

Indistinct Union: Christianity, Integral Philosophy, and Politics

Yazidis and the Original Religion of the Near East

The horrific bombing in the Kurdish regions around Kirkuk (death toll estimates currently at 400) targeted the Yazidis, a smallish Kurdish (but non-Muslim) sect. The Ys tended to separate themselves from the Peshmerga (the Kurdish military), which likely resulted in their being left vulnerable to this brutal attack. (For interviews with some Yazidis, [here](#) via BBC).

Who are theologically [the Yazidis](#)?

For repeat readers, they will know I support the (somewhat) controversial thesis of Christian scholar [Margaret Barker](#) (known as Royal Temple Theology).

Barker's first work is titled *The Older Testament*. A brilliant way to describe her point of view—namely that the Judaism that comes across in the Hebrew Bible we currently have has been massively (re)edited, more than most scholars will admit, by the Deuteronomic/Rabbinic schools of Judaism.

The Older Testament (as opposed to the “Old Testament” of the Deutro. school) included the belief in two G/Gods. The first was the High God (El, Elyon) who had “sons” (angelic beings). Each angel, known as an angel of the nation, was chosen for a specific people. As above so below. i.e. When there was war on earth between two peoples, their angels were fighting in heaven. Hence all the Psalms rousing YHWH (Israel's Angel/god) to fight.

The second G/god then is YHWH for Israel. The second God can manifest/appear either in angelic form (i.e. pillar of cloud leading the Israelites through the Desert) or in human-form, à la the three visitors to Abraham, who he recognized as angels and worshiped.

The Yazidis are called “Satanists” by certain Muslims and Christians in Iraq because they are said to worship an “angel.” In other words, the Yazidis are the modern day practitioners of this essentially ancient (Older) Near Eastern religion. The “original” Judaism. Or the original religion from which likely most, if not all, Eastern religions descend. Including Islam by the way, given that Islam considers itself to be returning to the original religion of Abraham.

The charge of Satanism then sadly way off. Because Yazidis are actually following the basic

Christianity replicates this “second God” structure by having the Father be El/Elyon the unnameable high God and Christ (incarnate in Jesus) being the second God, the God of the “Christians”.

The dangerous trend of this system, no doubt, (Jesus=High Priest) is that Jesus is an Angel and not really human....called Docetism or Gnosticism when it becomes a heresy.

It's a kind of pluralistic monotheism. There is only one High God for everyone. And only one mediator, second God for each group. One angel/god per nation. But multiple one way mediations. This model splits the difference between syncretism (bad merging of too many paths/angels) and fundamentalist exclusivism

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(our mediation path as only path).

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Religious Communities

The Syriac Gazetteer refers to religious communities using a nested controlled vocabulary. These terms are used according to scholarly convention and for scholars' convenience, without asserting that members of these groups would have called themselves by these labels. In this context, "religious communities" is not intended to imply a plurality of members in any one location, nor any harmonious existence among people identified with the same label. Nor are the existence of multiple labels intended to suggest that these categories are immutable or mutually exclusive. *Caveat lector.*

NB: Each list is alphabetized within its level, with the exception of Syriac.

- Christians
 - Syriac
 - Bardaisanites
 - East Syrian
 - Ancient Church of the East
 - Assyrian Evangelical Church
 - Chaldean Catholic
 - Church of the East
 - Indian
 - Chaldean Syrian Church
 - Malabar Catholic Church
 - Malabar Independent Syrian Church
 - Malankara Catholic Church
 - Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
 - Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church
 - Mar Thoma Syrian Church
 - West Syrian
 - Maronite
 - Melkite
 - Syrian Catholic
 - Syrian Orthodox
 - Arabic
 - Arabic Protestant
 - Rum Orthodox
 - Armenian
 - Armenian Catholic
 - Armenian Chalcedonian
 - Armenian Orthodox
 - Armenian Protestant
 - Coptic

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- Ethiopic
- Georgian
- Greek
 - Greek Catholic
 - Greek Orthodox
 - Marcionites
- Latin
 - Protestant
 - Roman Catholic
- Gnostics
 - Mandaeans
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- Jews
 - Karaite
 - Rabbanite
- Muslims
 - Khariji
 - Shi'a
 - Isma'ili
 - Twelver
 - Zaydi
 - Sunni
- Yezidis
- Zoroastrians



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Meeting the Yezidis

One positive byproduct of the war in Iraq has been the increased contact between outsiders and some of the smaller cultural groups in Iraq. I'm thinking particularly about the [Yezidis](#), a [religious group](#) in North Iraq. Frequently misunderstood - even [seen as devil-worshippers](#) - they have been the objects of prejudice within their own country, and confusion outside it.

