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Ahl-e Haqq (Yarsanism)

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Summary

Ahl-e Haqq (also called Yarsanism, Yaresan and Kaka'i) is a religion connected with Western Kurdistan, often classified as one of the movements inspired by Ghulat Shiism. The leading ideas of the religious doctrine of Ahl-e Haqq are the successive manifestations of the Most High and the esotericism of the hidden world (*batini*), the sacred manifesting itself in the world on the basis of allegory. The incarnations were to be accompanied by seven spiritual beings (*Haft Tan*), and in some versions by seven higher embodied beings (*Haftawana* - seven sons).

The cult of Ahl-e Haqq, like in Sufism, focuses on the recitation of religious poetry - *kalams* , dances, and the communal consumption of food constituting an offering (*niyaz*). It is believed that pilgrimage to places associated with the holy Yaresan is more appropriate than the islamic hac to Mecca, and good deeds for the sake of other people are more important than prayer. Sultan Sahak - the founder of Yaresan - who is also considered the most important incarnation of God, was a Kurd and a settled Sufi mystic in the towns of Perdivar and Shahu in the land of Guran . Most of the followers live between the Iranian provinces of Kordestan , Kermanshah and Western Azerbaijan, a significant group is also found in Iraq, where they are called Kaka'i . Yarsani's have also an active diaspora in Western Europe (e.g. Sweden) and around the world.

Ahl-e Haqq (also written *Ahl-i Haqq*, meaning "People of Truth", also called: *Yarsanism*, *Yaresan*, and *Kaka'i* in northern Iraq) is an indigenous religious group inhabiting the areas of Kurdistan (especially Eastern and Southern), Iraq and Iran. Its contemporary form is often associated with unorthodox movements related to Shiism *ghulat* (in Latin alphabet also spelled as *golat*) (see: Halm, 2011; Moosa, 1988: XVIII -XXI; van Bruinessen, 1995a: 122).

The followers of Ahl-e Haqq are in a large part Kurds from the Iranian provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah and West Azerbaijan and from northern Iraq. However, the Kurds are not the only ethnic group of this faith (some believe that they are currently a minority) (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 117-138), because among the followers of Ahl-e

Haqq there are also Lurs, Azeris, Persians, Arabs and Turkmen. The followers of Ahl-e Haqq in Iranian cities are more inclined towards Muslim Shiism, while the most heterodox are the followers living in the region that is the cradle of the movement – Guran in Kermashah province (van Bruinessen, 1995: 119). Estimates from the turn of the century, of the number of followers of this religion range from half a million to one million (van Bruinessen, 1995b: 9; Mattar , 2004: 82); unfortunately, there is a lack of precise data on this subject, and the estimation may be further complicated by the fact that a part of Ahl-e Haqq followers identify themselves as Shia Muslims.

The main feature of the many diverse Ahl-e Haqq groups is the belief in the transmigration of the soul (*tanasukh*) and the successive manifestations of God with four or more angels in human form. One of the divine incarnations was Ali, but the most important of them was Sultan Sahak , who appeared in the Guran region around the 15th century. The Guran people consider Sahak to be the last incarnation, but other Ahl-e Haqq groups also believe in later manifestations, such as Ata Beg, who introduced the religion to Azerbaijan (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 119).

Already in the first half of the 20th century Vladimir Minorsky and Vladimir Ivanov and later Mohammed Mokri , Cecil John Edmonds , Jean During and M. M. Reza Fariborz Hamzeh'ee conducted studies on Ahl-e Haqq. However, the knowledge gathered about this religious movement still seems to be fragmentary. Apart from the secrecy and exclusivity of this religious minority, the reasons for this state of knowledge, according to van Bruinessen , lies in the multiplicity of local traditions and individual interpretations of faith, which, despite the relatively large amount of information for Western researchers, remain inconsistent and do not form a single canon of beliefs and practices (van Bruinessen, 2014: 6-7).

