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# Mandaeism

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**Mandaeism** or **Mandaeism** (Mandaic: **Mandaiuta**, Arabic: مندائية *Mandā'iyya*, Persian: مندائیان) is a **monotheistic religion** with a strongly **dualistic** worldview. Its adherents, the Mandaeans, revere **Adam**, **Abel**, **Seth**, **Enosh**, **Noah**, **Shem**, **Aram** and especially **John the Baptist**. They are sometimes identified with the **Sabian** religion, particularly in an Arabian context, but actually Mandaeism and **Manichaeism** seem to be independent – to some degree opposing – developments out of the mainstream Sabian religious community, which is extinct today.

Mandaeans seem to be indigenous to **Mesopotamia** and are certainly of Pre Arab and Pre Islamic origin. They may well be related to the **Assyrians** who are also Semitic, Aramaic speaking indigenous Pre Arab and Pre Islamic inhabitants of Iraq. They are **Semites** and speak a dialect of **Aramaic** known as **Mandaic**.

Mandaeism has historically been practised primarily around the lower **Karun**, **Euphrates** and **Tigris** and the rivers that surround the **Shatt-al-Arab** waterway, part of southern **Iraq** and **Khuzestan Province** in **Iran**. There are thought to be between 60,000 and 70,000 Mandaeans worldwide,<sup>[1]</sup> and until the 2003 **Iraq war**, almost all of them lived in Iraq.<sup>[3]</sup> Many Mandaean Iraqis have since fled their country (as have **many other** Iraqis) because of the turmoil of the war and **terrorism**.<sup>[4]</sup> By 2007, the population of Mandaeans in Iraq had fallen to approximately 5,000.<sup>[3]</sup> Most Mandaean Iraqis have sought refuge in **Iran** with the fellow Mandians there. Others have moved to northern Iraq. There has been a much smaller influx into Syria and Jordan, with smaller populations in Sweden, Australia, the United States, and other Western countries.

The Mandaeans have remained separate and intensely private—reports of them and of their religion have come primarily from outsiders, particularly from the **Orientalists** J. Heinrich Petermann, Nicholas Siouffi, and **Lady Drower**. An Anglican vicar, Rev. Peter Owen-Jones, included a short segment on a Mandaean group in Sydney, Australia, in his BBC series "Around the World in 80 Faiths."

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## Origin of the term "Mandaean"

[edit]

In *Shahnameh* (farsi word for "letter of kings"), written by Ferdowsi Toosi referred to a man named Mardas, an Amir lived about 800 years ago in the south west of IRAN (dasht e savaran e neizeh gozar) who seems to be one of the mandaecs, because he prayed to god after washing himself all the time especially at dawns. this religion also is called " Moghtaseleh " means those who wash themselves a lot (Ghosl in arabic means Batheing) The term comes from **Classical Mandaic** *Mandaiia* and appears in **Neo-Mandaic** as *Mandeyānā*. On the basis of cognates in other **Aramaic** dialects, Semiticists such as Mark Lidzbarski and Rudolf Macuch have translated the term *manda*, from which *Mandaiia* derives, as "knowledge" (cf. Aramaic מַדְאָא *manda* in Dan. 2:21, 4:31, 33, 5:12; cpr. **Hebrew**: מַדְאָא *madda* without the nasal insert). This etymology suggests that the Mandaeans may well be the only sect surviving from **late Antiquity** to identify themselves explicitly as **Gnostics**.

Other scholars<sup>[*who?*]</sup> derive the term *mandaiia* from *Mandā d-Heyyi* (**Mandaic** *manda d-hiia* "Knowledge of Life", reference to the chief

### Mandaeans *Mandeyānā*

Mandaeans.JPG	Mandaeans in Iraq
<b>Total population</b>	
60,000 to 70,000 <sup>[1]</sup>	
<b>Regions with significant populations</b>	
<span><span></span></span> <b>Iraq</b>	70,000 (until 2003); 7,000 (as of 2010)
<span><span></span></span> <b>Iran</b>	5,000 to 10,000 <sup>[2]</sup>
<span><span></span></span> <b>Jordan</b>	?
<span><span></span></span> <b>Syria</b>	?
<span><span></span></span> <b>Sweden</b>	5,000
<span><span></span></span> <b>Australia</b>	3,500
<span><span></span></span> <b>United States</b>	1,500 to 2,000
<span><span></span></span> <b>United Kingdom</b>	1,000
<span><span></span></span> <b>Canada</b>	?
<b>Religions</b>	
Mandaeism	
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Ginza Rba, Qolusta	
<b>Languages</b>	
Mandaic	
Arabic and Persian are also spoken	

divinity *hiia rbia* "the Great Life") or from the word (*bi*)*manda*, which is the cultic hut in which many Mandaean ceremonies are performed (such as the baptism, which is the central sacrament of Mandaean religious life). This last term is possibly to be derived from Pahlavi *m'nd mānd* ("house").