Then suddenly in the past few years a steady stream of outsiders have made their way to the Yezidi villages near Mosul and Dohuk. Most recently there is [Michael Totten's](#) report, written in February. Before that [Michael Yon](#) did something similar. And back in April 2005, [Jacob Appelbaum](#) wrote his own [two-part account](#) of the Yezidis, with many pictures he's taken.

All three have written touching and human portraits of the Yezidis, as well as collecting ever more accurate information about their beliefs and lifestyles. They certainly compare favourably to this [account](#) of them written back in 1941, and even to the [photographs](#) from the same time, recently shown at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.

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Yazidi

Wikibook

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Yazidi

"Yezidi" redirects here. For other uses, see Yazid (disambiguation).

Yazidi *Êzîdî*



Yazidis on the mountain of Sinjar, Iraq/Syrian border, 1920s.

Total population	
700,000 ^[1]	
Regions with significant populations	
 Iraqi Kurdistan	500,000 ^[2]
 Germany	60,000
 Syrian Kurdistan	50,000
 Russia	40,586
 Armenia	35,272 ^[3]
 Georgia	20,843 (18,000 in Tbilisi) ^[4]
Religions	
Iranian religions	
Scriptures	
Yazidi Book of Revelation (Kitêba Cilwe) Yazidi Black Book (Mishefa Reş)	
Languages	
Kurdish (Latin)	

The **Yazidi** (also **Yezidi**, *Êzîdî*) are a Kurdish ethno-religious community, representing an ancient religion that is linked to Zoroastrianism. They live primarily in the Nineveh Province of northern Iraq. Additional communities in Armenia, Georgia, Turkey, and Syria have been in decline since the 1990s, their members having emigrated to Europe, especially to Germany. The Yazidi believe in God as creator of the world, which he placed under the care of seven holy beings or angels, the chief of whom is Melek Taus, the Peacock Angel.

Demographics

Historically, the Yazidi lived primarily in communities in locales that are in present day Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, and also had significant numbers in Armenia and Georgia. However, events since the 20th century have resulted in considerable demographic shift in these areas as well as mass emigration. As a result population estimates are unclear in many regions, and estimates of the size of the total population vary.

The bulk of the Yazidi population lives in Iraq, where they make up an important Iraqi minority community. Estimates of the size of these communities vary significantly, between 70,000 and 500,000. They are particularly concentrated in northern Iraq in the Nineveh Province. The two biggest communities are in Shekhan, northeast of Mosul, and in Sinjar, at the Syrian border 80 kilometers west of Mosul. In Shekhan is the shrine of Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir at Lalish. During the 20th century the Shekhan community struggled for dominance with the more conservative Sinjar community. The demographic profile has probably changed considerably since the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003 and the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Yazidi in Syria live primarily in two communities, one in the Al-Jazira area and the other in the Kurd-Dagh. Population numbers for the Syrian Yazidi community are unclear. In 1963 the community was estimated at about 10,000, according to the national census, but numbers for 1987 were unavailable.^[5] There may be between about 12,000 and 15,000 Yazidi in Syria today, though more than half of the community may have emigrated from Syria since the 1980s. Estimates are further complicated by the arrival of as many as 50,000 Yazidi refugees from Iraq during the Iraq War.

The Turkish Yazidi community declined precipitously during the 20th century. By 1982 it had decreased to about 30,000, and in 2009 there were fewer than 500. Most Turkish Yazidi have emigrated to Europe, particularly Germany; those who remain reside primarily in their former heartland of Tur Abdin. Population estimates for the communities in Georgia and Armenia vary, but they too have declined severely. In Georgia the community fell from around 30,000 people to fewer than 5,000 during the 1990s. The numbers in Armenia may have been somewhat more stable; there may be around 40,000 Yazidi still in Armenia.^[6] Most Georgian and Armenian Yazidi have relocated to Russia, which recorded a population of 31,273 Yazidis in the 2002 census.