The religious centers of Ahl-e Haqq are primarily the provinces of Lorestan and Kermanshah, as well as the land stretching between them called Guran (also written *Goran*). Particular reverence is given to the temples where the tombs of Sultan Sahak are located in Perdivar (also written – *Pardivar* , *Pird-i War*) and Baba Yadgar in Dohab (Halm, 2011). Although the sacred language of the People of Truth is Gorani , and the Guran tribes are part of the followers, the linguistic and ethnic classification of the inhabitants of the region is not easy, because not all of them speak one of the dialects related to the poetic Gorani language (or the group of living languages Hawrami) and not everyone is a member of the Guran people (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 117; Leezenberg , 1993). In Azerbaijan, Kalams are also read and sung in the Turkish language Adari (among the Iraqi Kaka'i there are also Turkmen), and over the years some of them have also been written down in Persian. The language of the most sacred texts of Ahl-e Haqq, however, is Gorani .

The term *Kaka'i* meaning “circle of friends” refers to the term *Yaresan* with a similar meaning. It is usually used to denote groups of Ahl-e Haqq believers in Iraq. In Southern Kurdistan (Kurdistan Autonomous Region in Iraq) the word *Kaka'i* is also used to denote other ethno-religious minorities, e.g. Shabak and Bajalan , and in a narrower sense the political-ethnic community of *Kaka'i* (Leezenberg , 1994; Kreyenbroek , 2012). All these groups share many similarities, both in terms of beliefs, language, where the Hawrami dialects play the main role, and ethnic identity, as a large part of their members consider themselves Kurds.

The character of Sultan Sahak

Sultan Sahak (also called Ishaq and Isaac) was most likely a sedentary dervish referred to as a *pir* (a Sufi term meaning spiritual master, literally “elder”), in charge of the towns of Perdivar and Shahu . They lie on the Servan River (also called the Diyala), a tributary of the Tigris. Sultan Sahak came from a famous family of Kurdish sheikhs, Barzanji , and his mother was Khatun Dayerah – came from the famous Jaf tribe in Kurdistan (Moosa, 1988: 215). Although the father is considered to be the respected Sheikh Isa , according to the myths concerning Sahak’s birth , it occurred without the participation of a sexual act – through the transformation of a bird that landed on the virgin or her giving birth to a child in similar circumstances (cf. van Bruinessen, 1995: 132). According to the researcher, the virgin conception could have been related more to the condemnation of the sexual sphere by the Gnostics than to Christian influences (which were present in Ahl-e Haqq) (van Bruinessen, 1995: 130).

According to legends, Sahak was to acquire many disciples in the area and to divide the most important functions between three of them. He appointed Binyamin as the person responsible for oaths and theology, Pir Musa was to take care of the books , and Dawud as the teacher . After some time, he was to miraculously disappear into the sea. According to Matti Moosa , Sahak’s teaching consisted of a slightly modified Shiite injunction to know one’s imam. Those who know their place in the community, can distinguish good from evil, do not do the latter to others, remain sober, do not beg, are not overly worried or cause others to worry, have achieved Truth (*Haqiqat*) and are his sons of Sultan Sahak (Moosa, 1988: 215-216). Sahak’s protégés from Hawramanu probably formed a kind of dervish order. This is likely, given the popularity of radical Sufi orders in sixteenth-century Iran, such as the Qalandar , Safawi , Haydari , and Jalali groups. Contacts with the Safawi , among others, are attested by tales of miracles that Sultan Sahak is said to have performed for Safi al-Din (Moosa, 1988: 217).

Sultan Sahak is undoubtedly the most important Yaresan figure deified by the faithful,

but it is worth noting that some of the customs and cosmology of Ahl-e Haqq may have been older than the teachings of Sahak and were local beliefs, only reformulated by this religious leader. This is similar as in the case of Yezidism (Kreyenbroek 2005).

Cosmology and Cosmography in Ahl-e Haqq

Before the creation of the world, God brought into existence the Seven Companions (*Haft Tan*). According to some believers (including the Ibrahim lineage in Guran), the Seven Sons of Sultan Sahak (*Haftawane*) corresponded to these seven beings on earth. For believers who particularly worship one of *the Haft Tan* – Baba Yadigar , *the Haftawane* are indeed earthly beings, but they bring darkness, and in addition they fought with the Seven Companions at the beginning of time, and they play this role in every era (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 136).