## Other associated terms

[edit]

Within the Middle East, but outside of their community, the Mandaeans are more commonly known as the *Ṣubba* (singular *Ṣubbi*). The term *Ṣubba* is derived from the word *muṣbattah* (Arabic: مصبته ), the baptism ritual of the Mandaeans. In Islam, the term "Sabians" (Arabic: الصابئون *al-Ṣābi'ūn*) is used as a blanket term for adherents to a number of religions, including that of the Mandaeans, in reference to the Sabians of the Qur'an (see below). Occasionally, Mandaeans are called **Christians of Saint John**, based upon preliminary reports made by members of the Discalced Carmelite mission in Basra during the 16th century.

A *mandá* (Arabic: مندى) is a place of worship for followers of Mandaism. A *mandá* must be built beside a river in order to perform *maṣbattah* because water is an essential element in the Mandaic faith. Modern *mandás* sometimes have a bath inside a building instead.

## Mandaean history

[edit]

See also: *Sabians*

The evidence about Mandaean history has been almost entirely confined to some of the Mandaean religious literature. But their origin seems ultimately have been with the Ebionite Elchasai, who preached to an Abrahamic community called "Sobaii" in Parthian ruled Assyria.

Arab sources of early Qur'anic times (7th century) make some references to Sabians. They are counted among the *Ahl al-Kitāb* (*People of the Book*), and several hadith feature them. Some scholars hold that these Sabians are those currently referred to as Mandaeans, while others contend that the etymology of the root word 'Sabi'un' points to origins either in the Syriac or Mandaic word 'Sabian', and suggest that the Mandaean religion originated with Sabeans who came under the influence of early Hellenic Sabian missionaries, but preferred their own priesthood. Contemporary authors mention that they were generally originally considered to be of western ("Greek" or Levant) origin in one way or another. The Sabians believed to "belong to the prophet Noah";<sup>[5]</sup> similarly, the Mandaeans claim direct ancestry from Noah.

Early in the 9th century, a group in Harran declared themselves Sabians when facing persecution; a Christian writer<sup>[who?][when?]</sup> said that the true 'Sabians' or Sabba lived in the marshes of Lower Iraq. The earliest account we have about the Mandaeans is that of the Assyrian writer Theodore Bar Konai (in the Scholion, A.D. 792). In the *Fihrist* ("Book of Nations") of Arabic scholar Al-Nadim (an c.987), the *Moghtasilah* (*Moghtasila*..., "self-ablutionists") are counted among the followers of *El-Hasaih*. Called a "sect" of "Sabians", they are located in southern Mesopotamia.<sup>[6]</sup> No reference to Mandaeans, which were a distinct group by then, seems to have been made by Al-Nadim; *Moghtasilah* is not that group's self-appellation and the few details on rituals and habit are similar to Mandaeans ones, but they may merely have been related sects.

Elchasai's religious community seems to have prospered but ultimately splintered; early on, the prophet Mani renounced Judaism and departed with his followers. Likewise, the Mandaeans may have originated in a schism where they renounced the Torah, while the mainstream Sampsaeans<sup>[citation needed]</sup> held on to it (as Elchasai's followers did); this must have happened around the mid-late 1st millennium AD. Al-Biruni (writing at the beginning of the 11th century AD) said that the 'real Sabians' were "the remnants of the Jewish tribes who remained in Babylonia when the other tribes left it for Jerusalem in the days of Cyrus and Artaxerxes. These remaining tribes...adopted a system mixed up of Magism and Judaism."<sup>[7]</sup> It is not clear what group he referred to exactly, for by then the Elchasaite sects may have been at their most diverse. Some disappeared subsequently, the Sampsaeans for example are not well attested in later sources.

