

MATERIALS AND SOURCES ON AHL-I HAQ IN KURDISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Ahl-i haq "Truth-Worshippers" are an ethno-confessional Kurdish community with own specific beliefs and religious features. They live in the Iraqi and Iranian parts of Kurdistan, they live also in Shiraz, Damawand mountains, Qazvin, and Azerbaijan.

The adherents of Ahl-i haq religious community are known among other faith- believers as Ali-ilahi . This name reflects the belief of Ahl-i haq that Ali was an embodiment of God. On this ground, they are numbered among extreme Shiites. According to Ahl-i haq concepts, Ali b. Abi Talib was one embodiment of God, the first but not the principal one. In addition to him, there are more important embodiments of God: Shakhoshin, Sultan Is'haq, since, the truth (haq) was revealed at their time. From this point of view, these legendary persons are more eligible to be commemorated in the name of the community than Ali.

Ahl-i haq religion is strictly monotheistic: God is the only creator, and nobody helped him in the creation of the world. Monotheism is revealed in the central Sufi dogma- Wahdat al-Wujud (unity of existence).

God has multiply embodied in people. The last embodiment will occur on the Day of Resurrection.

Religious texts mention only seven embodiments of God; proceeding from the analysis of the sources, we assume that the first "real" embodiment of God (don) was Ali b. Abi Talib, rather than Khavandgar. The latter was God himself in the period of creation of the Universe. In each period God was surrounded by four angels, each of angels embodying in real person.

"Jam" is the general assembly which convened not only for religious purposes, but also for marriages, for decision-making on political and administrative matters, etc. The assemblies are held in a specially allocated place "Jamkhane".

Ahl-i haq religion has a hidden character, its members have to hide their faith from the others, but at the same time they need to recognize each other- this is achieved through a password, or a catchphrase.

Keywords: Ahl-i haq, Ali-ilahi, Truth-Worshippers, Kurdish community

"Truth-Worshippers" are an ethno-confessional Kurdish community with own specific beliefs and religious features. They live in the Iraqi and Iranian parts of Kurdistan, in particular, the area of Hauraman, divided into two parts at the borders. The Iranian part includes the territories of Karaid, Perdivar, Zahau, Kermanshah, and Luristan. Outside these , Ahl-i haq live in Shiraz, Damawand mountains, Qazvin, and Azerbaijan.

In Iraq the area of Ahl-i haq habitation is called Hauraman Lehon (another name- Shanderwe), which is part of the Suleimania Province. Here, the villages Hawar, Chalan, Hawarakon and Daratu house their sacred places. Members of the community also reside in Kirkuk, in the villages Matiq, Tobzawe, Alisura, Jinglwe, Lhe'b, Zankar and others. In the area Mosul they live in villages- Matrad, Ofaid, Tuzlaban, Hordak, Kolabor, and Kalak. In the city of Khanaqin they reside in the villages- Mehas, Sheibrahim, Puik, and Chanchakal /21, 106/. Besides, Ahl-i haq live in the small town Mandali, in Kalamhaj Neighbourhood / 19,390/. About 424 people of them live in the town Guver in the Erbil province /16,133/.

Most investigators wrongly maintain that Ahl-I haq also live in Turkey, confusing them with Kizilbash, known under the name Alavi(Alawi).Regardless of some similarities and mutual linking, these communities differ in their beliefs and rituals. There are also differences in their religious organization. The confusion of the two communities affected the calculation of Ahl-i haq number. G.A. Shpazhnikov, for example, provides the total approximate number of Ahl-i haq, including Turkish Kizilbash – 3 to 5 mln people /10, 23/ .

V. Ivanov asserts that in addition to Turkey, Ahl-i haq live in the Caucasus/ 13, 1/; Their number and abodes are not specified.

It should be noted, that materials to be used as basis for calculation of their number are unavailable at present . One more complication is that Ahl-i haq are represented not only by Kurds, but also by Persians and Azerbaijanians. Probably, other peoples are also in their number. This fact made an Ahl-i haq write that their religion, in addition to Kurds, spreads among Turks, Persians and Arabs. Moreover, he adds that there are Ahl-i haq also in Turkey, Syria and Lebanon /23, 11/. Obviously, the writer means Kizilbshes of Turkey, Druzes of Lebanon and Nusairits of Syria.

It is evident that Ahl-i haq speak the Kurdish "gorani" dialect. In this connection, V. Zhukovsky notes the significance of Gorani Kurds for two reasons: first, they have their own dialect; second, they supply the largest number of the sect adherents /4, 2 /.

Gorani Kurds themselves call their dialect "macho". It is the religious language of the Shanderwe' area, it is the language of Ahl-i haq religious literature /24, 87/. Some of Ahl-i haq consider that in the Shanderwe' area they ceased to speak macho, but they use "sorani" dialect, while in the Provinces Kirkuk, Erbil, Mosul and Khanaqin Macho sustains its significance / 20, 7/ .

The adherents of Ahl-i haq religious community are known among other faith- believers as Ali-ilahi . This name reflects the belief of Ahl-i haq that Ali was an embodiment of God. On this ground, they are numbered among extreme Shiites. However, things are not as simple as that. According to Ahl-i haq concepts, Ali b. Abi Talib was one embodiment of God, the first but not the principal one. In addition to him, there are more important embodiments of God: Shakhoshin, Sultan Is'haq, since, according to the legend, the truth-(haq) was revealed at their time. From this point of view, these legendary persons are more eligible to be commemorated in the name of the community than Ali.

V. Zhukovsky writes about the invalidity of the name Ali-ilahi: "... if on this ground they may be called Ali-ilahi, then the names Eesa-ilahi or Ibrahim-ilahi could be also valid, because Ali does not differ from Jesus at all, and the latter from Abraham"/4, 10/¹ . V. Minorsky also thinks that the name Ali- ilahi is inaccurate /6, VIII/.

The explanation of the fact why the name of Ali turned out more preferable is that adherents of other religions, primarily Muslims, knew only Ali out of all Ahl-i haq deities.

Probably, Ahl-i haq themselves appeared as Shiites so as to conceal their faith, their desire to conceal their faith, and, simultaneously, recognition of Ali as one of deities to some extent unwillingly promoted the prestige of the name of Ali. His name even became part of their everyday life. These shows in greetings: "ya Ali", and the reply: "maula Ali".

However, the name Ahl-i haq is more preferable for members of the community, since they consider their faith the true faith, and themselves truth-worshippers. Anyway, this name is not accurate either, because it is a Sufi term, used by adherents of other religions, too.

Ahl-i haq have two other self-names: "Yarsan" & "Kakai". There are various opinions concerning the name "Yarsan"; some people think that it stems from the word "yarstan"-

¹ Our materials are void of mentioning Jesus or Abraham at all .

homeland of friends /22, 47/; but this name is sooner a Toponym in its meaning. According to others, the population of Hauraman pronounce the word "Sultan" as "San"; the name of Sultan Is'haq sounds as Sani Saq . Hence "yarsan"- friends of Sultan / 23, 11/. This explanation is quite logical; taking into account that "san" is an ancient word meaning "great", "immortal" and has nothing to do with the Arabic word "Sultan" /25, 74/ ².