Before God created the Seven Companions, he was in a static pearl, from which he emerged, because the creation of *Haft Tan* caused its breaking. (Mokri , 1963; Rodziewicz, 2014). The transition from a static beginning to a differentiated world at the beginning of time is also present in the hymns of Kaka'i known in the archaic Turkish language, where it is present, as Phillip Kreyenbroek states, as a metaphor of the Creator as a painter of many colors (Kreyenbroek , 2006).

The concept of time in Ahl-e Haqq, similarly to Yezidism , Zoroastrianism and Hinduism, is most likely understood in a spiral manner. Subsequent events: the appearance of Ali , the beheading of Hussein , the coming of Sultan Sahak with teachings and the Last Judgement create a certain progressive sequence of religious history. A recurring event – according to some believers – is also the battle of the forces of light and darkness (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 124). Religious events (such as the exile of Adam) and their messages (such as the Quran) have, like the entire universe, an external (*zahiri*) and an internal (*batini*) side. Truth manifests itself in the exoteric world in an allegorical way (*macazi*), and literally and actually in the esoteric nature (Edmonds , 1969: 90).

Theology of Ahl-e Haqq

The manifestation of the divine message in the world of Ahl-e Haqq occurs through the successive incarnations of God and the gifts that these incarnations bring – Ali brought religious law into the world – *Sharia* , Shah Khusin (also spelled *Shahkooshin* or *Shah Khoshen*) road – *tariqat* , Shah Fazl, on the other hand, mystical knowledge – *marifa't* , the last stage of religious knowledge was introduced by Sultan Sahak , revealing the Truth – *haqqiqat* not to the noble peoples of the Middle East, but to the ordinary inhabitants of Guran (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 120). It is worth noting that these

stations of mystical “knowledge” are also obligatory in Sufism, although of course there is no such assignment of a given path to a holy figure as presented above. Some believers believe not in four, but in seven divine incarnations – the names of the remaining three are not consistent and widely known (Halm, 2011), and Ahl-e Haqq in Sahneh and Kaka’i in Hawar do not mention Şah Fazla as a theophany.

God the Creator is sometimes mentioned as the first theophany (among others under the name *Khuda* , which is somewhat reminiscent of the Yezidi *Xuwede* , but more often as *Khavandagar*), but generally phrases mentioning God by name are absent, and often (also when describing subsequent incarnations) people speak of Sultan Sahak , referring to the Supreme Being and not necessarily directly to the historical personage (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 132).

Each incarnation of God was accompanied by one or several types of groups of seven higher beings. Edmonds listed three such groups in Kaka’i beliefs – the Seven Companions (*Haft Tan*), the Seven Sons (*Haftawana*) and the Seven Caliphs (*Hafta Khalifa*). Additional groups such as the Seventy-Two Elders (*Haftad-u-du Pir*) (Edmonds , 1969: 89). *The Tan Haft* is similar to the Seven Angels in Yezidism and Amesha The Spentas in Zoroastrianism came into being at the beginning of time through God the Creator (Moosa, 1988: 216). Halm states that at the time of a given incarnation there are Four Helping Angels (*yan-e ħār malak*) and one woman, and their names often derive from the traditions of Islam and radical branches of Shiism (for example, Fatima is an angel accompanying Ali). Indeed, when listing the companions of theophany, the most important seems to be the spiritual group (often consisting of seven angels) – *Haft Tan*. The Seven Companions of Sultan Sahak – the most worshipped incarnation of God – are usually referred to as: Binyamin , Dawud (sometimes identified with the Christian and Muslim devil), Pir Musa, Mustafa Daudani (or *Mustafa-Dodon*), Baba Yadigar (or *Yadgar*), Ramzbar (or *Khatoon Ramzyar* – who is a female spirit) and Shah Ibrahim (also spelled *Shah Ebrahims*) (cf. van Bruinessen, 1995a: 125; Farrokhnia and Reza, 2010: 90; Edmonds , 1969: 94). As van Bruinessen noted, Sultan Sahak himself is sometimes counted among the Seven, while the first four from the aforementioned list form the Four Angels, and the group is completed (to the number 7) by a female spirit and Baba Yadigar (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 125).