Around 1290, a learned Dominican Catholic from Tuscany, Ricoldo da Montecroce, or Ricoldo Pennini, was in Mesopotamia where he met the Mandaeans. He described them as follows:

"A very strange and singular people, in terms of their rituals, lives in the desert near Baghdad; they are called Sabaeans. Many of them came to me and begged me insistently to go and visit them. They are a very simple people and they claim to possess a secret law of God, which they preserve in beautiful books. Their writing is a sort of middle way between Syriac and Arabic. They detest Abraham because of circumcision and they venerate John the Baptist above all. They live only near a few rivers in the desert. They wash day and night so as not to be condemned by God, ..."

Some Portuguese Jesuits had met some "Saint John Christians" or Mandaeans around the Strait of Hormuz in 1559, when the Portuguese fleet fought with the Ottoman Turkish army in Bahrain. These Mandaean seemed to be willing to obey the Catholic Church. They learned and used the seven Catholic sacraments and the related ceremonies in their lives.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Mandaean beliefs

[edit]

Mandaism, as the religion of the Mandaean people, is based more on a common heritage than on any set of religious creeds and doctrines. A basic guide to Mandaean theology does not exist. The corpus of Mandaean literature, though quite large, covers topics such as eschatology, the knowledge of God, and the afterlife only in an unsystematic manner, and, apart from the priesthood, is known only to a few laypeople.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Fundamental tenets

[edit]

According to E.S. Drower, the Mandaean Gnosis is characterized by nine features, which appear in various forms in other gnostic sects:<sup>[10]</sup>

1. A supreme formless Entity, the expression of which in time and space is creation of spiritual, **etheric**, and material worlds and beings. Production of these is delegated by It to a creator or creators who originated in It. The cosmos is created by Archetypal Man, who produces it in similitude to his own shape.

### Gnosticism



This article is part of a series on Gnosticism

#### History of Gnosticism

Early Gnosticism  
Syrian-Egyptic Gnosticism  
Gnosticism in modern times

#### Proto-Gnostics

Philo  
Simon Magus  
Cerinthus

2. **Dualism**: a cosmic Father and Mother, Light and Darkness, Right and Left, **syzygy** in cosmic and microcosmic form.
3. As a feature of this dualism, counter-types, a world of ideas.
4. The soul is portrayed as an exile, a captive: home and origin being the supreme Entity to which the soul eventually returns.
5. Planets and stars influence **fate** and human beings, and are also places of detention after death.
6. A saviour spirit or saviour spirits which assist the soul on the journey through life and after it to 'worlds of light'.
7. A cult-language of symbol and metaphor. Ideas and qualities are personified.
8. 'Mysteries', i.e. **sacraments** to aid and purify the soul, to ensure **rebirth** into a spiritual body, and ascent from the world of matter. These are often adaptations of existing seasonal and traditional rites to which an esoteric interpretation is attached. In the case of the **Nasoreans** this interpretation is based upon the Creation story (see 1 and 2), especially on the Divine Man, Adam, as crowned and anointed King-priest.
9. **Great secrecy** is enjoined upon initiates; full explanation of 1, 2, and 8 being reserved for those considered able to understand and preserve the gnosis.

Mandaeans believe in marriage and procreation, and in the importance of leading an ethical and moral lifestyle in this world, placing a high priority upon family life. Consequently, Mandaeans do not practice **celibacy** or **asceticism**. Mandaeans will, however, abstain from strong drink and **red meat**. While they agree with other **gnostic** sects that the world is a prison governed by the planetary **archons**, they do not view it as a cruel and inhospitable one.

### Mandaean scriptures

[edit]

The Mandaeans have a large corpus of religious **scriptures**, the most important of which is the *Genzā Rabbā* or Ginza, a collection of history, theology, and prayers (German translation available [here](#)). The *Genzā Rabbā* is divided into two halves—the *Genzā Smālā* or "Left Ginza" and the *Genzā Yeminā* or "Right Ginza". By consulting the **colophons** in the Left Ginza, Jorunn J. Buckley has identified an uninterrupted chain of copyists to the late 2nd or early 3rd c. AD. The colophons attest to the existence of the Mandaeans during the late **Arsacid** period at the very latest, a fact corroborated by the *Harān Gāweṭā* legend, according to which the Mandaeans left **Judea** after the destruction of **Jerusalem** in the 1st c. AD, and settled within the Arsacid empire. Although the Ginza continued to evolve under the rule of the **Sassanians** and the Islamic empires, few textual traditions can lay claim to such extensive continuity.