In Iraqi Kurdistan the most wide-spread self-name is "Kakaii". According to the informer, the self-name in Iran is Ahl-i haq³.

In the Kurdish language the word "kaka" means "brother", it is widely spread in all dialects.

There is a legend usually referred to in explanation of the word "Kakaii" as a religious community. According to the legend, Sheikh Eesa, father of Sultan Is'haq, lived in the village called Barznja. The temple (Takiya) of the village needed repair; the Shaikh and his sons started the repair. One of the beams turned out to be short, it did not reach from wall to wall; Is'haq, who held the end of the beam, cried out to his brother: "Kaka raichesha!"(Brother, pull!)-the beam stretched and reached the opposite wall. This miracle was the reason to use the word "kaka" referring to Sultan Is'haq's community.

But this is just a legend, the reality was different. Members of Ahl-i haq community are considered brothers or friends (yars) in this and future lives. All of them are "yarsani", i.e. friends of Sultan Is'haq. Thus, their self-name "kaka" reflects concept of brotherhood of the member of the community.

The origin of the word "kaka"- brother should not be looked for in Christianity, like V. Ivanov does, who identifies Ahl-i haq with Christians since monks call each other brothers. He also makes a mistake to believe that this word is not used in Kurdistan /3, 56/. According to Abbas al-Azawi, "Kakaii" is the Kurdish name of Futuwwa movement at the Abbaside time /17, 11/. Rojbayani asserts that "Kakaii" is the name of an ancient Kurdish tribe mentioned by al-Masudi in "Muruj az-zahab" as "kakhahi" /19, 430/. All these explanations are doubtful. Most probably, the word "kaka" is related to one of the basic dogmas of the faith- that of brotherhood of all members of Ahl-i haq.

There was a discussion in Kurdish magazines and newspapers in Iraq between members of Ahl-i haq concerning the origin of the name "Kakaii". Someone maintained that it is the name of a

² In the Hett language there was the word "santa"- king, it was used for one of gods /3, 124/. Probably, there is a certain relation between "santa" and "san".

³The informer was Mr. S. F., aged 27, an adherent of Ahl-i haq , from the Seiide kin. The meeting took place on May 10, 1987.

tribe in Kurdistan/ 22, 47/. However it is well known that many Kurdish tribes belong to Ahl-i haq , and religious texts and songs do not mention any Kakaii tribe; at the same time, they mention the tribes- Kabaltas or Kavirtas, Nanakali, Jaf, Dilfi, Bilbas / 6,56-57,59/, Shkak / 13, 205/. If the name "Kakaii" was the name of a tribe, most probably it would be the tribe of Sultan Is'haq himself, since he is the founder and central figure of Ahl-i haq religion. But Sultan Is'haq was born in the village Barznja, Shahrazur region in Iraqi Kurdistan. His mother was from Jaf tribe; the word "Kakaii" is absent from Sultan Is'haqs biography.

According to another more grounded opinion, "Kakaii" is not the name of a tribe, but that of Sultan Is'haq's followers. In the tribes Sanjabi, Lak, Jaf there are Sunnites, Shiites and Kakaiides. At the same time, Kakaiides may be represented by Turks, Arabs and Persians /23, 11/. That is why the name of Kakaii is a local name of Ahl-i haq in Iraqi Kurdistan, which is synonym of the term "religion of Yars (brothers)". Ahl-i haq are also called other names. In Iran they are called "Kurdacha- Kurdish children"/ 4, 2/. This name is an evidence that Ahl-i haq religion is exclusively Kurdish. In Iran one more name used- "Khurush-kush", i.e. those who kill cocks /4, 2/. The origin of this name stems from the fact that sacrifice of Ahl-i haq are primarily cocks. A relatively small number of studies are devoted to Ahl-i haq and their religion. Most of them are shallow reviews of Ahl-i haq beliefs containing erroneous information.

One of the first people who wrote about Ahl-i haq was Major Rawlinson who was mistaken to believe that their object of worship embodied in Benyamin, Musa, Daud, Ilias and Salman al-Farsi, and that members of the community worshiped Haft-Tan /14, 36/. However, the above characters are not embodiment of God but those of four angels, while Haft-Tan is name of Seven Pirs who accompany God; they are worshipped by Ahl-i haq, but not deified.

Abbas al-Azawi refers to historic hypotheses which have no proofs in the history of Ahl-i haq origin or their beliefs. Al-Azawi first maintains that Kakaiides were an order of Futuwwa in Iraq led by Caliph Nasir li-din Allah al-Abbasi /17,26 /. Then he asserts that Sultan Is'haq is the founder of the group "Is'haqia"⁴/17, 41/, stating simultaneously that Ahl-i haq are followers of al-Hallaj / 17, 53-5/. These and other contradictions make the work of al-Azawi extremely unreliable from the scientific point of view.

E.A. Belyaev also has inaccuracies. First, he names no other embodiments of God but Ali. Second, he points out the Christian influence on Ahl-i haq beliefs and rituals, specially the ritual of communion /1, 84/. This influence is observed only with Kizilbashs whom he ranks among Ahl-i haq, but not with Ahl-i haq. V. Nikitin on the contrary rejects any Christian influence on

⁴ Is'haqites are followers of Is'haq b. Mahmud an-Nahai, nicknamed al-Ahmar, who preached extreme Shiit-Pantheistic teaching in Madain in the late 9th century .

Ahl-i haq. At the same time, he points out the presence of Ahl-i haq in Turkey, obviously meaning Kizilbashes, and ignoring Christian influence on them /7, 345/.

Shakir Khasbak is also mistaken to consider that God embodied in Benyamin, Musa, Daud, Masih, Muhammad, Baba Ydgar, Husien and seven Pirs. Here, he repeats the wrong concepts of Rawlinson. He separates Ali-ilahi from Kakaiides, considering them independent religious community. Moreover, Shakir Khasbak fails to mention the nomenclature Ahl-i haq at all /18, 492/.

Rojbayani believes that Kakai are an ancient Kurdish religious community "Dev Yasna", i.e. Dau worshippers. In his opinion, Dau is a contracted form of Diyaus, which turned into Taus with Ezides and into Daud with Kakaiides /19, 417/. It is difficult to agree with such ancient origin of Ahl-i haq religion.

S.L. Vassilyev quotes inaccurate information about Ahl-i haq: "Ali is embodiment of Allah, divine truth, and it is he who embodies in all prophets and imams, and appears as Mahdi" /2, 157/. S. Vassilyev, following the others, mentions only the embodiment of God in Ali. In fact, Ahl-i haq believe that God does not embody in prophets or imams, and the figure that appears at "the end of the world" is not at all from Shiite teachings; according to Ahl-i haq that will be Shakhoshin.

In addition to the above works, there is a number of studies that have scientific value; they may become a good scientific ground for future investigations.