This mass emigration has resulted in the establishment of large diaspora communities abroad. The most significant of these is in Germany, which now has a Yazidi community of over 40,000. Most are from Turkey and more recently Iraq, and live in the western states of North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony. Since 2008 Sweden has seen sizable growth in its Yazidi emigrant community, which had grown to around 4,000 by 2010, and a smaller community exists in the Netherlands. Other diaspora groups live in Belgium, Denmark, France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia; these have a total population of probably less than 5,000.



Yazidi leaders and Chaldean clergymen meeting in Mesopotamia, 19th century.



Yazidi men in Mardin, late 19th century.

Origins

The Yazidi are mostly Kurdish-speaking people who adhere to a branch of Iranian religions that blends elements of Mithraism, pre-Islamic Mesopotamian/Assyrian religious traditions, Christianity and Islam. In addition to Kurdish, there are significant Yazidi communities who speak Arabic as their native language. Their principal holy site is in Lalish, northeast of Mosul. The Yazidis' own name for themselves is *Êzîdî* or *Êzîdî* or, in some areas, *Dasinî* (the latter, strictly speaking, is a tribal name). Some scholars have derived the name Yazidi from Old Iranian *yazata*

(divine being), but most say it is a derivation from Umayyad Caliph Yazid I (Yazid bin Muawiyah), revered by the Yazidis as an incarnation of the divine figure Sultan Ezi.^[7] Yazidis, themselves, believe that their name is derived from the word *Yezdan* or *Êzîd* "God". The Yazidis' cultural practices are observably in Kurdish, and almost all speak Kurmanjî with the exception of the villages of Bashiqa and Bahazane, where Arabic is spoken. Kurmanjî is the language of almost all the orally transmitted religious traditions of the Yazidis.

The religion of the Yazidis is a highly syncretic one: Sufi influence and imagery can be seen in their religious vocabulary, especially in the terminology of their esoteric literature, but much of the mythology is non-Islamic. Their cosmogonies apparently have many points in common with those of ancient Persian religions. Early writers attempted to describe Yazidi origins, broadly speaking, in terms of Islam, or Persian, or sometimes even pagan religions; however, publications since the 1990s have shown such an approach to be overly simplistic.

The origin of the Yazidi religion is now usually seen by scholars as a complex process of syncretism, whereby the belief system and practices of a local faith had a profound influence on the religiosity of adherents of the 'Adawiyya Sufi order living in the Yezidi mountains, and caused it to deviate from Islamic norms relatively soon after the death of its founder, Shaykh 'Adî ibn Musafir (Yezidish *Şêx Adî*), who is said to be of Umayyad descent. He settled in the valley of Laliş (some thirty-six miles north-east of Mosul) in the early 12th century. Şêx Adî himself, a figure of undoubted orthodoxy, enjoyed widespread influence. He died in 1162, and his tomb at Laliş is a focal point of Yazidi pilgrimage.^[8]

According to the Yezidi calendar, April 2012 marked the beginning of their year 6,762 (thereby year 1 would have been in 4,750 BC in the Gregorian calendar).^[9]


During the fourteenth century, important Yezidi tribes whose sphere of influence stretched well into what is now Turkey (including, for a period, the rulers of the principality of Jazira) are cited in historical sources as Yazidi.

According to Moḥammed Aš-Şahrastani, "The Yezidis are the followers of Yezîd bn Unaisa, who [said that he] kept friendship with the first Muhakkama before the Azariqa"^[10] "It is clear, then, that Aš-Şahrastani finds the religious origin of this interesting people in the person of Yezîd bn Unaisa. ... We are to understand, therefore, that to the knowledge of the writer, bn Unaisa is the founder of the Yezidi sect, which took its name from him."^[11] "Now, the first Muhakkamah is an appellative applied to the Muslim schismatics called Al-Ḥawarij. ... According to this it might be inferred that the Yezidis were originally a Ḥarijite sub-sect."^[12] "Yezid moreover, is said to have been in sympathy with Al-Abadiyah, a sect founded by 'Abd-Allah Ibn Ibaq."; and the Ibaḍi sect is another Ḥarijite sub-sect.