Other important books include the *Qolastā*, the "Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans", which was translated by **E. S. Drower** (much of it is found [here](#) and [here](#)). One of the chief works of Mandaean scripture, accessible to laymen and initiates alike, is the *Draša ḡ-lahia* "The Book of John the Baptist" ([text](#); [German translation](#)), which includes a dialogue between John and **Jesus**. In addition to the *Ginza*, *Qolusta*, and *Draša*, there is the *Dīvān*, which contains a description of the 'regions' the soul ascends through, and the *Asfar Malwāshē*, the "Book of the Zodiacal Constellations". Finally, there are some pre-Muslim artifacts which contain Mandaean writings and inscriptions, such as some **Aramaic incantation bowls**.

The language in which the Mandaean religious literature was originally composed is known as **Mandaic**, and is a member of the **Aramaic** family of dialects. It is written in a cursive variant of the **Parthian** chancery script. Many Mandaean lay people do not speak this language, though some members of the Mandaean community resident in Iran and Iraq continue to speak **Neo-Mandaic**, a modern version of this language.

### Cosmology

[edit]

As noted above (under Mandaean Beliefs) Mandaean theology is not systematic. There is no one single authoritative account of the creation of the cosmos, but rather a series of several accounts. Some scholars, such as Edmondo Lupieri,<sup>[1]</sup> maintain that comparison of these different accounts may reveal the diverse religious influences upon which the Mandaeans have drawn and the ways in which the Mandaean religion has evolved over time.

In contrast with the religious texts of the western **Gnostic** sects formerly found in Syria and Egypt, the earliest Mandaean religious texts suggest a more strictly **dualistic** theology, typical of other Iranian religions such as **Zoroastrianism**, **Zurvanism**, **Manichaeism**, and the teachings of **Mazdak**. In these texts, instead of a large **pleroma**, there is a discrete division between *light* and *darkness*. The ruler of darkness is called **Ptahil** (similar to the Gnostic **Demiurge**), and the originator of the light (i.e. **God**) is only known as "the great first Life from the worlds of light, the sublime one that stands above all works". When this being **emanated**, other spiritual beings became increasingly corrupted, and they and their ruler Ptahil created our world. The similarity between the name Ptahil and the Egyptian **Ptah** should also be noted—the Mandaeans believe that they were resident in Egypt for a while.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that Ptahil alone does not constitute the demiurge but only fills that role insofar as he is the creator of our world. Rather, Ptahil is the lowest of a group of three "demiurgic" beings, the other two being Yushamin (a.k.a. Joshamin) and Abathur. Abathur's demiurgic role consists of his sitting in judgment upon the souls of mortals. The role of Yushamin, the senior being, is more obscure; wanting to create a world of his own, he was severely punished for opposing the King of Light.

### Chief prophets

[edit]

Mandaeans recognize several prophets. **Yahya ibn Zakariyya**, known by Christians as **John the Baptist**, is accorded a special status, higher than his role in **Christianity** and **Islam**. Mandaeans do not consider John to be the founder of their religion but revere him as one of their greatest teachers, tracing their beliefs back to **Adam**.

Mandaeans maintain that Jesus and Muhammad were *mšīha kdaba* "false **messiahs**"<sup>[12]</sup> who perverted the teachings entrusted to him by John. The Mandaic word *k(a)daba*, however, might be interpreted as being derived from either of two roots: the first root, meaning "to lie," is the one traditionally ascribed to Jesus; the second, meaning "to write," might provide a second meaning, that of "book"; hence some Mandaeans, motivated perhaps by an ecumenical spirit, maintain that Jesus was not a "lying Messiah" but a "book Messiah", the "book" in question presumably being the Christian Gospels. This seems to be a folk etymology without support in the Mandaean texts.<sup>[13]</sup>

Likewise, the Mandaeans believe that **Abraham**, **Moses**, and **Muhammad** were false **prophets**,<sup>[14]</sup> but recognize other prophetic figures from the **Abrahamic** traditions, such as Adam, his sons Hibil (**Abel**) and Šitil (**Seth**), and his grandson Anuš (**Enosh**), as well as Nuh

Valentinus
Basilides
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(Noah), his son Sam (**Shem**) and his son Ram (**Aram**). The latter three they consider to be their direct ancestors.