The first one to be mentioned is the paper by V. Zhukovsky entitled "The sect of Truth-worshippers- Ahl-i Hakk in Persia". This is the first investigation of Ahl-i haq in the Russian language. The writer met the representative of Ahl-i haq religion by chance, he succeeded in obtaining a lot of valuable information concerning their rituals and beliefs. Especially important are the religious poems written down by V. Zhukovsky under the title "Symbol of Faith", which contain explanation of numerous aspects of this religion.

The significance of V. Minorsky's work "Materials to study the Persian Truth-worshippers Sect, or Ali Ilahi" is in the fact that writer collected a part of Ahl-i haq religious texts that belongs to "Saranjam" in the Persian language, religious poetry in Azeri, and provided commented translation into Russian. The work by V. Minorsky is actually a collection of texts for further studies, which is shown in the title. Its meaning is that it is the first publication and translation of a very important religious text "Saranjam" (completion), which is indispensable to any investigator.

Also important are the two articles by V.Minorsky about Ahl-i haq in two editions of "The Encyclopedia of Islam". The article about Sultan Is'haq correctly pointed out that this figure- the principal embodiment of God- was an actual person; some provisions of Ahl-i haq religion are also worded /12, 1934, 546/.

The article entitled "Ahl-i haq" contains information concerning the "secret" aspects of the religion, description of rituals and customs, clarification of the residence areas of the community. In the opinion of the scholar, Ahl-i haq dogmata are syncretic; though it is based on Shiite Maximalism, it is still very far from Shiism, being an independent religious system. V. Minorsky separates Ahl-i haq from "Ali- ilahi"/12, 1960, 260-263/, asserting that each of Ali-ilahi, Kizilbash, Ahl-i haq, Shabak and Sarli are a single group /ibid, 329/.

The work of V.Ivanov "The Truth-worshippers of Kurdistan. Ahl-i haq texts" contain the first publication of a number of religious texts and their translation into English. The book contains a deep analysis of the material. V. Ivanov attempted to show the influence of various religions and sects on Ahl-i haq beliefs. The conclusions of the investigator may be summarized in the following way: "Ahl-i haq split from Ismailites and underwent a large influence of the Christian Pavlician movement". Our primary grounds were the Persian texts published by V.Ivanov.

Among the works to be mentioned is the book "Kakaii" by Hauramani (in Kurdish language). Hauramani lived in the village Hawar for three years; in addition to his personal observations, the book contains a number of religious texts: "Songs of Yarsan Faith(Surudahai Dini Yrsan)", "A Book of Yarsan Symbols (Daftari Rumuzi Yarsan)" in Gorani dialect.

Hauramani translated these texts into Sorani dialect and provided their interpretation. He attempted to make a critical analysis of the opinions of other investigators. However, his attempts to present Ahl-i haq dogmata as a modern form of Zoroastrism are unconvincing /24, 247/.

Personal meetings with an Ahl-i haq, who presented valuable information and gave explanation concerning many questions, became a very important source of this study. The informer provided a number of unknown data about Ahl-i haq secret teachings (for example, the password, or the catchword used by the members of the community to recognize each other became known).It should be noted that in many cases the data of the informer do not correspond to the text. This is clear, because a folk form, as a rule, differs, to a various extent, from the official prescription.

Most of investigators insist on calling Ahl-i haq a sect. It is high time to start using appropriate names. Ahl-i haq have their own dogmata system, a pantheon of gods, eschatology, holy books, rituals and customs. The existence of other religious elements in Ahl-i haq beliefs is a common

phenomena witnessed in every religion. It is clear that Ahl-i haq dogmata developed under the influence of Shiism, local beliefs and, later, evolved into an independent ethno- confessional system, which may be fairly called an independent religion.

Dogmata of Ahl-i haq religion

Ahl-i haq religion is strictly monotheistic: God is the only creator, and nobody helped him in the creation of the world.

Monotheism is revealed in the central dogma- Wahdat al-Wujud (unity of existence).

Wahdat al-Wujud is a Sufi term; it means that God manifests himself everywhere, that creation of God is his particle, reflex-ion of his beauty.

The verses by a Sufi poet Mirza Galib provide a good explanation of Wahdat al-Wujud concept: "What is the world? A mirror of truth; its vastness is a place to contemplate the divine face; in every tiny particle one witnesses an apparition of the single Creator" /8, 75/.

A similar concept is described in the Ahl-i haqs holy text "Tezkirei a'la": All things are particle of the true light (nuri haq); this house is the house of the pure and right"/13, text 2/. According to the above extract, everything in the world is pure and sacred, since it is made of divine light; this world is the place of the pure and faithful. That is why Ahl-i haq do not reject other religions, considering their adherents truly faithful.

Assessing the place of Wahdat al-Wujud dogma in Ahl-i haq religion, V. Zhukovsky gives the following definition: "(This is) a teaching about the presence of a divine particle in every object"/ 4, 9/. There is divine light in everything, even in animals; there is a divine spark everywhere: to torture an animal means to insult God/4, 13/.

The second important dogma is that of embodiment of God in earthly people. Ahl-i haq believe that God embodied in people, manifesting himself as an ordinary man, with simultaneous miracle- making to confirm his divine being, so as to show people the way of truth.

All investigators think that God has had seven embodiments. That is why they divide Ahl-i haq history into seven epochs or periods. However, it should be noted that, first, God had more than seven embodiments; second, it would be more exact to speak about six epochs of Ahl-i haq history, not seven. We shall discuss it below .

The third dogma is no less important than the two previous ones. This is the dogma of transition of souls (metempsychosis). After the death of a man, his soul transits to the body of another man, i.e. revives, provided the deceased person was a good believer; otherwise, his soul transits to the

body of an animal. They say in this connection that death is like a duck diving in one place and emerging in other. Ahl-i haq call the metempsychosis phenomenon "don"- this Turkish word means "undressing" /13, 8/. Every person is to undergo 1001 dons; this also applies to God who moves in a man 1001 times. In metempsychosis, a man is rewarded for his deeds: A good man stays man, while the soul of a bad man transits to an animal. At the end of the 1001st period, the man becomes a "Didadar"- (who recovered his sight), the truth is revealed to him and he transfers to the rank of angels, where he stays till the advent of God embodied in Shakhoshin. This will happen when all people complete 1001 dons; after that everyone will become divine creatures⁵.

The idea of appearance of Shakhoshin on the Day of Resurrection is similar to the Christian idea of Christ, Shiite concept of Mahdi, and Sunnite concept of Essa and Mahdi. The difference is that with Christians and Muslims Jesus (Essa) and Mahdi will come before the Day of Resurrection, so as to correct people and restore justice. With Ahl-i haq, Shakhoshin is God himself, his advent will mean the end of "this life"; there will be no Last Judgment, nor paradise, nor hell, because everyone will get salvation when alive, and will live like an angel. This concept differs Ahl-i haq from Christian and Muslims.

However, religious texts mention Mahdi and "Sahib az-Zaman"(The Master of Time). "The Day of Punishment" is also mentioned when rulers will be judged /12, 1960, 261/.

