

Mehrdad Izady and the History of Kurdish Christianity

By Fred Aprim
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Kurdish writer Mehrdad R. Izady continues in the ongoing campaign to Kurdify northern Mesopotamia (Assyria) and corrupts the history of the indigenous Assyrian people. See his latest stunt published about the Kurds under the title "Christianity" here:

<http://www.kurdistanica.com/english/religion/christianity/christianity.html>

One problem with this kind of publication, i.e., material published on private web sites such as kurdistanica, is that it is hard to respond and challenge Izady. It is not possible to respond and have that response posted on the same web site to offer readers the opportunity to read the other side of the argument since the nationalists Kurds who run kurdistanica would not agree to post any challenges to their corrupted version of history. This is unlike the case where an article is posted in a public magazine or newspaper as one can send a reply to that publication, with at least a chance to be published and the people will have a chance to read the challenge.

I have responded earlier to two of Izady's previous writings:

The first, "Kurdishmedia.com Attempts to Rewrite History – Again," appeared in Zinda magazine in response to an article by Izady in www.kurdishmedia.com. Click on the link below to read that response.

<http://www.zindamagazine.com/html/archives/2003/3.31.03/index.php#Literatus>

The second response was to an article titled "Back from the Brink" by David Axe published in *Archaeology* magazine, Volume 59 Number 4, July/August 2006 issue. In that article, Axe, a Kurdish sympathizer; interviewed Izady and the latter went on with his wild claims that the Kurds are the descendents of the ancient Mesopotamian Halaf, Ubaidian, Hurrians, and other civilizations. Of course, this is the biggest lie in the history of Mesopotamia. The magazine has yet to respond to my letter.

Meanwhile, in her letter to *Archeology*, Dr. Eden Naby asked the magazine: "Why Mr. Axe, a journalist with apparent credentials that you accepted, does not cite one specialist on Mesopotamian archeology - whether Prof. MacGuire Gibson from the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago or Prof. Simo Parpola from Helsinki University - is a mystery. And why *ARCHEOLGY* accepted an article so submissive to Kurdish myth-making is yet more shocking."

Many have challenged Izady's writings repeatedly and there are those who choose to ignore him since he is not trusted as a historian. In his latest article, Izady surpassed all revisionists before him; he deserves to be awarded the title "the father of all revisionists."

In his latest article about Kurds and Christianity, Izady proves yet again to be a master plagiarist. His bibliography is centered on the work of a few western missionaries who did interact with Kurds starting in the late 19th century. However, those missionaries never stated what Izady claims. If we read any scholarly work about Christianity and Christians in Asia in general and Mesopotamia in particular, one would convincingly find that despite the fact that missionaries were sent to evangelize the Kurds in late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, the Kurds were never part of early Christian enterprise in Asia.

Lets visit with all the following scholars, theologians and historians who are the experts on Christianity and Christians in Asia and the Middle East, early and modern: Alphone Mingana (The Early Spread of Christianity in Asia), Aziz Atiya (History of Eastern Christianity), Samuel Moffett (A History of Christianity in Asia), John Stewart (Nestorian Missionary Enterprise), Kenneth Latourette (A History of Christianity), Robin Waterfield (Christians in Persia), Everett Ferguson, Michael McHugh and Frederick Norris (The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity), W. A. Wigram (History of the Assyrian Church), P. Y. Saeki (The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China), Gordon Chapman (Christianity Comes to Asia),

Donald Hoke (The Church in Asia), Nicolas Zernov (Eastern Christendom), J. F. Coakley (the Church of the East and the Church of England), Lawrence Browne (The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia), Aubrey Vine (The Nestorian Churches), Mark Dickens (The Church of the East), etc., etc.

My question to Izady is: In which book of the above are the Kurds mentioned in the manner presented, i.e., played any role in early Christianity in the region? Would Izady refer to one sentence from any of the above reputable publications and show the readers when and where are Kurds mentioned as Christians in early or medieval periods?

Izady's article is full of fallacies. He begins by talking about the so-called Kurdish Royal House of Adiabene. The Royal House of Adiabene in question was not Kurdish rather Assyrian. The Royal House of Adiabene in the said period was represented by Queen Helena and her son Izates who converted to Judaism in A.D. 30. Not a single historian ever referred to Helena as Kurdish. There is no better authority on this matter than the accounts of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37 – c. 100) who supports this statement and refutes Izady's claims (Read Whiston, William. trans. *The Works of Josephus*. 14th ed. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 1999. pp. 526-530).

Later, Izady makes his largest leap into fantasy yet and writes: "*With the waning and isolation of Christianity in Kurdistan and the Middle East following the expansion of Islam, the dwindling Christian Kurdish community began to renounce its Kurdish ethnic identity and forged a new one with its neighboring Semitic Christians. The Suriyâni (Nestorian) Christians of Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, who have recently adopted the ethnic name Assyrian, are a Neo-Aramaic-speaking amalgam of Kurds and Semitic peoples who have retained the old religion and language of the Nestorian Church, and the court language of the old Kingdom of Adiabene. A large number of these Suriyâni Christians lived, until the onslaught of World War I, deep in mountainous northern Kurdistan, away from any ethnic or genetic influence of the Semitic Christians of lowland Mesopotamia. Their fair complexion, in marked contrast to that of their Semitic "brethren" in the Mosul region, also bears witness to their Kurdish origin. Yet they speak Neo-Aramaic and insist on a separate ethnic identity.*"

This is myth making at its most imaginative!

How would one respond to such nonsense? Is a response really worth it? The fact is that Izady has no degree in ancient history. Izady has a degree in Kurdish culture from Harvard, which, lucky for him, was granted when few people knew anything about the Kurds. In this vacuum of knowledge and genuine historical sources about Kurds, the Kurdish nationalist movements play a big role in shaping what is published; politicized Kurdish publications masquerade as academic studies. Izady takes advantage of the vacuum in academia and lets his pen run wild in laying claims to parts of history about which he knows almost nothing. While he is little more than a joke in modern Middle East studies, even among Kurdish scholars, yet he is happily hoodwinking others.

For a critique of Izady's flawed concept of Kurdish ancient history and the so-called Kurdistan, see Maria T O'Shea, *Trapped between the Map and Reality: Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan*. New York: Routledge, 2004. O'Shea argues that Kurdistan lacks a real definition and that the concept survives the reality, which is a mixture of myths and modern ambition. For comments on Izady's obsession with creating a Kurdish ancient history that does not exist, see the works of real Kurdish scholars published in a series of books on Kurdish history.

Izady is a Kurdish chauvinist and he has ambiguous credentials that he uses to construct a myth about the Kurdish pre-16th century history of the region. Both Kurdish and other trained historians have exposed Izady's questionable campaign as totally flawed. The fact remains that most of the Kurdish early stages history is fabricated.

As Dr. Eden Naby noted, we need a committee of few capable, educated and resourceful people who will make it their responsibility to respond to popular press accounts, both to encourage good writing and dissuade publications from reproducing rubbish. This must come to pass and it must be an organized effort.

In the meantime, we, as individuals, will continue to do our best to undo the damage done by such writers like Izady who have a dangerous agenda: to corrupt the glorious history of northern Mesopotamia (Assyria).