## Priests and laymen

[edit]

There is a strict division between Mandaean laity and the priests. According to E.S. Drower (*The Secret Adam*, p. ix):

[T]hose amongst the community who possess secret knowledge are called *Našuraiia*—Našoreans (or, if the emphatic <š> is written as <z>, *Nazorenes*). At the same time the ignorant or semi-ignorant laity are called 'Mandaeans', *Mandaiia*—'gnostics'. When a man becomes a priest he leaves 'Mandaeanism' and enters *tarmiduta*, 'priesthood'. Even then he has not attained to true enlightenment, for this, called 'Naširuta', is reserved for a very few. Those possessed of its secrets may call themselves Našoreans, and 'Našorean' today indicates not only one who observes strictly all rules of ritual purity, but one who understands the secret doctrine.

[15]

There are three grades of priesthood in Mandaicism: the *tarmidia* "disciples" (**Neo-Mandaic** *tarmidānā*), the *ganziabria* "treasurers" (from **Old Persian** *ganza-bara* "id.", Neo-Mandaic *ganzebrānā*) and the *rišamma* "leader of the people." This last office, the highest level of the Mandaean priesthood, has lain vacant for many years. At the moment, the highest office currently occupied is that of the *ganzebrā*, a title which appears first in a religious context in the Aramaic ritual texts from **Persepolis** (ca. 3rd c. BCE) and which may be related to the *kamnaskires* (Elamite <qa-ap-nu-iš-ki-ra> *kapnuskir* "treasurer"), title of the rulers of **Elymais** (modern **Khuzestan**) during the Hellenistic age. Traditionally, any *ganzebrā* who baptizes seven or more *ganzebrānā* may qualify for the office of *rišamma*, though the Mandaean community has yet to rally as a whole behind any single candidate.

The contemporary priesthood can trace its immediate origins to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1831, an outbreak of cholera devastated the region and eliminated most if not all of the Mandaean religious authorities. Two of the surviving acolytes (*šgandia*), **Yahia Bihram** and **Ram Zhrun**, reestablished the priesthood on the basis of their own training and the texts that were available to them.

In 2009 there were two dozen Mandaean priests in the world, according to the Associated Press.<sup>[2]</sup>

## View of Jerusalem

[edit]

In **Mandaicism**, **Jerusalem** is considered a city of wickedness, dedicated to the god of **Judaism**, whom they call Adunay (*Adonai*) or Yurba (possibly *YHWH*) and consider to be an evil spirit. According to Sidra d-Yahia 54, Jerusalem is "the stronghold that Adunay built ... [he] brought to it falsehood in plenty, and it meant persecution against my *tarmidia* (Manda d-Hiia's disciples)." In the *Ginza Rba* (15.11), it is said to have come into being as a result of the incestuous union of the seven **planets** with their evil mother **Ruha d-Qudsha**, who "left **lewdness**, **perversion**, and **fornication** in it. They said: 'Whoever lives in the city of Jerusalem will not mention the name of God.'" (Elsewhere, however, it more prosaically says the city was built by **Solomon**.) However, **Yahya** (John the Baptist), an important figure in the religion, is said to have been born there.

Later on, in the days of **Pontius Pilate**, it states that the good spirit Anush Utra went there, healed the sick and worked miracles, and made converts, confronting **Jesus** (whom they consider a false prophet) and refuting his arguments; but its inhabitants opposed him and persecuted the converts, 365 of whom were killed (GR 15.11) or forced out (GR 2.1.) Miriai, a **Jewish** princess, was converted, and fled to the shores of the **Euphrates**. This angered Anush Utra, who received permission from God to destroy Jerusalem and the temple, smash the "seven columns," and slay the Jews who lived there, after bringing out the remaining "believers." Elsewhere, the *Ginza Rba* (18) prophesies that Jerusalem "must flourish for a thousand years, remain a thousand years destroyed, and then the entire Tibil (material world) will be destroyed."