Yazidi man in traditional clothes

Religious beliefs

Part of a series on
Yazdânism

The yellow sun with 21 rays. The number 21 holds great importance in the ancient religious practice of Yazdânism.
Branches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yazidi (<i>Êzîdîtî</i>) • Ishikism (<i>Elewîtî</i>) • Ahl-e Haqq (<i>Yarsanîtî</i>) • Zoroastrian Yazdânism (<i>Zerdeştîî</i>)
Blessed persons in Yezidi faith
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheikh ‘Adî ibn Musâfir al-Umawî (<i>Şêx Adî</i>) • Blessed person Abd-al-Rahman ibn Muljam (<i>Kharijite assassin of Ali ibn Abi Talib</i>)
Yezidi holy scripture and worship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yazidi Book of Revelation (<i>Kitêba Cilwe</i>) • Yazidi Black Book (<i>Mishefa Reş</i>) • Melek Taus (<i>Tawûsê Melek</i>)
Blessed persons in Yâresân faith
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epochs of Khawandagar (<i>God</i>) • Alî ibn Abî Tâlib (<i>Elî</i>) · Shah Khoshin • Sultan Sahak (<i>Siltan Sahak</i>)
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 Kurdistan portal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	v t e ^[13]

Yazidis are monotheists, believing in one God, who created the world and entrusted it into the care of a *Heptad* of seven Holy Beings, often known as Angels or *heft sirr* (the Seven Mysteries). Preeminent among these is Tawûsê Melek (frequently known as "Melek Taus" in English publications), the Peacock Angel.

Yazidism is not an off-shoot of another religion (such as Christianity or Islam), but shows influence from the many religions of the middle-east. Core Yazidi cosmology has a pre-Zoroastrian Iranian origin, but Yazidism also includes elements of ancient nature-worship, as well as influences from Christianity, Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, Islam and Judaism. The heptad of angels are God's emanations which are formed of the light of God. God delegates most of his action to the heptad and is therefore somewhat deistic in nature.

According to the *Encyclopedia of the Orient*,

The reason for the Yazidis reputation of being devil worshipers is connected to the other name of Melek Taus, Shaytan, the same name the Koran has for Satan.

Furthermore, the Yazidi story regarding Tawûsê Melek's rise to favor with God is almost identical to the story of the jinn Iblis in Islam, except that Yazidis revere Tawûsê Melek for refusing to submit to God by bowing to Adam, while Muslims believe that Iblis' refusal to submit caused him to fall out of Grace with God, and to later become Satan himself.^[14]

Tawûsê Melek is often identified by Muslims and Christians with Shaitan (Satan). Yazidis, however, believe Tawûsê Melek is not a source of evil or wickedness. They consider him to be the leader of the archangels, not a fallen angel. They are forbidden from speaking the name Shaitan. They also hold that the source of evil is in the heart and spirit of humans themselves, not in Tawûsê Melek. The active forces in their religion are Tawûsê Melek and Sheik Adî.

The *Kitêba Cilwe* "Book of Illumination", which claims to be the words of Tawûsê Melek, and which presumably represents Yazidi belief, states that he allocates responsibilities, blessings and misfortunes as he sees fit and that it is not for the race of Adam to question him. Sheikh Adî believed that the spirit of Tawûsê Melek was the same as his own, perhaps as a reincarnation. He is reported to have said:

I was present when Adam was living in Paradise, and also when Nemrud threw Abraham in fire. I was present when God said to me: 'You are the ruler and Lord on the Earth'. God, the compassionate, gave me seven earths and throne of the heaven.

Yazidi accounts of creation differ from that of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They believe that God first created Tawûsê Melek from his own illumination (*Ronahî*) and the other six archangels were created later. God ordered Tawûsê Melek not to bow to other beings. Then God created the other archangels and ordered them to bring him dust (*Ax*) from the Earth (*Erd*) and build the body of Adam. Then God gave life to Adam from his own breath and instructed all archangels to bow to Adam. The archangels obeyed except for Tawûsê Melek. In answer to God, Tawûsê Melek replied, "How can I submit to another being! I am from your illumination while Adam is made of dust." Then God praised him and made him the leader of all angels and his deputy on the Earth. (This probably furthers what some see as a connection to the Islamic *Shaytan*, as according to the Quran he too refused to bow to Adam at God's command, though in this case it is seen as being a sign of Shaytan's sinful pride.) Hence the Yazidis believe that Tawûsê Melek is the representative of God on the face of the Earth and comes down to the Earth on the first Wednesday of Nisan (April). Yazidis hold that God created Tawûsê Melek on this day, and celebrate it as New Year's Day. Yazidis argue that the order to bow to Adam was only a test for Tawûsê Melek, since if God commands anything then it must happen. (*Bibe, dibe*). In other words, God could have made him submit to Adam, but gave Tawûsê Melek the choice as a test. They believe that their respect and praise for Tawûsê Melek is a way to acknowledge his majestic and sublime nature. This idea is called "Knowledge of the Sublime" (*Zanista Ciwaniyê*).