This number of angels is related to the symbolism in Ahl-e Haqq – the connection with the four elements, the four (often out of seven) previous incarnations of God carrying the four paths of knowledge (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 129). The four members of *the Haft Tan* are associated with the elements, as well as the seasons. At the creation of man, Pir Musa was supposed to add water, Dawud the wind, Musa the fire, and Binyamin the earth. In addition, Dawud is supposed to take care of spring, Binyamin of

summer, Moses of autumn, and Mustafa Dodon is the patron of winter (Farrokhnia and Reza, 2010: 96).

Among the believers living in different regions, there are different names for the Seven Companions of the individual incarnations of God. Sultan Ishiq or Sahak is said to be the 1001st theophany according to some Kaka'i , not the fourth and last, or the fourth of the seven incarnations as in other versions of the story. Some believers identify Sultan Sahak with Hacı Bektaş (the founder of the Bektaşiyya order), and Ahle-Haqq 's religious poetry – *kalam* – contains stories about how Sahak took the form of a Bektaş in order to spread *tariqat* in Anatolia. One can therefore conclude that Alevi are thus treated as somewhat less religiously enlightened (having only *tariqat* as opposed to Ahl-e Haqq, who also have Truth – *haqiqat*). According to other versions of the myth, it was not Sultan Sahak who incarnated as the founder of the Bektaşiyya , but Muhammad Beg (who lived later than Sahak) or Ateş Beg or an angel close to God – Dawud (in this version, therefore, Bektaş was not an incarnation of God) (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 121-122).

Characters associated with Alevism and Semitic angels and prophets (including Azrail as well as heroes from Iranian legends (such as Kai Khosrou, Jibrail , Musa),) are not the only higher beings drawn from religious movements neighboring the followers of Ahl-e Haqq. Some researchers point to the influence of Armenian Christianity, noting that *Sahak* is a modern Armenian version of the name *Isaac* (Moosa also indicates *Binyamin* – Benjamin and *Bus* as St. Paul) (Moosa, 1988: 214). Other scholars point out that the series of seven incarnations that a person must go through (as was said earlier, among some Yaresans it counts 1001 incarnations, this number is also sometimes mentioned as the number of incarnations of God on Earth) is a motif characteristic of various radical branches of Shiism from the areas where Ahl-e Haqq was founded, for example the Nusayrites (Alawites) (Halm, 2011).

According to Martin van Bruinessen, one of the characteristic features of the Ahl-e Haqq myths is the inclusiveness of the mythology, and at the same time the reconciliation of many biographies and legends about religious and historical figures (e.g. Sufi saints). Some reconciliation of the contradictory content of different myths is possible by recognizing several heroes as reincarnations of the same higher being (e.g. the blacksmith Kawa is an incarnation of Dawud) or as cooperating forces corresponding to a given religious era (*aura*) (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 130).

Ahl-e Haqq, like the Yezidis , have been accused of devil worship. According to one of the Ahl-e Haqq groups in Guran Dawud did not agree to kneel before man, but he is responsible (like the Peacock Angel in Yezidism) for the temporal world, not hell. What

is more, the temporal world is not so negatively valorized here as in Gnosticism, but quite the opposite, according to one of Bruinessen's informants – in Yezidism Malaki Tawus currently rules the world, while God is absent (van Bruinessen, 2014: 17). This interpretation reflects the beliefs of the Yezidis, who believe that the supreme demiurgic being – *Xwede* – gave power over the temporal world to the Peacock Angel. It is also an example of Eliade's *deus otiosus* (Eliade, 2000: 63-66).

Anthropology among the Ahl-e Haqq

One of the basic elements of the Ahl-e Haqq faith is reincarnation, called *Don-Ba-Don* (literally “fabric to fabric”, also meaning a transition from one world to another – a change of body like clothes by the same soul based on its worldly deeds). Worthy people are to be reborn as equally righteous, and evil people in the bodies of lousy or animals. Material success on earth, however, is not dependent on previous incarnations (Farrokhnia and Reza, 2010: 89).

After passing through 1001 *dons* (worlds, cycles) a person can unite with God. This path leads through the attainment of successive divine virtues and requires much sacrifice and suffering (ibidem). The people from the Guran land that Bruinessen studied did not use the term *Don-Ba-Don*. Some of them who spoke Arabic referred to reincarnation with the Arabic equivalent *tanasukh*. As the Dutch anthropologist noted, these believers do not, however, associate metempsychosis with liberation from the body and temporality (which is more or less emphasized in various movements associated with gnosis or forms of Hinduism). Their funeral rites do not differ in form or in a less mournful mood from those practiced by the Muslims around them.