In the Abahatan Qadmaia prayer, repeated during **baptism** of the dead, the Mandaeans invoke blessings upon the 365 who were killed or forced out of Jerusalem:

“ Those 365 priests who came forth from the city of Jerusalem, the city of this *masiqta* and *dukhrana*, a forgiveness of sins may there be for them. ”

## Related groups

[edit]

According to the *Fihrist* of **ibn al-Nadim**, the Mesopotamian prophet **Mani**, the founder of **Manichaeism**, was brought up within the **Elkasaites** (*Elcesaites* or *Elchasaites*) sect. The Elkasaites were a Judeo-Christian baptismal sect which seem to have been related, possibly ancestral, to the Mandaeans (see **Sabians**). The members of this sect, like the Mandaeans, wore white and performed baptisms. They dwelt in east **Judea** and **Assyria**, whence the Mandaeans claim to have migrated to southern **Mesopotamia**, according to the *Harran Gawaiā* legend. Mani later left the Elkasaites to found his own religion. In a comparative analysis, Mandaean scholar Säv-Söderberg indicated that Mani's *Psalms of Thomas* were closely related to Mandaean texts<sup>[citation needed]</sup>. This would imply that **Mani** had access to Mandaean religious literature, or both derived from the same source.

Other groups which have been identified with the Mandaeans include the "**Nasoraean**", described by **Epiphanius**, and the **Dositheans**, mentioned by **Theodore Bar Kōnī** in his *Scholion*. **Ibn al-Nadim** also mentions a group called the *Mughtasila*, "the self-ablutionists", who may be identified with one or the other of these groups. The members of this sect, like the Mandaeans, wore white and performed baptisms.

Whether groups such as the Elkasaites, the *Mughtasila*, the Nasoraean, and the Dositheans can be identified with the Mandaeans or one another is a difficult question. While it seems certain that a number of distinct groups are intended by these names, the nature of these sects and the connections between them are less than clear. At least according to the *Fihrist* (see above), these groups seem all to have emerged from or developed in parallel with the "Sabian" followers of *El-Hasaiḥ*; "Elkasaites" in particular may simply have been a blanket term for *Mughtasila*, Mandaeans, the original Sabians and even Manichaeans.

## Mandaeans today

[edit]

## War in Iraq and diaspora

[edit]

Further information: *Iraqi minorities#Mandaeans*

The prewar Iraqi Mandaean community was centered around Baghdad.<sup>[16]</sup> Mandaean emigration from Iraq began during Saddam Hussein's rule, but accelerated greatly after the American invasion and subsequent occupation.<sup>[16]</sup> Since the invasion Mandaeans, like

other Iraqi minorities, have been subjected to violence by **Islamist** terrorist groups (not necessarily of Iraqi origin), including murders, kidnappings, rapes, evictions, and forced conversions.<sup>[16][17]</sup> Mandaeans and many other Iraqis, have been also targeted for kidnapping since many worked as goldsmiths.<sup>[16]</sup> Mandaism is pacifistic and forbids its adherents from carrying weapons,<sup>[16]</sup> though in the past it appears that some Mandaeans served as mercenaries both for Arabs and for the Portuguese.<sup>[18]</sup>

Most Iraqi Mandaeans have fled the country in the face of this violence, and the Mandaean community in Iraq faces extinction.<sup>[4][19]</sup> Out of the over 60,000 Mandaeans in Iraq in the early 1990s, only about 5,000 to 7,000 remain there; as of early 2007, over 80% of Iraqi Mandaeans were refugees in **Syria** and **Jordan** as a result of the **Iraq War**. There are small Mandaean diaspora populations in **Sweden** (c. 5,000), **Australia** (c. 3,500 as of 2006), the **USA** (c. 1,500), the **UK** (c. 1,000), and **Canada**.<sup>[4][20][21][22][23]</sup> Sweden became a popular destination because a Mandaean community existed there before the war and the Swedish government has a liberal asylum policy toward Iraqis.<sup>[24]</sup> The scattered nature of the Mandaean diaspora has raised fears among Mandaeans for the religion's survival.<sup>[2][17]</sup> Mandaism has no provision for conversion, and the religious status of Mandaeans who marry outside the faith and their children is disputed.<sup>[2][17]</sup>

The contemporary status of the Mandaeans has prompted a number of American intellectuals and civil rights activists to call upon the U.S. government to extend refugee status to the community. In 2007, *The New York Times* ran an *op-ed* piece in which Swarthmore professor **Nathaniel Deutsch** called for the Bush administration to take immediate action to preserve the community:

