Timur”

- John S. Guest, “Survival Among the Kurds: A History of the Yezidis”, 1993, p. 27

FALL OF BEDIRKHAN BEG AND THE RETALIATION OF THE EZIDIS

The Ottoman rulers regarded the steadily increasing influence and strength of the Kurdish emir Bedir Khan Beg with suspicion and finally decided to eliminate him. Bedir Khan Beg embarked on extensive alliances with other Kurdish emirs, further expanding a realm of power. Bedir Khan Beg, who became the ruler of Botan with the help of the Ottomans, should now be deposed by them. This time, however, with the help of the Ezidis, of whom about 9 years earlier thousands of them were massacred by Bedir Khan Beg⁸⁶.

In 1847, an army, commanded by Croatian General Osman Pasha, moved from Anatolia towards Cezîra Botan without Yêzdansher, the nephew of Bedir Khan Begs, resisting. Gradually, one ally of Bedir Khan Beg was beaten after another. The Ottoman forces were supported by an Ezidi contingent⁸⁷.

The Ezidi forces fought on the side of the Ottomans against the Allies of Bedir Khan Beg, whose power gradually collapsed. Prof. Dr. Kizilhan: "As a result of the operation supported by Ezidis, Bedir Khan Beg had to surrender and was exiled to Crete²⁴".

Bedir Khan Beg, who resisted 40 days in his castle, was eventually defeated and surrendered in July 1847. Muhammad Pasha Rewandûz was also defeated by the Ottomans. He entrenched himself in his castle in Rewandûz, then announced his surrender and was captured. A short time later he was pardoned by the Ottoman sultan. However, he was murdered on his return⁸⁸. Bedir Khan Beg died in exile in 1868⁸⁹.



FIG. 8: (FORMER) EZIDI SETTLEMENT AREAS

² Prof. Dr. Jan Ilhan Kizilhan: „Kollektive Erinnerungen“, Kapitel „die Yeziden und das „Millet-System“ (1839-1876), voraussichtlich 2014

BEDIRKHAN BEG IN THE KURDISH SOCIETY AND THE HAMIDIYE CAVALRY



FIG. 108. GROUP OF KURD HAMIDIYEH CAVALRY.

**FIG. 9: GROUP OF KURDISH
HAMIDIYE CAVALRYMAN**

We learned about the atrocities of Bedirkhan Beg against the Ezidis. His grandson Kamûran Bedirkhan, on the other hand, tried to heroize his grandfather to a national hero:

„His [Bedirkhan Begs] dream was to unite the individual regions of Kurdistan and to found an independent Kurdistan⁹⁰“.

The Kurdistan Students' Association (YXK), which is close to the PKK, goes even further:

„In the liberated Kurdistan, non-Muslim religions were allowed to develop freely and other peoples were equated with the Kurdish people. A Kurdish state was to be built⁹¹“

Not only that Kurdistan was not liberated, but the fact of making the murderer of so many Ezidis into a national hero goes far beyond gross negligence. Non-Muslim religions were not allowed to develop freely. The claim that non-Muslim religions have been able to develop freely is lacking any factual basis, as shown. Such allegations are an obvious distortion of the facts and an insult to the Ezidi victims.

„Neither the actions Bedirkhan Beg in relation to the court nor any of its undertakings, animosity and alliances in Kurdistan suggest pursuit of nationalist goals⁹²“, Turgut writes.

Gökçe on Bedirkhan Beg's alleged aspirations of a Kurdish state: *"It is difficult to turn it into a Kurdish-nationalist manifestation, especially as we then find no activity by Bedir Khan that would confirm such a thesis."*

Martin Van Bruinessen argued that Bedir Khan Beg was only interested in greater autonomy under the Ottomans, and perhaps his nationalist characterization is a product of 20th century revisionism by an emergent Kurdish intelligentsia⁹³.

Also, within the Kurdish society praising hymns about Bedirkhan Beg and his nephew in the form of songs and traditions are still exists⁹⁴.

This distorted image of Bedirkhan Beg within Kurdish society is in strong contrast to the destiny of the Ezidis under Bedirkhan Beg. As mentioned above, especially the Ezidis in today's countries Russia, Georgia and Armenia have fled from this Kurdish emir, which is still present in the collective memory. The memories of Bedirkhan Beg are also associated with bad experiences among the Yezidis of Tur Abdin, Shingal and Sheikhan. These memories were recorded in various songs (kurd. *Stran*)^{95,96}.