Şêx Adî has observed the story of Tawûsê Melek and believed in him.

One of the key creation beliefs held by Yazidis is that they are the descendants of Adam through his son Shehid bin Jer rather than Eve. Yazidis believe that good and evil both exist in the mind and spirit of human beings. It depends on the humans, themselves, as to which they choose. In this process, their devotion to Tawûsê Melek is essential, since it was he who was given the same choice between good and evil by God, and chose the good.

The Yazidi holy books are claimed to be the *Kitêba Cilwe* (Book of Revelation) and the *Mishefa Reş* (Black Book). However, scholars generally agree that the manuscripts of both books published in 1911 and 1913 were forgeries written by non-Yazidis in response to Western travelers' and scholars' interest in the Yazidi religion; the material in them is consistent with authentic Yazidi traditions, however. True texts of those names may have existed, but remain obscure. The real core texts of the religion that exist today are the hymns known as qawls; they have also been orally transmitted during most of their history, but are now being collected with the assent of the community, effectively transforming Yazidism into a scriptural religion. The qawls are full of cryptic allusions and usually need to be accompanied by *çîrōks* or 'stories' that explain their context.

Two key and interrelated features of Yazidism are: a) a preoccupation with religious purity and b) a belief in metempsychosis. The first of these is expressed in the system of caste, the food laws, the traditional preferences for living in Yazidi communities, and the variety of taboos governing many aspects of life. The second is crucial; Yazidis traditionally believe that the Seven Holy Beings are periodically reincarnated in human form, called a *koasasa*.

A belief in the reincarnation of lesser Yazidi souls also exists. Like the Ahl-e Haqq, the Yazidis use the metaphor of a change of garment to describe the process, which they call *kiras guhorîn* in Yezidish (changing the garment). Alongside this, Yazidi mythology also includes descriptions of heaven and hell, with hell extinguished, and other traditions incorporating these ideas into a belief system that includes reincarnation.

Organization

Yazidi society is hierarchical. The secular leader is a hereditary emir or prince, whereas a chief sheikh heads the religious hierarchy. The Yazidi are strictly endogamous; members of the three Yazidi castes, the murids, sheikhs and pirs, marry only within their group, marriage outside the caste is considered as sin punishable by death to restore lost honour.^[15]

Religious practices

Prayers

Yazidis have five daily prayers:

Nivêja berîspêdê (the Dawn Prayer), Nivêja rojhilatînê (the Sunrise Prayer), Nivêja nîvro (the Noon Prayer), Nivêja êvarî (the Afternoon Prayer), Nivêja rojavabûnê (the Sunset Prayer). However, most Yazidis observe only two of these, the sunrise and sunset prayers.

Worshippers should turn their face toward the sun, and for the noon prayer, they should face toward Laliş. Such prayer should be accompanied by certain gestures, including kissing the rounded neck (*gerîvan*) of the sacred shirt (*kiras*). The daily prayer services must not be performed in the presence of outsiders, and are always performed in the direction of the sun. Wednesday is the holy day but Saturday is the day of rest. There is also a three-day fast in December.

Festivals

The Yazidi New Year falls in Spring (somewhat later than the Equinox). There is some lamentation by women in the cemeteries, to the accompaniment of the music of the *Qewals*, but the festival is generally characterized by joyous events: the music of *dehol* (drum) and *zorna* (shawm), communal dancing and meals, the decorating of eggs.

Similarly, the village Tawaf, a festival held in the spring in honor of the patron of the local shrine, has secular music, dance and meals in addition to the performance of sacred music.

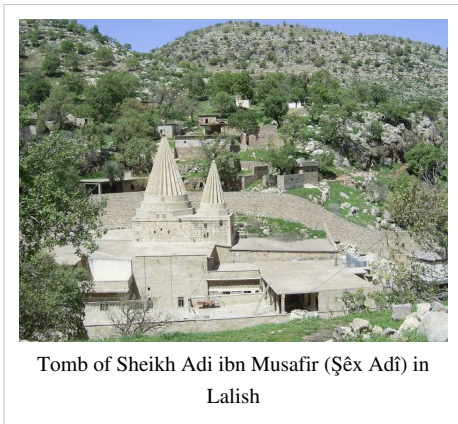
Another important festival is the *Tawûsgeran* (circulation of the peacock) where Qewals and other religious dignitaries visit Yazidi villages, bringing the *senjaq*, sacred images of a peacock made from brass symbolising Tawûsê Melek. These are venerated, taxes are collected from the pious, sermons are preached and holy water distributed.