The United States didn't set out to eradicate the Mandaeans, one of the oldest, smallest and least understood of the many minorities in Iraq. This extinction in the making has simply been another unfortunate and entirely **unintended consequence** of our invasion of Iraq—though that will be of little comfort to the Mandaeans, whose 2,000-year-old culture is in grave danger of disappearing from the face of the earth. . . . When American forces invaded in 2003, there were probably 60,000 Mandaeans in Iraq; today, fewer than 5,000 remain. . . . Of the mere 500 Iraqi refugees who were allowed into the United States from April 2003 to April 2007, only a few were Mandaeans. And despite the Bush administration's commitment to let in 7,000 refugees in the fiscal year that ended [September 30, 2007], fewer than 2,000, including just three Iraqi Mandaean families, entered the country. If all Iraqi Mandaeans are granted privileged status and allowed to enter the United States in significant numbers, it may just be enough to save them and their ancient culture from destruction. If not, after 2,000 years of history, of persecution and tenacious survival, the last Gnostics will finally disappear, victims of an extinction inadvertently set into motion by our nation's negligence in Iraq.

—Nathaniel Deutsch, professor of religion, **Swarthmore College**, October 7, 2007<sup>[3]</sup>

Iraqi Mandaeans were given refugee status by the US State Department in 2007. Since then around 1200 have entered the US.<sup>[2]</sup> Many Mandaeans have began returning to Iraq during the past two years, as the circumstances in Iraq have improved.

## Iranian Mandaeans

[edit]

In Iran the *Gozinesh Law* (passed in 1985) has the effect of prohibiting Mandaeans from fully participating in civil life. This law and other *gozinesh* provisions make access to employment, education, and a range of other areas conditional upon a rigorous ideological screening, the principal prerequisite for which is devotion to the tenets of Islam.<sup>[25]</sup> These laws are regularly applied to discriminate against religious and ethnic groups that are not officially recognized, such as the Mandaeans, **Zoroastrians** and **Bahai**.<sup>[26]</sup> There are estimated to be between 5,000 and 10,000 Mandaeans in Iran.<sup>[2]</sup> In 2002 the US State Department granted Iranian Mandaeans protective refugee status; since then roughly 1,000 have emigrated to the US.<sup>[2]</sup>

## See also

[edit]

- **Iraqi people**
- **Aramaic**

## Notes

[edit]

- <sup>^</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> **Iraqi minority group needs U.S. attention**, Kai Thaler, *Yale Daily News*, March 9, 2007.
- <sup>^</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> <sup>d</sup> <sup>e</sup> <sup>f</sup> <sup>g</sup> <http://www.hollandsentinel.com/lifestyle/x1558731033/Saving-the-people-killing-the-faith>
- <sup>^</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> "Save the Gnostics" by Nathaniel Deutsch, October 6, 2007, *New York Times*.
- <sup>^</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> **Iraq's Mandaeans 'face extinction'**, Angus Crawford, BBC, March 4, 2007.
- <sup>^</sup> Khalil 'ibn Ahmad (d. 786-787 AD), who was in Basra before his death, wrote: "The Sabians believe they belong to the prophet Noah, they read *Zaboor* (see also **Book of Psalms**), and their religion looks like Christianity." He also states that "they worship the angels."
- <sup>^</sup> **Chwolohn**, Die Sabier, 1856, I, 112; II, 543, cited by Salmon.
- <sup>^</sup> **Extracts from E. S. Drower, *Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran***,
- <sup>^</sup> **The Mandaeans: True descendents of ancient Babylonians**
- <sup>^</sup> **Eric Segelberg** "Mašbūtā. Studies in the Ritual of the Mandaean Baptism, Uppsala, Sweden, 1958".
- <sup>^</sup> **Drower, Ethel Stephana** (1960). *The secret Adam, a study of Nasoraean gnosis*. London UK: Clarendon Press. p. xi
- <sup>^</sup> Lupieri, Edmondo (2002). *The Mandaeans: The Last Gnostics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. pp. 38–41.
- <sup>^</sup> Lupieri, Edmondo (2001). *The Mandaeans: The Last Gnostics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. pg. 248.
- <sup>^</sup> Macuch, Rudolf (1965). *Handbook of Classical and Modern Mandaic*. Berlin: De Gruyter & Co.. pp. 61 fn. 105.
- <sup>^</sup> Lupieri, Edmondo (2001). *The Mandaeans: The Last Gnostics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. pg. 116.
- <sup>^</sup> **Eric Segelberg**, "The Ordination of the Mandaean tarmida and its Relation to Jewish and Early Christian Ordination Rites", (*Studia patristica* 10, 1970).
- <sup>^</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> <sup>d</sup> <sup>e</sup> Ekman, Ivar (April 9, 2007). "An exodus to Sweden from Iraq for ethnic Mandaeans". *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 12, 2010.
- <sup>^</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> Newmarker, Chris (February 10, 2007). "Survival of Ancient Faith Threatened by Fighting in Iraq". *The Washington Post*. Retrieved May 12, 2010.
- <sup>^</sup> Lupieri, Edmondo (2002). *The Mandaeans: The Last Gnostics*. Charles Hindley Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. p. 91.
- <sup>^</sup> **Genocide Watch: Mandaeans of Iraq**
- <sup>^</sup> **Survival of Ancient Faith Threatened by Fighting in Iraq**, Chris Newmarker, Associated Press. February 10, 2007.
- <sup>^</sup> **The Plight of Iraq's Mandaeans**, John Bolender. Counterpunch.org, January 8/9, 2005.
- <sup>^</sup> **An exodus to Sweden from Iraq for ethnic Mandaeans**, Ivar Ekman. *International Herald Tribune*, April 9, 2007.
- <sup>^</sup> **Mandaeans persecuted in Iraq**. ABC Radio National (Australia), June 7, 2006.