We consider that Ahl-i haq connect the concept of the Day of Reckoning with the tribute to other faith-believers. Ahl-i haq who recognize other religions believe that their adherents will meet the Day of Resurrection according to the laws of these religions. There is one more evidence of it ; one of the texts says that Sultan Is'haq (the principal embodiment of God) established the ritual of "nut cracking" (initiation ritual). According to Sultan Is'haq, he who cracks the nut will not go to the flame of Hell /13, text 165/. Hence the existence of Hell and Paradise, however, they are intended not for Ahl-i haq, but for other faith-bleviers.

According Ahl-i haq beliefs, the Day of Resurrection will occur in Sharazur area in Iraqi Kurdistan. The name of the area is interpreted as Shazuhur(the place where God appears).

Inside every man there is struggle between reason and passions. Reason is a source of all goods; passion source of trouble and evil. Man has his own will; in the struggle of passions and reason, passions win sometimes. This entails change of values, the truth is lost. That is why Shakhoshin

⁵ Described according the words of the informer.

will have to descend in the body of man to restore the laws of life /4, 3/⁶. Thus, man himself is responsible for what he is doing.

He should walk the way of reason, harnessing his passions and desires. There is no Shaitan and evil spirits in Ahl-i haq religion- all trouble come from man himself. Van Bruinssen maintains that Ahl-i haq worship Shaitan, like Ezides. He assumes that some members of the community consider Ezidism their religion/15, 422/⁷. According to the informer, Ahl-i haq do not use the word "Shaitan", it may be heard only from Muslims.

Concept of Divine Embodiments

God has multiply embodied in people. The last embodiment will occur on the Day of Resurrection.

Religious texts mention only seven embodiments of God:

- 1- Khavandgar
- 2- Ali b. Abi Tlib
- 3- Shakhoshin
- 4- Sultan Is'haq
- 5- Shah Quliwais (Qurmiz)
- 6- Muhammad-beg
- 7- Khan Atash

Proceeding from the analysis of the sources, we assume that the first "real" embodiment of God (don) was Ali b. Abi Talib, rather than Khavandgar. The latter was God himself in the period of creation of the Universe, the four angels (Jubrail, Israfeel, Mikaeel, Izrail-Razbar) and Adam.

Many features and specifics of the Khavandgar period coincide with the Muslim account of Allah and his creation of the world. The inclusion of the Khavandgar period description in the religious legend is a direct reflexion of the Islamic basis of Ahl-i haq religion. This is also confirmed by the fact that Ahl-i haq themselves refer to that period using the Muslim word

⁶ Probably, by Shakhoshin God in general is meant, since Shakhoshin is an embodiment of God at particular time, and after disappearing he will reappear only on the Day of Resurrection.

⁷ Ezidism is a syncretic religion. It is confessed by a part of Kurds who make an ethno- confessional community with the Kurdish people. Ezidism lacks the concept of Shaitan either, that is why they cannot be considered worshippers of Shaitan and evil spirits.

"Sharia"/12, 1960,260/, this word being also used to refer to Muslims/4, 3/. One can come to the conclusion that Ahl-i haq see the Muslim Shariat as the lowest stage in the evolution of their religion. In this way Ahl-i haq show that Islam has stopped its development while their religion achieved new summits. Calling Muslims "Sharia", Ahl-i haq emphasize that it was themselves, not Muslims, who in the evolution found the truth, while Muslims stayed at the level of their law- Shariat.

Thus, the Khavandgar period is seen as the time of creation by God of the world and man.

The first embodiment of God (don) was Ali b. Abi Talib. The story of creation is short and original. After the creation of Adam, God gave him the appearance of Ali and embodied in him/24, 192/. That was the beginning of the Ali period, which was called "Tarika". The meaning of this term is unclear; it may be assumed that it is the emerging of Shiism and streams within it. The Ali period is the second step in the rising of Ahl-i haq religion. This explains the influence of Shiite ideas on Ahl-i haq. According to the legend- the most important event of that period was the ascension (Mi'raj) of Muhammad to heaven and his meeting with God, where he discovered that God was his cousin Ali b. Abi Talib. Ali gave Muhammad the Quran and told him to read only 300 thousand words of it to the community. The remaining 300 thousand words were banned by Ali, as they contained the secret truth /13, text23/.

The second important event of that period was hiding by Ali in the ceiling of Kufa mosque of a scroll containing the truth. The scroll was hidden together with a jug of sour milk. After hiding the scroll, Ali told his associates: "After my death, when the sun sets three times bowing to God, a man will appear who will find this scroll- know this is Ali ! He will reveal secrets and fundamentals of the true faith to everybody" /25, 74/. Ali will be killed by Ibn-Muljam, which he will know in advance / 13, text 27/. In the second period, God is embodied in Shakhoshin. The events of that time develop in Luristan (Feili). Shakhoshin's mother is known under the name Mama Jalala, the only daughter of Mirza Ma'ana /6, 12/.

Once a particle of the sun entered Mama Jalala's mouth. A few days later she got pregnant. When her father and brothers learned about it, they decided to kill her. The brothers led Mama Jalala to the forest. However, when they tied her, they heard the voice of a baby in her womb which stopped them. The brothers got frightened and took her back home, where they described to their father what had happened. The father accepted the daughter on the condition that she should give birth through her mouth; if it was ordinary childbirth she would be killed. After a certain period of time Mama Jalala gave birth through her mouth to something glaring. At that time her homeland was attacked by the Turks (Roms). Mirza Ma'ana fled with his family, the daughter and newborn baby stayed, and nobody was able to approach and take the glaring infant. When everybody was gone, the sun set three times before the new baby. This was witnessed by Kaka

Rida(Rada)⁸. He realized that the new-born child was the promised Ali. He came and stayed with the child who recognized Kaka Rida also. When he heard about the Turkish attack, he told Kaka Rida to bring a colt, sat on it, attacked the Turks and destroyed them. The place of his victory is still called Rumishkan in south of Kermanshah /6, 24/.

After that Shakhoshin visited his associates at various places showed them the miracles and they believed him. Then he went to Kufa; here he "took out the scroll of the unspoken mystery and the cup of sour milk. The King of the World (i.e. Shakhoshin, R.S.) said: Someone will come with seven companions... and he will read to you everything contained in the scroll; he will divide the cup of sour milk between friends and touch it with his blessed finger... He is I, I am He...". After that the King of the World put the cup of sour milk onto the H'urin stone /6, 41/. Then Shakhoshin went towards the sea and disappeared in it.

The Shakhoshin period is known under the name "ma'rifa" (cognition). Probably, this term means cognition of God and Ahl-i haq religion, because people believed Shakhoshin only after he showed them a miracle. He told them that the truth will be revealed in the next period. The word "ma'rifa" precisely characterizes the meaning of the events of that legendary period.

The third period is the most important, as ahl-i haq see it. It is the period of Sultan Is'haq who was the principal embodiment of God. This period is known as "Haqiqat"- truth. At that time Sultan Is'haq revealed and announced the secret aspects of ahl-i haq religion.

