

*PhD Project abstract*

*Iranian Religions and Islamic Heterodoxy:*

*A Study in the Origins of Yaresan*

The planned project deals with the Yaresan, a religious group which took shape in the west of Iran in the 13th century. Now its followers mostly live in some Kurdish parts of Iran and Iraq. This religion, which is called "Yari", is obviously the outcome of religious movements against the Islamic Caliphate in early centuries of Islam in Iran.

It is noticeable that there are some different names which are applied to the Yaresan, for instance: Ahl-e Haqq, Ali Alahi, Tayfa and Kaka'i. Although Ahl-e Haqq seems to be an incorrect name for Yaresan it is more popular than others. The title of Ahl-e Haqq has not any religious origins among the Yaresan and it has not been applied in religious texts of Yaresan. Probably, this title has been adopted only 100 years ago. Ahl-e Haqq is a very general name and probably it has been borrowed from Sufi groups in Iran. But the main name that Yaresan use for their religion is "Din-e Yari" (Yari religion) and the word of "Yaresan" is applied for the community of Yari believers.

Although the role of Iranian ancient religions in the formation of Yaresan beliefs is clear and Yaresan is a religion with a unique worldview and individual rituals which mostly refer to a variety of ancient Iranian religious symbols, we cannot deny the role of some Shiite imams among the Yaresan, so that they are generally subsumed under the Shi'i Ghulat sects, despite some important difference between them.

Some researchers believe that Yaresan has Islamic origins and some of them believe that Yaresan has Iranian origins. It is reasonable idea that Yaresan is a syncretistic religion, but for confirmation of all these claims we need comprehensive historical research.

Most of the studies about Yaresan just repeat general sentences about history of Yaresan and then describe their beliefs and rituals or other aspects of Yaresan. In my opinion, before any attempt for understanding Yaresan can be made, the following questions should be answered: Which social and historical circumstances led to formation of Yaresan beliefs? What kind of changes this religion had over the course of history? And are there any traces of Yaresan in historiography or historical documents? I think it is time to avoid the attraction of describing Yaresan rituals and beliefs and to attempt to answer the question of their exact origins.

The existence of many studies about Yaresan has led to good knowledge about the rituals and beliefs of this religion, but there is still a lack of information about the history and the origins of Yaresan. Therefore, in this project it will be tried to study the historical roots and traces of Yaresan and the interaction between this religion and socio-political pressure to assimilation by the surrounding official religion during its history.