

## Sinjar: 14 Days That Saved the Yazidis from Islamic State

**Susan Shand**

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Susan Shand was working as a television producer in the Kurdish Service of Voice of America in 2014. Unbeknownst to her, she was about to witness the first genocide of the twenty-first century. *Sinjar* covers the fourteen days when Islamic State invaded Iraq and perpetrated the Yazidi genocide.

Sometimes referred to as the original ethnic Kurds, Yazidis are a religious group in Kurdistan. Unlike their Muslim and Christian neighbors, there's no proselytizing or conversion in their faith; Yazidis practice a private, oral tradition that members are born into, making the events of August 2014 all the more devastating.

Shand presents the genocide as the Yazidis themselves see it: as a betrayal. Estimates differ on how many Yazidis were killed, injured, or kidnapped during the incursion, but they range from 3,100 to 10,800. Stories of escape are rare because Yazidis trusted in shared regional ties so completely, from the loyalty of their Arab and Muslim neighbors to the fortitude of the Peshmerga, the Kurdish fighting force. Tracing indifference, bigotry, incompetence, and possible conspiracy, Shand shows how historical and modern political and military actions intersected and resulted in the decimation of a people.

Despite heroic interventions, Yazidis paid a great cost for their survival. Because of Islamic State's actions during those fourteen days, not only have Yazidis lost their villages and livelihoods, they've lost generations to death and sex slave markets. Their horror and sense of betrayal has resulted in flight far beyond Mount Sinjar. For the first time, Yazidis will no longer call themselves Kurds. Now, they are simply Yazidi, an identity wholly its own.

If there's such a thing as a good book about genocide, *Sinjar* qualifies. Shand's report is as troubling, detailed, and gruesome as the topic deserves. She leverages her skills on behalf of the Yazidis, ensuring that the story of their genocide is recorded for history, not by the victors but by those who were the target.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (September/October 2018)

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