The legend says that after the disappearance of Shakhoshin his associates went to look for their teacher and found him in the sea depths, where he was speaking to the depth creatures. There, Shakhoshin told them to go to the house of Sheikh Eesa and promised to come there as a falcon. They came to Sheikh Eesa's home and insisted that he had to marry Khatun Daira, Hasan Beg Jaf's daughter. After the wedding, the young wife got pregnant. Before childbirth a white falcon appeared in the sky and flew directly in Sheikh Eesa's house. At this moment Daira's belly disappeared, and the falcon took the appearance of a boy. That was how Sultan Is'haq was born. After Sheikh Eesa's death, there was enmity between his son by another wife Kadir Napak (Kadir the Impure) and Sultan Is'haq. The latter fled to Hauraman. He built a bridge over the river Sirwan there. That place was called Pirdiwar, it became his residence, and his grave is there too.

Ahl-i haq religion was actually shaped and established in the Sultan Is'haq period. It was he who revealed to his associates the secrets which determined its dogmas and laws. The first thing he did was to arrange the religious system, starting with the initiation ritual. Then he established

⁸ The first angel of Shakhoshin, i.e. embodiment Jubrail.

obligatory sacrifices in two forms- nezr and qurbani (made at religious assemblies- jam). Sultan Is'haq determined the rules of Ahl-i haq behavior.

The next embodiment of God was Qurmiz (Sha Quli Weis), then Muhammad- beg, and Khan Atash after him.

These are six known periods. In addition to the above, God had many other embodiments. However, little is known about them. A fragment of "Tazkarei A'la" has the following words of Muhammad-beg:" After me Khan Atash will come, Ama Makli after him, next Ser Khosh, then Sultan Mahmud, Mirza Abbas, Mirza Nizam, Aga Mirza. All of them are I, and I am they!" / 13, text 131/.

V. Minorsky quotes a story of a Seide Ahl-i haq from Mazendaran named Alem Ghir, who was considered an embodiment of God:"Seide had 1000 adherents. The disturbance stirred by him in Mazendaran led to his arrest in November 1891.He lived in Tehran as honored prisoner, freely managing his flock"/6, X/. In another paper V. Minorsky says that Khan Ahmad-khan Ardalani, died in 1636, members of Ahl-i haq "Ibrahimi" group regarded him as an embodiment of God /26, 11/.

Titles of the names are an indicator to identify the time and place of Ahl-i haq history events. Such titles as Khawandigar, Maula Ali and Shakhoshin are of Iranian origin; Muhammad-beg and Khan Atash are Azerbaijanian. "Sultan" was used in Kurdistan, especially in the Iraqi part, when it was under Osmands; this title was widely used at that time. Religious titles also serve as an indicator: Pir, Bawa, Shah, Dede were used long before the appearance of Christianity and Islam in Kurdistan. "Pir" is a contracted version of the Persian word "pedar", meaning "father" or "spiritual teacher"; for example, Pir Magrun, Pir Shalyar, Pir Mikaeel and others. The term "Bawe" used by Ahl-i haq originates from the word "baba", which was widely spread in Saljuq time, like: Baba Ali Hamadani, Baba Tahir Hamadani, Baba Tugur...

The title "Dede" came into usage at the time of onset of Kizilbash movement (Safavides), in relation to Sheikh Haidar Safavi. The members of the Sufi fraternity "bektashiya" began using it with the names of their leaders. For example, Dede Qanber, Dede Haidar, Dede Alau and others /19, 406/. The above titles may provide approximate dates and locations of prominent Ahl-i haq figures.

Angels of various periods

In each period (don or qapi) God was surrounded by four angels, each of angels embodying in real person. There are a few lists of angels. Differing in periods and names not only of the embodiments of angels, but also of God. The attempts to sort out the lists may lead to

contradictory conclusions. That is why we shall confine ourselves to mentioning only the most important names.

The legend says that the following angels existed in the Khawanigar period (Shari'at): Jubraeel, Mikaeel, Israfeel and 'zraeel- they are called "Yaran Chahar Malak"(four angel brothers). According to "Tazkirei A'la", Khawandigar created them out of the sacred light /13, text 8/. "The songs of Yaran Religion" says that Khawandigar created Jubraeel from clay and made him traveling companion, then he created the other angels /24, 97/.

According to another source, Khawandigar created Jubraeel from his armpit, Mikaeel from his mouth, Israfeel from his breath and 'Zraeel from air and light /12, 1960, 260/. It should be noted that Khawandigar divided 'Zraeel into two parts, with a beam of light and a crust of bread staying between them; at that moment Khawandigar said:" I separated Razbar from 'Zraeel, to become Mistress Qiyamat (Khatun Qiyamat) and help people, ask for mercy in people's hereafter; and 'Zraeel will take out people's souls"/ 13, text 15/. V. Ivanov identifies Razbar with the Goddess of Water (Arwisura Anahita) who would later become, in his opinion, the wife of Mitra (Ritsh) /13, 43/.

It should be said that the name Razbar should probably sound as Ramzbar, meaning "owner of Excellence". Hawramani reproduces this name correctly /24, 116/. Such an interpretation of this name is still more correct because the fifth angel embodied in the mother of an embodiment of God: in Fatima bint Asad- Ali's mother, in Mame Jalala- Shakhoshin's mother, in Khatun Daira- Sultan Is'haq's mother, and so on.

There were five angels in the Ali period: Salman, Muhammad, Qanbar, Nusair and Fatima. Angels embodied in associates and relatives of Ali b. Abi Talib- embodiment of God. There is some unclarity concerning Nusair; if it is Muhammad b. Nusair, the founder of the Nusairite sect, he lived two centuries later than Ali (died in 873). V. Ivanon correctly thinks that another Nusair is meant /13, 166/. There is a legend that Ali cured the sick Nusair. The astonished Nusair exclaimed:" You are God!", Ali got furious and killed him; but later Ali raised him from the dead for his mother's sake. After the resurrection, Nusair again called Ali God and he was killed again. This happened a few times /4, 9/.

In Shakhoshin's period angels embodied in Kaka Rida, Baba Buzurg, Kuri Faqe, Baba Tahir and Mama Jalala.

Angels of Sultan Is'haq's period are: Benyamin, Daud, Musa, Mustafa and Khatun Daira . Since this period is the most important in the Ahl-i haq religious history, Sultan Is'haq and his five angels are best known and recognized by all streams of Ahl-i haq. That is why this group of angels is often referred into all periods of the embodiment of God. It is interesting that Ahl-i haq

call their religion by the name of the principal angel- "Sharti Benyamin(condition of Benyamin)". Benyamin is usually called Pir Benyamin.

In addition to the embodiments of God and angels, Ahl-i haq have beliefs also in groups of saints. The first group is called "Haft Tan"- this is the name of five Sultan Is'haq's angels: Benyamin, Daud, Musa, Mustafa, and Razbar plus Shaibrahim and Baba Buzurg. The second group is "haftawana" which includes seven Sultan Is'haq's sons: Mir Habib- shah, Seiid Bolwefa⁹, Sheikh Shahedin¹⁰, Mir Mustafa, Seiid Mohammed Gure Savar¹¹, Haji-baba Hoseni, and Hamush Prochin¹²/ 6, 52-53/.

"The Songs of Yarsan Religion" contain the definitions of the roles of the two groups by Sultan Is'haq:" Haftan is a part of my body, and Haftawana is a particle of my light. But the body and the light is one" /24, 101/.