In addition to the version of the creation of man similar to the Yezidi and Zoroastrian, in which man was created from the four elements, there is also a widespread belief in the differentiation of the Yaresan from other people. Some (such as the faithful of Ahl-e Haqq) were created from yellow clay (*zarda-gel*) and they will attain salvation, unlike those who were created from the black earth (*kak-e siah*). Most Yaresan believers believe in the coming of the final judgment on the fields of Shahrazur or Soltaniya. Only some of the faithful of this religion mention as an element of the end of times the coming of the savior in the form of Mahdi or the Lord of Time (*saheb-e zaman*) (Halm, 2011). The believers studied by Bruinessen in the Guran lands did not have elaborate views on eschatology or the nature of reincarnation. The process of transmigration of mortal souls was most often understood only in the context of punishments and rewards for earthly deeds. The Muslim paradise (in Persian *Bihisht*) and hell were perceived as a state of mind, not a place (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 134).

The image of a man in Yaresan is also connected with the expected appearance.

Members of Ahl-e Haqq are sometimes identified by the moustaches they grow (van Bruinessen, 2014; Hosseini, 2020). Men should not shave or trim their moustaches, because they are a sign of religious affiliation, but they are also supposed to emphasize modesty and be a cover for the male gender (Farrokhnia and Reza, 2010: 92).

Forms of worship in Ahl-e Haqq

As in Yezidism, in the Yaresan cult , what is important is not the private utterance of formulas, but the distribution of food (*niyaz* and *nazr*). Also important is the mystical experience of the bond with God (*zıkr* or *dekr*) – a Sufi concept referring to the inner remembrance of God (Shah, 2009). Superiority of good deeds (towards another person and the community) is treated as a general principle, valued more highly than private or public forms of prayer (Edmonds , 1969: 95; Farrokhnia and Reza, 2010: 87-93). Another significant difference from Islam is the possibility of performing religious rituals in any place where people gather in silence. This can be either a private home or a clean, open space (Edmonds, 1969: 95). Farrokhnia and Reza, studying Ahl-e Haqq in Iranian Sahneh, point out that the place of prayer (*niyazkhane*, or in Sahneh – *Jamkhaneh*) should also allow for organizing a meeting in a circle, which is supposed to reflect the sky (Farrokhnia and Reza, 2010: 90).

During collective worship, accompanied by the Central Asian instrument tanbour, everyone holds hands and dances in a circle, shouting *Yahoo* (a term for God and Ali) with each movement in Sahneh. This dance often involves sensory deprivation and a kind of loss of control over the body (Farrokhnia and Reza, 2010: 92). In addition to the collective singing, *kalamkhan* (people specially taught religious hymns – kalams – and the traditions associated with them and explaining their meaning) recite or sing them. This type of prayer is very similar to *semah* in Sufism and Yezidism and *Jam* (kur d. *cem*) in Alevism . To perform it, a proper place is needed, as well as seven men (children and women do not participate in Yaresan rituals), who are girded and have their heads covered. Among the Yaresan in Sahneh, the following division of roles during the rituals applies – *sayyid* leads the prayers, *doakhan* reads the sacred texts (this is probably a function similar to *kalamkhan*), *khalefeh* distributes cooked food offerings among the gathered, and *khadem* serves the leaders and the faithful, taking care of order during the rituals (Farrokhnia and Reza, 2010: 91). Usually, ceremonies begin with a joint and simultaneous kissing of hands, those gathered in a circle hold each other's right hands, those arriving must bow to everyone already seated, moving from left to right. Then, water brought by *Khadem* the faithful washes their hands and touches their faces with them, saying: *The first and the last is Yār – "Beloved Friend"* (which refers to God). After these words, the offering is distributed (Hamzeh'ee,

2011).

Among the kalams , many followers of Ahl-e Haqq consider *Kalâm-e* to be the most sacred, because it contains a literal message from God and a summary of the teachings of Sultan Sahak . *Seranjâm* , which was composed in the 15th century in the poetic language of Gorani (gurani). It is also believed to have been written by Binyamin – one of the Haft Tan in Perdivar (Halm, 2011; Moosa, 1988: 215).