The greatest festival of the year for ordinary Yazidis is the *Cejna Cemaiya* "Feast of the Assembly" at Lalish, a seven-day occasion. A focus of widespread pilgrimage, this is an important time for social contact and affirmation of identity. The religious center of the event is the belief in an annual gathering of the *Heptad* in the holy place at this time. Rituals practiced include the sacrifice of a bull at the shrine of Şêx Shams and the practice of *sema*.

Pilgrimage

The most important ritual is the annual seven-day pilgrimage to the tomb of Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir (Şêx Adî) in Lalish, north of Mosul, Iraq. A sacred microcosm of the world, as it were, it contains not only many shrines dedicated to the *koasasa*, but a number of other landmarks corresponding to other sites or symbols of significance in other faiths, including *Pirra selat* "Serat Bridge" and a mountain called Mt. Arafat. The two sacred springs are called *Zamzam* and *Kaniya Sipî* "The White Spring".

If possible, Yazidis make at least one pilgrimage to Lalish during their lifetime, and those living in the region try to attend at least once a year for the autumn *Feast of the Assembly* which is celebrated from 23 Aylûl (September) to 1 Tashrîn (October). During the celebration, Yazidi bathe in the river, wash figures of Tawûsê Melek and light hundreds of lamps in the tombs of Şêx Adî and other saints. They also sacrifice an ox, which is one reason they have been connected to Mithraism, in addition to the presence of the dog and serpent in their iconography. The sacrifice of the ox is meant to declare the arrival of fall and to ask for precipitation during winter in order to bring back life to the Earth in the next spring. Moreover, in astrology, the ox is the symbol of Tashrîn.



Tomb of Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir (Şêx Adî) in Lalish

Purity and taboos

The Yazidis' concern with religious purity, and their reluctance to mix elements perceived to be incompatible, is shown not only in their caste system, but also in various taboos affecting everyday life. Some of these, such as those on exogamy or on insulting or offending men of religion, are widely respected. Others are often ignored when men of religion are not present. Others still are less widely known and may be localized.

The purity of the four elements Earth, Air, Fire and Water is protected by a number of taboos, e.g. against spitting on earth, water or fire. Some discourage spitting or pouring hot water on the ground because they believe that spirits or souls that may be present would be harmed or offended by such actions if they happen to be hit by the discarded liquid. These may also reflect ancient Iranian preoccupations, as apparently do taboos concerning bodily waste, hair and menstrual blood.

Too much contact with non-Yazidis is also considered polluting. In the past, Yazidis avoided military service which would have led them to live among Muslims, and were forbidden to share such items as cups or razors with

outsiders. A resemblance to the external ear may lie behind the taboo against eating head lettuce, whose name *koas* resembles Yazidi pronunciations of *koasasa*. Additionally, lettuce grown near Mosul is thought by some Yazidi to be fertilized with human waste, which may contribute to the idea that it is unsuitable for consumption. However, in a BBC interview in April 2010, a senior Yazidi authority stated that ordinary Yazidis may eat what they want, but holy men refrain from certain vegetables (including cabbage) because "they cause gases".^[16]

Yazidis refrain from wearing the colour blue^[citation needed] (or possibly green as stated in *Soldier Poet and Rebel* by Miles Hudson). The origins of this prohibition are unknown, but may either be because blue represents Noah's flood, or it was possibly the colour worn by a conquering king sometime in the past. Alternatively, the prohibition may arise from their veneration of the Peacock Angel and an unwillingness to usurp His colour.

Customs

Children are baptized at birth and circumcision is common but not required. Dead are buried in conical tombs immediately after death and buried with hands crossed.

Yazidi are dominantly monogamous but chiefs may be polygamous, having more than one wife. Yazidi are exclusively endogamous; clans do not intermarry even with other Kurds and accept no converts. They claim they are descended only from Adam and not from Eve.

A severe punishment is expulsion, which is also effectively excommunication because the soul of the exiled is forfeit.