- 24. ↑ Ekman, Ivar (April 9, 2007). "An exodus to Sweden from Iraq for ethnic Mandaeans". *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 12, 2010.
- 25. ↑ Ideological Screening (ROOZ :: English)
- 26. ↑ Annual Report for Iran, 2005, Amnesty International.

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## External links

[edit]

- [Mandaean Association Union](#) - The Mandaean Association Union is an international federation which strives for unification of Mandaeans around the globe. Information in English and Arabic.
- [An Ancient Religion Endangered by Iraq War](#) - A video by News21.
- [BBC: Iraq chaos threatens ancient faith](#)
- [BBC: Iraq's Mandaeans 'face extinction'](#)
- [BBC: Mandaeans - a threatened religion](#)
- [The Mandaeans: True descendents of ancient Babylonians](#)
- [Commentary: The woes of a peaceful and persecuted people](#) - *CNN*
- Shahāb Mirzā'i, *Ablution of Mandaeans* (*Ghosl-e Sābe'in* - غسل صابین), in Persian, Jadid Online, December 18, 2008
- [Audio slideshow](#) (showing Iranian Mandaeans performing ablution on the banks of the Karun river in Ahwaz): (4 min 25 sec)

## Mandaean scriptures

[edit]

- [Mandaean scriptures](#): *Qolastā* and *Haran Gawaitha* texts and fragments (note that the book titled *Ginza Rba* is not the *Ginza Rba* but is instead *Qolastā*, "The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans" as translated by E.S Drower).
- [Gnostic John the Baptizer: Selections from the Mandæan John-Book](#): This is the complete 1924 edition of G.R.S. Mead's classic study of the Mandæan John-Book, containing excerpts from the scripture itself (in The Gnosis Archive collection - www.gnosis.org).
- [The Genzā Rabbā](#) (1925 German translation by Mark Lidzbarski) at the [Internet Archive](#)
- The John-Book (*Draša d-Iahia*) - complete text in [Mandaic](#) and [German translation](#) (1905) by Mark Lidzbarski at the [Internet Archive](#)
- [Mandaic liturgies](#) in German translation (1925) by Mark Lidzbarski at the [Internet Archive](#)

## Books about Mandaism available online

[edit]

- [Fragments of a Faith Forgotten](#) by G. R. S. Mead a complete version (with old and new errors), contains information on [Mani](#), [Manichæism](#), [Elkasaites](#), [Nasoraeans](#), [Sabians](#) and other gnostic groups. Published in 1901, still considered authoritative.
- [Extracts from E. S. Drower, Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran](#), Leiden, 1962
- [The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran](#) by Lady Drower, 1937 - the entire book

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