

The Yezidis. Foreword by Philip Kreyenbroek,
London, Saqi books, 96 p., 35 pl.

Christine Allison



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- 1 An introduction to Yezidism for the general reader has been needed for some time. This book, its straightforward style notwithstanding, is based on both fieldwork and wide research and is a reliable source, giving an accurate description of the Yezidi community in Iraq and the period around the second Gulf War. It is also well illustrated. The introductory chapter describes the Yezidis' historical and geographical background, the main community centres in Iraq (Sheikhan and Sinjar) and the Yezidis' situation as a minority religion within the Kurdish autonomous zone. The second deals with their highly syncretistic religion, its caste system, its rules of conduct, and recent changes in religious habits and attitudes brought about by higher literacy levels and mass media. The chapter on festivals focuses mainly on the Autumn Feast of the Assembly (which figures in many of the colour plates). The final two chapters describe how the Yezidis fared during and after the Second Gulf War. These are followed by a useful select bibliography and an index. More Lady Drower than Monsieur Lescot, this book has a lively tone and a 'warts and all' style of description – which includes everything from the unpopularity of the princely family, the taking of alms by men of religion from the commoners, bathroom provision in the Sacred Valley of Lalesh, the replacement of epic songs by *Mr Bean* as a popular entertainment, to Yezidi anxieties that as a religious minority they might become a terrorist target. This may not be to the taste of all, but the author never claims to be other than an outsider, and the whole is informed by a strong sympathy for the Yezidi community, and a concern that a very old tradition is changing so rapidly that much will soon be lost. Beneath the good humour, this is a serious general book about Yezidism.

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Thèmes : 6.3. Autres religions

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