In 2007, an incidence of honour killing—the stoning of Du'a Khalil Aswad—made world headlines.^[17]

Myths



The Chermera or "40 Men" Temple on the highest peak of the Sinjar Mountains in northern Iraq. The temple is so old that no one remembers how it came to have that name, but it is believed to derive from the burial of 40 men on the mountaintop site

The tale of the Yazidis' origin found in the Black Book gives them a distinctive ancestry and expresses their feeling of difference from other races. Before the roles of the sexes were determined, Adam and Eve quarreled about which of them provided the creative element in the begetting of children. Each stored their seed in a jar which was then sealed. When Eve's was opened it was full of insects and other unpleasant creatures, but inside Adam's jar was a beautiful boychild. This lovely child, known as *son of Jar* grew up to marry a houri and became the ancestor of the Yazidis. Therefore, the Yazidi are regarded as descending from Adam alone, while other humans are descendants of both Adam and Eve.

In other cultures

Muslim antipathy

As a demiurge figure, Tawûsê Melek is often identified by orthodox Muslims as a Shaitan (Satan), a Muslim term denoting a devil or demon who deceives true believers. The Islamic tradition regarding the fall of "Shaitan" from Grace is in fact very similar to the Yazidi story of Malek Taus – that is, the Jinn who refused to submit to God by bowing to Adam is celebrated as Tawûsê Melek by Yazidis, but the Islamic version of the same story curses the same Jinn who refused to submit as becoming Satan. Thus, the Yazidi have been accused of devil worship. Because of this and due to their pre-Islamic beliefs, they have been oppressed by their Muslim neighbors. Treatment of Yazidis was exceptionally harsh during the rule of the Ottoman Empire during the 18th and the first half of 19th century and their numbers dwindled under Ottoman rule both in Syria and Iraq. Massacres at the hand of Ottoman

Turks and Muslim Kurdish princes almost wiped out their community in the 19th century. Several punitive expeditions were organized against the Yazidis by the Turkish governors (Wāli) of Diyarbakir, Mosul and Baghdad. These operations were legitimized by fatāwa from Islamic clerics. The objective of these persecutions was the forced conversion of Yazidis to the Sunni Hanafi Islam of the Turkish Ottoman Empire.

Recent controversies

On August 14, 2007, some 500 Yazidis were killed in a coordinated series of bombings that became the deadliest suicide attack since the Iraq War began.

On August 13, 2009, at least 20 people were killed and 30 wounded in a double suicide bombing in northern Iraq, an Iraqi Interior Ministry official said. Two suicide bombers with explosive vests carried out the attack at a cafe in Sinjar, a town west of Mosul. In Sinjar, many townspeople are members of the Yazidi minority.

In Europe

Feleknaş Uca, a Yazidi Member of the European Parliament for Germany's Party of Democratic Socialism, was the world's only Yazidi parliamentarian until the Iraqi legislature was elected in 2005. European Yazidis have contributed to the academic community, such as Khalil Rashow in Germany and Jalile Jalil in Austria.

In May 2012, five members of a Yazidi family living in Detmold, Germany, were convicted for having murdered their sister in a so-called "honour killing" and sentenced to terms ranging from five-and-a-half years to life in prison. The victim was 18-year-old Arzu Özmen (also spelled Ozmen outside Germany), who fell in love with a German journeymen baker and ran away from her family, violating the exogamy taboo. In November 2011, her siblings abducted her and brother Osman killed her with two shots in the head.

In Western theological references

As the Yazidi hold religious beliefs that are mostly unfamiliar to outsiders, many non-Yazidi people have written about them and ascribed facts to their beliefs that have dubious historical validity. For example, horror writer H. P. Lovecraft made a reference to the Yazidi as the "last survivors of the Persian devil-worshippers" in his short story *The Horror at Red Hook*.^[18]

The Yazidis, perhaps because of their secrecy, also have a place in modern occultism. G. I. Gurdjieff wrote about his encounters with the Yazidis several times in his book *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, mentioning that they are considered to be "devil worshippers" by other ethnicities in the region.