The third group includes 72 Pirs who lived in Dalaho¹³; this group headed by Pir Rustam.

S. Edmonds mentions one more group- "Haft Halife"(seven out of 72 pirs), especially distinguished by Sultan Is'haq to be spiritual teachers of Ahl-i haq; it is led by Daud. S. Edmonds says that these seven can be seiid's teachers/11,186/. This group is not mentioned in other sources, even the informer lacked any idea about it.

Ahl-i haq spiritual hierarchy

Ahl-i haq have the following spiritual titles: Seiid (Pir), Khalifa (Dalil), Chavash(Khadim), and Dervish. The first 3 titles are inherited and belong to three kin's charged with various religious duties.

Seiids are the kin of Sultan Is'haq, posterity of Haftavana group (Ojaq). Chairmen of religious assemblies (Jams) are selected from this kin. Members of the kin are entitled to perform initiations as well as to be pirs. The kin of Seiids and its members in no way differ from common members of the community. Rojbayani is not right believing that Seiids manage spiritual and everyday life of Ahl-i haq /19, 426/. Only the selected Seiid to chair religious assemblies is distinguished. Outside of the Jam he is a common person.

⁹ More correct : Seiid Abu- l- Wafa .

¹⁰ More correct : Sheikh Shihab ad- din.

¹¹ More correct : Seiid Muhammad Bora Suar.

¹² Hauramani quotes another list of this group: Mir, Seiid Mustafa, Seiid Muhammad, Seiid Abd al-Wafa, Seiid Shihab ad-Din, Seiid Habib-shah, and Seiid Bawais /24, 101/.

¹³ One of Shaho peaks in Hauraman. A legend says that a secret truth is hidden there.

Seiids are divided into several branches; theoretically there should be seven, according to the number of Sultan Is'haq's sons. Each branch should bear the name of one of them. Though Seiids are the posterity of the embodiments of God, they do not become such embodiments, as V. Ivanov incorrectly writes/ 13, 5/. It should be stressed once that Seiids do not at all differ from other members of the community. Much higher than them are Didadars- people who have had 1001 embodiments (dons), they are regarded as angels on the earth.

A Seiid selected as a chairman of the religious assembly usually wears clothes of Moslim Seiids: heel-long shirt and a short jacket; an aba is put on it; a green turban on the head and wears a green belt. A long beard is obligatory. In addition to the money earned in a usual way, Seiids receive presents in various forms, primarily for the performance of the initiation ritual.

Every Ahl-i haq has a spiritual "father"- Pir; he is usually called "bawa". Pirs should be of the seiid kin, they enjoy great respect, people kiss their hand at meeting. A man can not marry a member of his Pir's family, because they are considered his "relatives".

Khalifa are posterity of Pir Ismail Kaulani, one of the 72 Pirs; they also come from one kin /23, 7/. Seiid elected to chair the assembly chooses a Khalifa from that kin. Khalifa plays the second role after the Seiid in the performance of rituals. He is usually called "mam"- uncle. One of the members of Khalife kin becomes rahber (dalil) to proselities. During Jams the selected Khalifa recites prayers. A religious text says that Khalifa receives hides of sacrifice animals /13, text15/. Like dalil, Khalifa washes the bodies of the dead under Pir's supervision. Chawash (Khadim) belong to a special kin of Sultah Is'haq's associates- Kak Ahmad Konoposh. He is chosen to serve Jams; he also slaughters sacrifice animals/ 23, 7/. If this kin is not represented at some place, Chawash is assigned from the Seiids. Thus, Seiid and Khalifa are compulsory figures of religious life, Chawashes are not.

The informer asserts that representatives of all three kins are always present at all places of Ahl-i haq settlement. The village Hawarekon has only 6 houses, however, all the three above kins are represented.

Kalamkhuan is a performer of religious songs and poems, he usually does not belong to any particular kin. Any able person may become Kalamkhuan. According to the informer, almost all members of the community have a good knowledge of religious songs and poems.

Dervishes are people of righteous way of life, they live in pauperism and travel from place to place. They earn their living by begging. Dervishes cure the sick and pray for them. People believe that they know secret things, and that is why they are specially respected. A man who opted for the way of dervish ties a piece of decayed fabric to his right forearm, and his dalil presses it against his skin by the thumb, as if putting a "seal" on his arm.

Dervishes follow usual religious beliefs. Dervishes concepts are a mixture of folk legend and Sufi customs as well as special dervish rules. At the same time, they have no good understanding of "real" Sufism /13, 63/.

Ahl-i haq holy books

Ahl-i haq have a rich religious literature in prose and verse. It exists in manuscripts and in the form of religious folklore in various languages: Persian, Azeri and Kurdish (Gorani).

The central book is "Saranjam". It is written in Persian and contains poems in Gorani. Its text is incomplete and not put in order. The manuscript known to V. Minorsky was written in 1842. The investigator is well aware of the scroll shortcomings; he writes: " However, it is possible that the name "Serenjam" means a collection of stories related to consecutive periods, with their number and composition varying in manuscripts kept in various families"/ 6, XIX/. This opinion is true, because there are many manuscripts with obvious differences. However, they coincide in the principal matters. For example, this holds for the text "Tazkirei a'la" translated by V. Ivanov into English. The content of this writing corresponds to "Serenjam". However, it is shorter and better ordered. In addition to texts, it contains the description of the fundamentals of faith, with a lot of emphasis on the revealing of truth in the Sultan Is'haq period. V. Ivanov also included in his book translations of a few writings in Persian: "saqi- name haqiqat" by Mirza Rashid, "Rasail" by Gulshir Sabzavari, "Rasail" by Nuri Nishapuri, and poems in Azeri language.

There are many writings in Kurdish dialect Gorani: " Daftari Rumuzi Yarsan" by Saiid Qasim Avdal, " SruDi Dini Yrsan" by Mashalla Suri. All of them are translated by M. Hauramani into Sorani dialect in the book "Kakaii".

The work "Yarsan", ascribed to Sultan Is'haq himself, is written in the Gorani. It explains the fundamentals of Ahl-i haq faith and legend about the creation of the world/25, 1984/. Besides, V. Zhukovsky published a piece of poetry in the Gorani dialect, entitled " The Symbol of Faith" which is an interpretation of two Quranic Suras- "Ftiha" and "Ikhlas", with the revealing of the fundamentals of Ahl-i haq religion. One more work is "Shanamei Haqiqat" in Persian language, written in 1900 by Haji Ni'matulla Jaihun Abadii Mukri. Rojbayani writes that Kakaiids do not recognize this work, charging the writer of the distortion the fundamentals of faith /19, 436/.

There are also collections of poems ascribed to well known poets Hani Qubadi "Salavat-name" and Mawlawi " 'Aqida-name"/26/. There is a collection of poems by Baba Tahir Hamadani (in Gorani) / 12, 1934, 840/.