Pilgrimages are made to places associated with Yaresan (such as the tomb of Sultan Sahak or the Kosar stream, where the severed head of Baba Yadigar was supposed to be found). The land of Guran is considered by the local Ahl-e Haqq to be particularly important for religious events from the past and thus also maps (like pilgrimage sites) other sacred spaces. The workshop of the blacksmith Kawa, who appears in *the Shahnameh* and, according to the Kurds, killed the tyrant-dragon Zuhak, was also supposed to be located in Guran. Therefore, to add depth to time, all significant religious events also occurred on this land (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 134-136).

Members of Ahl-e Haqq fast twice a year for three days. Fasting may be understood not as refraining from food and drink, but rather as avoiding falsehood and evil (Edmonds, 1969: 95).

After the baby is born, between 7 and 40 days after birth, the infant is given a pir (from one of the Sayyid families) and dalil , who will be his intermediaries at the Last Judgement (a role similar to sheikhs and pirs in Yezidism). This ceremony is often called *Sar Separdem* (also written as *Sarsepordan*). During it, in the presence of the child's parents and future dalil, the pir cuts off a nutmeg over the newborn's head.

Edmonds (1969: 99) also noted that a similar institution is present among the Bektashites of the Tazin section , who, however, do not exchange garments after the oath, but mix hot and cold water like the Hawar people . It is also worth noting that the invocation at the conclusion of the Eternal Brotherhood in Yezidism says that two people will henceforth be responsible for each other in everything except for leaving the faith, transgressing inbreeding and marrying an infidel (Asatrian 2000: 79-96), which indicates that they are not responsible for their sins.

Halm, in describing the general beliefs of Ahl-e Haqq, calls the institution of religious brotherhood by the name – *shart-e eqrar* (meaning " covenant of confirmation ") and emphasizes its role in maintaining the incest taboo ^[1]. Indeed, persons bound by this type of brotherhood cannot marry members of their lineages for seven generations (Edmonds , 1969: 99). However, this religious institution also includes a social bond manifested in various holidays in mutual care and according to beliefs after death.

Persons who become Brothers and Sisters for Eternity also usually come from different families. Garnik Asatrian linked this kind of sacral bond with the Sufi circle, or even “friends” among the ancient Scythians. The latter institution carried with it a number of obligations, including participation in the funeral of the deceased “friend” (Asatrian , 2000: 91).

Several elements of the Ahl-e Haqq faith indicate remnants of nature worship. The gathering place of *the Haft Tan* is *the Aftab-i-Sharif* (meaning “Exalted Sun”). The hearths in the traditional Sayyid houses (whose lineage is also referred to by the word “hearth” - *ojaq*) are located in a central place. Shah Khusin , one of the theophanies, according to the myth, descended to earth from the sun as a particle of light. The sun is composed of light and fire, which are the most sacred combination, and it was thanks to him that Kawa defeated Zuhok . As the lord of fire, he could do this with the return of the sun and the arrival of the new year (*Newroz*) in the form of spring. (van Bruinessen, 1995a: 137-138; 2014: 18).

Community Organization

Among the Ahl-e Haqq in the town of Sahneh in the Iranian region of Kermanshah, there is a division into ordinary believers and eleven families of Sayyids who are responsible for leading the community and leading prayers (Farrokhnia and Reza, 2010: 88). In other regions, there is also a division in which the eleven lineages play an important role - *khandan s* (Hamzeh’ee , 2011) . According to Edmonds’s work (1969: 89-90) on the Ahl-e Haqq in Iraq, the founders of five of these lineages were the sons of Sultan Sahak . The remaining lineages also have eponyms from holy men whose prestige and religious fame made them worthy of worship as much as the descendants of the founder. Edmonds uses the terms *Haftawana* and *Neo-Sayyid* for this division within the Sayyid lineages . The former, literally meaning the Seven Sons, refers to the earthly counterparts of the Seven Higher Beings (van Bruinessen 1995a: 128) (*Haft Tan - the Seven Companions*, who are spiritual beings similar to the Zoroastrian *Amesha Spenta* and the Seven Angels of the Yazd) . There is no agreement on the number of lineages. Sayyids (Edmonds gives 5 *Haftawan* and 5 *Neo-Sayyids*, while other sources say 11 lineages of Sayyids) may be related to a different division within them or a method of counting depending on the subgroup of the faithful. A given Sayyid clan group or a given regional subgroup gives different names, *Haft Tan* and *Haftawan*, and even differs in the cosmology they follow (Hamzeh’ee, 2011). According to the beliefs of the Ahl-e Haqq from the town of Hawar, the Seven Companions were supposedly created by Sultan Ishaq without the participation of his wife from different parts of his body, and the Seven Sons were born similarly from his liver or navel.