The memory of the participation of the Kurdish tribes in the massacre of the Ottomans against the Ezidis from Shingal is not forgotten either. In 1891-1892 Ottoman General Whabi Omar Pasha started one of the largest massacres against the Ezidis. Whabi Omar Pasha travelled to

Sinjar to punish the Ezidis for the late payments of taxes. He called on the Ezidi prince to persuade the Ezidis to accept Islam, but he refused. Together with Kurds, which included the so-called Hamidiye cavalry of Kurdish recruits, he finally attacked the Ezidis in the Laliş valley. The Ezidis were murdered on a massive scale, women were burned alive, other women were sold on the slave market, or they were forcibly married to Muslim soldiers, the sanctuary of Lalis became an Islamic school, Ezidis were forced to accept the Islamic faith⁹⁷. 15,000 Ezidis converted to escape death⁹⁸.

The Hamidiye cavalry was formed in 1891 by the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II from Sunni Kurdish tribesmen⁹⁹. The Hamidiye Cavalry was led by Ibrahim Pasha, of the Confederation of Milan. Milan Confederacy once also included some Ezidi tribes. The Ezidi tribal leader of Danayi Hussein Qınjo (kurd. Hisenê Qenco) converted to Sunni Islam and later became Ibrahim Pasha's right-hand. Hundreds of Ezidi villages in the Serhed region were invaded by the Hamidiye cavalry, the Ezidi population was massacred, their property looted.

In particular, the Ezidis of Kars, Ardahan, Dogu Bayezit, Van, Bitlis, Siirt and Antep fled to Armenia together with the Armenians to escape the attacks of the Hamidiye cavalry in 1895¹⁰⁰. The Hamidiye cavalry also participated in the Armenian Genocide in 1915-1916, among which were thousands of Ezidi victims¹⁰¹. Here, too, the Ezidis once again fled to the Soviet Union.

„Yezidis receive 20,000 Christians during the Armenian genocide, who remained with the Yezidis until the end of the genocide. The Yezidis refused to extradite the Christians to the Ottomans, which resulted in a renewed campaign by the Turks against them. The Yezidis attacked the government forces off Baghdad, but to no avail. They were beaten back and forced to retreat to the mountains, where they continued to resist“

LESCOT, ROGER: ENQUÊTE SUR LES YÉZIDIS DE SYRIE ET DU DJEBEL SINDJÂR, BEYROUTH 1938, S. 127F.

CONCLUSION

The Muslim-Kurdish emir Bedir Khan Beg, who originally comes from an Ezidi family, persecuted, massacred and expelled Ezidis. He forced an Ezidi princess to marry him. Their grandchildren became important personalities of the Kurdish history. They declared Ezidism as “the original religion of all Kurds” to promote recognition of the Ezidi religion within the Kurdish majority population and yet (unconsciously) inflict such great damage to Ezidism.

Between ethnicity, which has only been a primary identity feature for a few decades, and religious affiliation, which has been the cause of persecution and massacres of the Ezidis for over a thousand years, it is still difficult for many to distinguish. As mentioned, it is a confusion of cause and effect to make the accusation of separatism to those who do not regard themselves as Kurds. We reject the Ezidi nationalism, which would merely represent Ezidism as a nation. There is also no doubt that the Ezidi identity is characterized by an ethno-confessional character. A reduction of this identity to a mere religious affiliation, which many Ezidis do because of political ideologies, is simply to be rejected.

The fate of the Ezidis, based on the social output of the Kurdish community, has already led to the fact that in the Soviet Union they were no longer considered as Kurds but as Ezidis (as a nation)¹⁰².

The gesture of humility and apology for the crimes of their ancestors by Kurdish personalities are already a step in the right direction, and they are welcomed^{103, 104, 105}. Rather, however, a greater discussion must take place within the society, which goes beyond the previous taboos and thus works up its own history. Fraternity between different peoples, religious communities and ethnic groups are created through mutual respect and understanding. Until today, the Ezidis in the Kurdish areas are exposed to stigmatization from this way of thinking¹⁰⁶.

Through the given example, we hope to have provided an impression of the suffering of the Ezidis throughout their history, which counts hundreds of such examples and which depicts the issue in its core and the problems of the Kurdish-Ezidi relationship.

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