

Girls dragged by their hair into sexual slavery and sold for \$25

Teenager tells of the rape and brutality suffered by Yazidis at the hands of jihadists.

Anthony Loyd reports from Shariya, Iraq



Some of the young women walked quietly to their enslavement, some had to be dragged from the building by their hair. In this way Islamic State divided its spoils of war and committed hundreds, perhaps thousands of Yazidi women to captivity, rape and violence in possibly the largest act of enslavement this century. "My mother started screaming and begging for mercy as the Daesh [Isis] fighters told my sister and me to join

the group of younger women specially selected," one 19-year-old Yazidi woman told *The Times*, recalling the moment that she was selected as a sex slave. "But they tore us from her grasp," added the woman, who can be known only by her initial as "Girl B" to protect her family. "I saw other women in the building being dragged out to waiting lorries by their hair." Girl B and her 14-year-old sister are among several Yazidi women who have managed to escape since they

were seized from the town of Sinjar and surrounding villages by Isis fighters in early August. The accounts of their ordeal are the foundation of a report released tomorrow by Amnesty International, *Escape from hell — Torture, sexual slavery in Islamic State captivity in Iraq*, which, with those of activists and advocates investigating their cases, suggests that the Isis plan to enslave the Yazidis was not only deliberate and co-ordinated, but part of a policy which regards sexual enslavement as central to the jihadists' core spiritual values.

The Yazidis' ordeal began on the first Sunday of August when Isis fighters swept into the town on the south side of the Sinjar Mountain. Girl B, her 14-year-old sister, their parents and six siblings including a girl of 11, fled.

As they approached the mountain sanctuary in a vehicle, they were cut off by the Isis advance. "They were local Sunni fighters, some of whom we recognised," Girl B recalled. "A local mechanic was among them. The Sunni men in our area became Daesh as soon as they got a smell of them approaching. No one even had to ask them to join."

First the captives were driven to a government building in Sinjar, one of numerous holding centres established by Isis. Here, among hundreds of Yazidi prisoners, the separation began. "The Daesh took our names and



ages and noted everything down," said Girl B, who was interviewed with her sister and three other escapees by *The Times* in northern Iraq last week. "Then they began dividing us: the men to one side, women and children to another. Then they selected the young women, both married and unmarried. They told me and my two younger sisters to join that last group. We didn't know what was happening, but our mother realised, and she began screaming."

According to the sisters, their mother succeeded in wresting back her 11-year-old but her two other daughters were put on a truck, one of dozens of lorries, pick-ups and dumper trucks waiting to transport the girls to sexual enslavement hours after they were taken prisoner.

"It was organised, and they took us away like cattle," Girl B said. "The sound was of shouting and yelling from the Daesh as we were pushed on to those lorries, and screaming from women."

They were taken to Mosul, where they joined hundreds of other female captives in the city's "Galaxy Hall", another holding centre.

Here, guarded by IS fighters, the Yazidi women were questioned further and asked to give details of their level of education. A fortnight later the two sisters were moved twice more, each time in smaller groups which were divided out among Isis commanders, who inspected them and selected them along the way "as



Yazidi families who had fled from Islamic State jihadists cross back into Iraq over the Syrian border after US airstrikes on Isis bases

sheep", until they ended up with a hundred other Yazidi girls in a house in the town of Baaj owned by a prominent Isis sheikh.

"There, the commanders of the Daesh came to look at us again," Girl B said. "We were lined up while they came to inspect and buy us. I could see the dinars change hands." Girl B knew her buyer. "Abu Ghuffram", an Isis commander in his forties, was a local Sunni with a pre-war reputation as a small-time criminal. Before joining Isis he had fixed gold teeth for clients, who included one of Girl B's older sisters. Now he wanted slaves.

Girl B, her 14-year-old sister and another 14-year-old Yazidi slave were taken to Abu Ghuffram's house in the village of Rambussi, and forced to serve the Isis commander and two of his captains.

Life alternated between domestic chores and violent assault. "Sometimes he would call me by name and talk reasonably," said Girl B, who in common with many Yazidi slaves was forcibly converted to Islam. "At other times the men would insult our Yazidi faith and curse us. If Abu Ghuffram was angry he would strike or kick me. Once he put his hands around my throat and tried to choke me."

As she recalled her experiences, Girl B's eyes glazed over and she appeared for a moment to be on the edge of having a fit. Then she came to and whispered to the Yazidi health

Girls dragged by their hair into sexual slavery and sold for \$25



Yazidi families who had fled from Islamic State jihadists cross back into Iraq over the Syrian border after US airstrikes on Isis bases

laying siege to the Sinjar mountains. Below, footage on YouTube shows Isis members laughing and joking about sharing Yazidi sex slaves. Hundreds of young Yazidi girls were driven off and handed to groups of jihadist fighters to be raped and then sold on



worker present in the room that she did not want to discuss further details of her abuse.

Afterwards, the health worker revealed that all three girls, including both 14-year-olds, had been repeatedly raped by the three Isis fighters in the house over a protracted period.

Dossiers compiled by local activists into the enslavement record the rape of Yazidi slaves as young as 12.