Ahl-i haq religious rituals

The initiation ritual – "Jwe'z shkandin" (nut cracking) is called also "Sarspardin" (offering one's head). Every Ahl-i haq undergoes this ritual, thus joining the Yar community. A man who has not undergone this ritual is not considered a member of the community. The initiation ritual is undergone in childhood. The ritual procedure must be attended by a Seiid, Khalifa and child's relatives. A child joins the community at the age of six to seven; he should be able to understand the meaning of what is happening. The child is to take hold of Seiids hem and give him a nut; Seiid cracks the nut and divides its kernel among those present - at this time Khalifa recites prayers.

The meaning of the ritual is that the child asks the Seiid to become his Pir. This manifested in the child's taking hold of the Seiids hem; the transfer of a nut symbolizes that the child "gives" his head to the Seiid and pledges to be devoted to him all his life. By cracking the nut Seiid shows his consent; Khalifa acts as a witness and Dalil blessing the ritual in the name of Benyamin. The explanation is that Sultan Is'haq was the first to perform the "nut cracking" ritual; he took hold of the hem of Daud clothes and gave him a nut, while Benyamin recited prayers. Sultan Is'haq determined the significance of this ritual by these words: " Verily, he who gives his head will not burn in the flame of Hell!" /13, 165/ ¹⁴.

V. Ivanov believes that the "nut cracking" accompanies not only the initiation ritual. In his opinion, the initiation ritual is called "Jauzi Shahi", and there is also a "Jauzi Shukrana" ritual-resumption of membership in Ahl-i haq community. He alleges the wedding ritual "Jauzi Yari" also involves nut cracking /13, 92/.

It should be noted that Ahl-i haq do not have a membership "resumption" ritual, nor nut cracking at wedding. A wedding is usually accompanied by the general assembly "Jam". At the initiation procedure not only the nut will be eaten, but also specially brought "Nabat" sweets. It is also a custom to give the Seiid money or articles.

After the initiation ritual, the child becomes Ahl-i haq "Yar".

General assembly (Jam)

This assembly is convened primarily for religious purposes, though it is not always so. Jam is convened for marriages, for decision-making on political and administrative matters, etc. The assemblies are held in a specially allocated place "Jamkhane" ¹⁵; sometimes it may also take

¹⁴ The text has a contradiction: Sultan Is'haq offered his head to Daud, and selected Benyamin as his Pir. In accordance with the rules of the ritual, he should have "given" his head to Benyamin.

¹⁵ V. Ivanov/13,77/ and Rojbayani /19, 434/ are mistaken to believe that Ahl-i haq have no special place for Jam.

place in homes of people who has a reason for a Jam. However, it is preferable to have assemblies at the holy place "Jamkhane".

A Jamkhane consists of a large room, its floor covered with carpets; a portrait of Ali on the wall is a must. During the meeting, jamkhane is guarded to prevent the entry of believers of other faiths.

Jam is headed by a specially elected Seiid, who fulfils this duty to the end of his life. In his turn, he assigns a Khalifa from a special kin; he also selects a Chawash(Khadim). If there is nobody from the kin of Khadim, The Seiid himself becomes a Khadim. The Chairman, Khalifa and Khadim are called "Sari Jam" (Head of the Jam)¹⁶.

Since the Jam is a holy assembly it is specially prepared. Every participant performs ablution and puts on clean clothes. People bring nuts, fruit and sweets to the assembly; all these things are called "nezzr"-dedication; there is no assembly without nezzr. The reason is that Sultan Is'haq said:" If five or more people come together and offer nezzr (nyaz) or Qurbani (meat of sacrifice animals), I am with them. Even if there are 1000 people at the assembly, there should be enough food for everybody" /13, text 167/.

Gathering together, people discuss various matters. When the Chairman addresses Khadim saying:"Alla bikan" (Begin in the name of Allah!), Khadim and members of his kin present stand before the Chairman and the Khalifa, then touch their thumbs to their big toes and straighten themselves with words: "Ya, Alla!"; the gathering respond: "E' walla, wedini Yar!" (Verily, God and Yar's faith!). Then the Chairman orders to hand out nezzr and Khalifa divides it. The first portion (the portion of God) is given to the Chairman (Seiid), who hands it out to the assembly; then Khalifa separates "the share of Light" (Chira)- this is a share for Farrash, the man who supervises Jamkhane, or to the host of the house accommodating the assembly . Next, Seiid and Khalifa are given their shares; the remaining portions are handed out starting from the man sitting on the right of Khalifa- the last one who receive his portion is Khadim(Chawash). "Nezzr" should be given to everybody; those absent from the assembly have their portion of nezzr brought to their homes.

Nobody touch nezzr before Khalifa recites the prayer:"Ttuth comes with nezzr, take a bit as alms.Let God hear this prayer to respond to nezzr. Let there be no evil behind nezzr". After these words everybody starts eating; however, not everything is eaten up, part of nezzr is taken home. After the eating of nezzr, Khalifa recites the prayer of the assembly:"O symbol of God! O condition of Benyamin! Leadership of Daud! Golden kalam of Musa! Pure service of Razbar!

¹⁶ V. Ivanov does not mention Seiid- the Jam chairman. He considers that Khalifa and Khadim are the Head of Jam (Sari Jam).

Blade of the sword of the brave! Assembly of the members of Haftwana! My beginning and end- Yar! O power of God"¹⁷. This prayer ends the assembly. Every participant kisses Khadims hand, and he reciprocates by kissing people's hands; then everybody leaves.

In some cases, in addition to the "nezh", people eat "qurbani"- boiled meat of sacrifice animals (mutton, veal, meat of cock).Qurbani is handed out like nezh. Animals for qurbani are selected in advance; first of all, these should be healthy, flawless rams or calves. The animals are prepared for the sacrifice¹⁸.

The animal is usually slaughtered by Khadim; the slaughtering proceeds according to certain rules. The animal stands with its head towards Qibla (Sultan Is'haq's grave), then it is laid in such a way that its head falls in a special pit; the Khadim pronounces:"My beginning and end- Yar!". After these words he slaughters the animal, its blood pours down to the pit to be buried. Blood of sacrifice animals is sacred and cannot be desecrated. The carcass is cut, starting from limbs, in such a way that bones stay intact. The meat is cut off and the bones are buried in the ground. Ahl-i haq believe that the animal will resurrect. The meat is well boiled and served to the assembly. After recitation of the prayer it is handed out like nezh.

Nezh and qurbani are two forms of sacrifice united by a common idea. There may be various reasons and purposes of this sacrifice; it may be redemptive or repentive, or it may contain a request, accompany a wedding ritual, childbirth, death, etc. In a difficult situation, an Ahl-i haq would say:"O Daud! Sitting on a grey horse, I donate three shahi (coins) to You!"¹⁹ In such a way an Ahl-i haq asks assistance from Daud and promises to donate money for it. The sum mentioned is purely token, for there is no rule to determine the amount of donation; it depends on the opportunities of a person- one may donate an animal, or just a nezh. There is no single event without Jam, where donations (nezh or qurbani) are obligatory. It should be clarified that qurbani is not only by animal sacrifice, it may be done by bread baked in oil, which is served during a Jam.