Pirs are religious mentors – this function is performed by members of the Sayyid families assigned to the faithful (Edmonds, 1969: 90). In Sahneh, they are subordinate to the Religious King Padishah (probably the highest-ranking representative of the Sayyids). The term “padishah” is also often used to refer to the founder of the religion and God. Pirs are subordinate to the dalil , whose task is to guide and take care of new believers. The duty of the believers is also to keep information about their faith secret (Farrokhnia and Reza, 2010: 88).

Every believer must have his own pir (Edmonds compares his role to that of a father, and he is chosen from among eleven lineages of Sayyids) and dalila (guide). Also (similarly to Yezidism, where each believer is assigned a sheikh and a pir), those subordinate to them are called murids and are expected to give gifts to their mentors (the dalila should get a third of what the pir gives) (Edmonds, 1969: 90-95). The pir and Dalila, like the sheikh and the pir in Yezidism, play important roles in the rituals related to the life cycle.

Among the Ahl-e Haqq, there is no strict inbreeding as in Yezidism. Marriage among the Kaka'i of Hawar is between the respective groups, so it is not uncommon for members of the Sayyid lineages to give their daughters to ordinary believers, and similarly, members of *the Haftawan* clan groups of the Sayyids would not give their daughters to men of the Noe-Sayyid groups. A woman who comes from a community of another religion may also become a member of the Kaka'i, belonging to her husband's spiritual mentor (pir) upon marrying a believer (Edmonds, 1969: 100).

Conclusion

Ahl-e Haqq (also called Yaresan and Kaka'i) is a religion most often classified as one of the movements developed from Ghulat Shiism, characterized by the reverence for Ali and the twelve imams. Sultan Sahak – the founder of Yaresan – who is also considered the most important incarnation of God, was a Kurd and a settled Sufi mystic in the towns of Perdivar and Shahu in the land of Guran. The leading ideas of the religious doctrine of Ahl-e Haqq are the successive manifestations of the Most High and the esotericism of the hidden world (batini), the sacred manifesting itself in the world on the basis of allegory. The incarnations were to be accompanied by seven spiritual beings (Haft Tan), and in some versions by seven higher embodied beings (Haftawana – seven sons). The most frequently mentioned incarnations of God are: Ali, Shah Khusin, Shah Fazl and Sultan Sahak. Sultan Sahak was a Kurd living in the land referred to as Goran or Hewraman. These lands also contain the most important Yaresan temples dedicated to Sahak and Baba Yadigar . Most of the followers live in the Iranian provinces of Kordestan, Kerman Shah, and

Western Azerbaijan. A significant group is also found in Iraq, where they are called Kaka'i.

Conclusion

Ahl-e Haqq represents a complex and internally diverse religious tradition rooted in Kurdish regions of Iran and Iraq, shaped by esoteric cosmology, doctrines of divine manifestation, and the transmigration of souls. Centred on Sultan Sahak as the pivotal theophany, its belief system integrates elements drawn from Shi'i heterodoxy, Sufism, and local religious traditions, while maintaining distinctive ritual practices, sacred poetry, and forms of communal organisation. Despite variations across regions and lineages, shared concepts such as *Haft Tan*, *kalam*, ritual brotherhood, and ethical conduct provide a common framework of belonging. Historically characterised by secrecy and marginalisation, Ahl-e Haqq continues to negotiate its religious identity within changing political, social, and diasporic contexts.

Endnotes

[1] H. Halm , AHL-E HAQQ [in:] Encyclopedia Iranica , available : <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ahl-e-haqq-people> [19/05/2014].

References & Further Readings

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