After two months spent denying their enslavement of prisoners, Isis first justified slavery among captured Yazidis, regarded by the jihadists as a "pagan minority", in an article in the October issue of Dabiq, its online propaganda and recruitment magazine.

"Enslaving the families of the kuffar [non-believers] and taking their women as concubines is a firmly established aspect of the Sharia", the article's author noted, before explaining that the use of concubines safeguarded spiritual purity by preventing unmarried men from committing adultery.

Earlier this month, Isis issued a formal set of rules governing their fighters' treatment of Yazidi sex slaves, which included instruction on the punishment of slaves, permissible sex practices with enslaved women, as well as noting the age at which their slaves could be used for sexual gratification.

"It is permissible to have intercourse with the female slave who hasn't reached puberty if she is fit for intercourse," one rule noted in the document, titled *Su' al wa-Jawab fi al-Sabi wa-Riqab* (or Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves), released by the Research and Fatwa Department of the Islamic State's research and fatwa department on December 3. It was distributed on flyers to Isis fighters after Friday prayers in Mosul ten days ago.

Girl B and her 14-year old sister

escaped captivity one night in late November, slipping past a sleeping guard and climbing over a wall. They trekked through the night up the slopes of the Sinjar mountains, where they eventually made contact with Yazidi fighters and were evacuated to Dohuk by helicopter.

The number still missing varies. The Kurdish regional government believes 3,583 Yazidi men, women and children are still unaccounted for — a figure which includes the victims of massacre. Yazidi activists and advocacy groups claim that 3,500 women and children are missing as captives and sex slaves, in addition to 2,000 Yazidi men, many of whom are feared to have been executed.

Both groups agree that about 430 Yazidis have escaped.

"We have every sort of case among the escapees," said Khider Domle, a Yazidi activist helping escapees in Dohuk.

"We have raped and pregnant cases; children who have escaped without parents; parents without children. We have cases of women who have been raped by just one Daesh fighter, and cases of women who have been multiply raped and sold several times among Isis fighters. We have found women sold for \$25, for \$100, for \$1,000. We have it all."

Last week's Kurdish operation to relieve Yazidis surrounded on the Sinjar mountains came too late to rescue the Yazidi captives held near by, who were moved deeper into Iraq and Syria by the end of November.

Among them are Girl B's parents and 11-year-old sister.

"I don't know if or when I shall ever see them again," Girl B said. "It is unclear if my father is even still alive. The last memory that remains of my family is that of being torn apart by Islamic State fighters, of my mother screaming and begging for mercy as we were pulled from her — asking for mercy when there was none."

Matt Ridley, page 27

Ancient faith that guards its secrets

Behind the story Catherine Philp

The Yazidis are no strangers to persecution. Their oral histories recall the 72 massacres inflicted on them over the centuries by neighbours and overlords who bought in to the age-old slander that their mysterious sect worshipped the Devil. That calumny persists to this day, among both friends and enemies. However, the fear is that this new persecution, at the hands of Islamic State, may hasten the end of this ancient and secretive faith in its very birthplace.

Like the Druze and the Jews, Yazidis see themselves as a distinct ethnicity and are classified as such by the United Nations, although ethnologists might recognise them as a subset of the Kurds, the main

group in the region they inhabit. Hundreds of thousands of Yazidis live in northern Iraq and in Syria, Georgia, Armenia and northwest Iran. Yazidism's birth is shrouded in mystery because of the lack of a literary tradition, enabling many adherents to claim that their faith predates the major monotheistic religions. Yet it is more likely to have emerged in the 11th century as a synthesis of practices of Zoroastrianism and Christianity.

Yazidis believe in a unitary God who created the world and placed it under the care of seven angels, led by the "Peacock Angel", Melek Taus, whose story closely mirrors that of Lucifer, the favoured angel who fell from grace to become the Prince of Darkness. Melek Taus, however,

I should have been the first to die, but his AK47 jammed



How The Times reported the massacre of Yazidis by Islamic State in August

Exclusive to members Interactive graphic Facts and analysis for every country in Middle East

thetimes.co.uk/middleeast

made his peace with God and was restored to heaven, where he watches over good and evil.

This anti-Manichean view of the world was never welcomed by more dogmatic rivals.

Yazidism recognises the Abrahamic prophets, ending with Muhammad, but they count the Greek philosophers among them and revere the elements above them all, especially the Sun.

Yazidism has never been a proselytising religion. It seeks to safeguard rather spread its secrets, some of which are known only to its priestly castes.

Even if they are willing, many ordinary Yazidis are unable to explain the origins of their esoteric traditions — the refusal to wear blue or eat lettuce, for example, or the obligation to sport a moustache.

Instant indulgence £3
Help is only a Co-op away this Christmas

The **co-operative** food
Here for you for life

WINNER 2014 Retail Industry Awards
Chilled Retailer of the Year - Multiple

co-operativefood.co.uk/christmas

The Co-operative Baking Camembert with Bacon 300g £3. Equivalent to £10 per kg. Offer ends 3rd January 2015. Participating stores. Subject to availability. Serving Suggestion.