Jam is attended only by men; women are prohibited to come there. V. Ivanov is not right in his statement that Ahl-i haq deliberately hide participation of woman in the Jam, since they need to refute accusation of dissoluteness made by other-faith believers /13, 78/. As informer says, it is not only women who are not allowed to Jam, but also boys without moustache. In this connection it should be mentioned that even Razbar was not admitted to the first Jam in Sultan Is'haq's time; she had to ask Mustafa to be her representative /13, text 166/.

¹⁷ The texts of both prayers described from the words of the informer; they are published for the first time.

¹⁸ These conditions of sacrifice were known even with Hetts /3, 135/.

¹⁹ (20) Shahis are equivalent to (2) qrans or (1000) dinars / 6, 3/.

After the completion of a Jam, part of the gathering stays to perform zikr. They recite religious poems, which are accompanied by the music of daf and tambur. After each verse (kalam) Khalifa recites the above mentioned "prayer of the Jam". During zikr some participants go into ecstasies, move their bodies, cry and repeat names of saints.

As it was already said, Jam is the only group form of worship of Ahl-i haq; that is why Jam is sacred. The sanctity of assembly and the place where it is held are compared with those of Muslim's Ca'ba. Sultan Is'haq is ascribed the following words:"One sitting in the Jam is relieved from sins like a Muslim visiting Ca'ba" /13, text 147/. Women and children who pass by the place where Jam is held should behave properly. According to the sources and investigations, Ahl-i haq have "Sharti Iqrar" ritual (making sworn brothers). A knowledgeable informer entirely rejects the existence of such cases. The sources state a necessity of concluding an agreement of sworn brotherhood between two men and one woman. Sworn brothers should give evidence of each other sins and good deeds in the hereafter /13, text 168/. There is an impression that a group of Murids of the same teacher- Pir is erroneously taken for sworn brothers. They have "brotherhood" in faith, not more than that.

Ahl-i haq have a forgiving of sins; Sultan Is'haq says:" We do not deny forgiving anyone who asks to forgive his sins"/13, text82/. V. Ivanov writes that forgiving of sins takes place during Jams, when everybody asks the Jam to postpone punishment till the Day of Resurrection /13, 95/.

It should be made clear that a sinner donates "nezh" or "qurbani" to the Jam without revealing the purpose of his donation; during the Jam the repenting man turns to God with a prayer of mercy.

The Password of Ahl-i haq

Ahl-i haq religion has a hidden character, its members have to hide their faith from the others, but at the same time they need to recognize each other- this is achieved through a password, or a catchphrase.

Every Ahl-i haq undergoes the initiation ritual and receives the password. Rojbayani considers that Ahl-i haq shake hands at meeting, and during that the palm should be pressed by the thumb and middle finger- next the password is pronounced. If a person does not know the password he should say:"I did not crack the nut"²⁰. If a man does not react to the special handshaking, he is not an Ahl-i haq /19, 435/. Rojbayani does not quote the password, he just does not know it.

²⁰ It is very doubtful that an Ahl-i haq should pronounce this phrase, because all the members of the community are obliged to undergo the initiation ritual.

We succeeded in learning the details of acquaintance from an informer²¹ : When two Ahl-i haq meet one of them asks: "where did you drink water?", the other replies: "I am from Ardawel²², dear. I girded myself with the belt of yars and go forward. I drank water from the eternally pure source". The password is entirely secret and is never disclosed. It is quoted here for the first time.

Ahl-i haq have no prayers similar to the Muslim's prayer (salat). They believe that Muslims do ablutions and pray because of their impurity, while Ahl-i haq possess a special purity ritual. So, they do not need daily washing and prayers.

Ahl-i haq have an annual three-day fasting (fasting of three days). They ground the three days by the fact that Muhammad, who was ignorant of the Kurdish language, mistook the commandment of God about three days of fasting a thirty-day fasting, because in Kurdish language the word three (se) and thirty (si) are alike.

The fasting lasts from January 13 to 15; it is not in March as V. Ivanov considers /13, 93/. The fasting is timed to the remembrance of people from the region (or tribe) Kavartas²³, who lived in the time of Qurmiz²⁴ and doubted his divine being, and that is why they undertook a trip to see him. When travelling, they slept in a cave, where they decided that if Qurmiz was God he should know about their arrival and come meet them. When Qurmiz heard these words, he got angry and sent blizzard on them which lasted three days. The people died; Qurmiz came and revived them, then they asked him forgiveness and became Yars of Qurmiz. To commemorate that event, Qurmiz ordered to fast three days a year/6, 13-14/. That is why the intention to have fasting is expressed by the words: "I decided to have a three-day fasting for love for my friends from Kavartas; my beginning and end- God !".

Rules of fasting

The fast begins on January 13; the first day is considered "Daud's Day". The complete fasting last from sunrise to sunset. Before people start eating, the Jam is gathered; everyone bringing "nezt" to be eaten in Jamkhana.

The second day is called "Benyamin's Day"; it is spent like the first day. The third day is called "Shah's(God's) Day"; during the day people prepare for the evening breaking of the fast . In every house they slaughter a cock, cook dishes of rice and wheat. Everyone comes to Jamkhane with his food, and all the fetched food is mixed and distributed like at an ordinary assembly;

²¹ He requested us to keep his name undisclosed .

²² The informer says that is an Ahli haq village. However, it is more likely to be the town of Ardebil in Iran, which used to be the centre of Shiite Safawide dynasty. One may trace the relation of Ahl-I haq and Safawides.

²³ V. Ivanov calls it Kamertas/13, text187/, and V. minorsky calls it Kabeltas /6, 13/.

²⁴ V. Ivanov assumes that Qurmiz lived in mid- 17th century /13, 95/.

everyone must bring bread baked in oil (ghirda), certainly fruit is brought. After Jam people have zikr which lasts till late at night.

The last night of the fast is most sacred for all Ahl-i haq, it is their main Holiday- "the three night holiday"²⁵. Some members of the community climb the sacred mountain Chadirga and have a Jam with food there. According to the legend, Sultan Is'haq held the first Jam there. Ahl-i haq, like all Kurds, observe Nawroz. They have no difference here.

* * *

It should be said, in conclusion, that Ahl-i haq religion originated from the ideas of extreme Shiite sects. Then it evolved to become independent. In the framework of this religion, the worship of local ethnic gods and divine persons was established; it evolved on the basis of Hauraman folk legends.

It is well known that Kurds participated in extreme Shiite movements, for example, in those of Ismailites and Qaramites. In the 12th century a Jewish traveler Benyamin from Todelo met among Kurds the followers of Ismailite movement in Alamut /13, 69/.

The influence of Shiite ideas and their mixing with folk beliefs in Hauraman led to the emerging of the religion of this type. V. Ivanov puts forward a logical assumption that the centralization politics of Nizarite Imamites in Anjudan and limitation of local power of pirs were the reasons for separation of Sultan Is'haq's followers. The separation was followed by the attempt to change the way of power transfer: From inherited Imamate to periodic divine manifestations/ 13, 72/.

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²⁵ V. Ivanov incorrectly determines the fast period and considers it a spring holiday, connecting it with Mazdakite tradition /13, 93/.

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