The Theosophical Society, in its electronic version of the *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary* states:

Yezidis (Arabic) [possibly from Persian yazdan god; or the 2nd Umayyad Caliph, Yazid (r. 680 - 683); or Persian city Yezd] A sect dwelling principally in Kurdistan, Armenia, and the Caucasus, who call themselves Dasni. Their religious beliefs take on the characteristics of their surrounding peoples, inasmuch as, openly or publicly, they regard Mohammed as a prophet, and Jesus Christ as an angel in human form. Points of resemblance are found with ancient Zoroastrian and Assyrian religion. The principal feature of their worship, however, is Satan under the name of Muluk-Taus. However, it is not the Christian Satan, nor the devil in any form; their Muluk-Taus is the hundred- or thousand-eyed cosmic wisdom, pictured as a bird (the peacock).

WP:NOTRS Idries Shah, writing under the pen-name *Arkon Daraul*, in the 1961 book *Secret Societies Yesterday and Today*, describes discovering a Yazidi-influenced secret society in the London suburbs called the "Order of the Peacock Angel." Idries Shah claimed that Tawûsê Melek could be understood, from the Sufi viewpoint, as an allegory of the higher powers in humanity.

In Western literature

In H.P. Lovecraft's story "The Horror at Red Hook", some of the murderous foreigners are identified as belonging to "the Yazidi clan of devil-worshippers".

In her memoir of her service with an intelligence unit of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division in Iraq during 2003 and 2004, Kayla Williams (2005) records being stationed in northern Iraq near the Syrian border in an area inhabited by "Yezidis". The Yezidis were Kurdish-speaking, but did not consider themselves Kurds, and expressed to Williams a fondness for America and Israel. She was able to learn only a little about the nature of their religion: she thought it very ancient, and concerned with angels. She describes a mountain-top Yezidi shrine as "a small rock building with objects dangling from the ceiling", and alcoves for the placement of offerings. She reports that local Muslims considered the Yezidis to be devil worshippers.

In an October 2006 article in *The New Republic*, Lawrence F. Kaplan echoes Williams's sentiments about the enthusiasm of the Yazidis for the American occupation of Iraq, in part because the Americans protect them from oppression by militant Muslims and the nearby Kurds. Kaplan notes that the peace and calm of Sinjar is virtually unique in Iraq: "Parents and children line the streets when U.S. patrols pass by, while Yazidi clerics pray for the welfare of U.S. forces."^[19]

A fictional Yazidi character of note is the super-powered police officer King Peacock of the *Top 10* series (and related comics).^[20] He is portrayed as a kind, peaceful character with a broad knowledge of religion and mythology. He is depicted as conservative, ethical, and highly principled in family life. An incredibly powerful martial artist, he is able to destroy matter, a power that he claims is derived from communicating with Malek Ta'us.

Tony Lagouranis comments on a Yazidi prisoner in his book *Fear Up Harsh: An Army Interrogator's Dark Journey through Iraq*:

There's a lot of mystery surrounding the Yazidi, and a lot of contradictory information. But I was drawn to this aspect of their beliefs: Yazidi don't have a Satan. Malak Ta'us, an archangel, God's favorite, was not thrown out of heaven the way Satan was. Instead, he descended, saw the suffering and pain of the world, and cried. His tears, thousands of years' worth, fell on the fires of hell, extinguishing them. If there is evil in the world, it does not come from a fallen angel or from the fires of hell. The evil in this world is man-made. Nevertheless, humans can, like Malak Ta'us, live in this world but still be good.

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Melek Taus

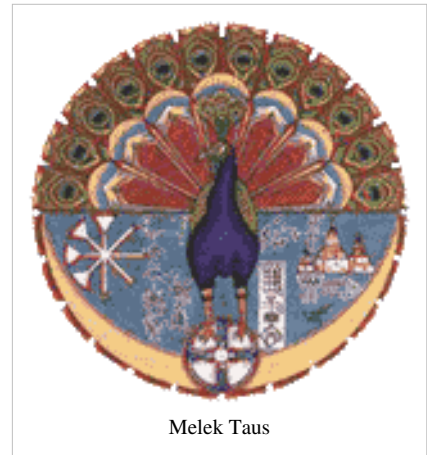
Melek Taus (Persian: ملك طاووس), or the **Peacock Angel**, is the Yazidi name for the central figure of their faith.

In the Yazidi belief system, God created the world, and the world is now in the care of a *Heptad* of seven Holy Beings, often known as Angels or *heft sirr* (the Seven Mysteries). Preeminent among these is Tawûsê Melek (frequently known as "Melek Taus" in English publications), the Peacock Angel. According to the *Encyclopedia of the Orient*,

The reason for the Yazidis reputation of being devil worshipers is connected to the other name of Melek Taus, Shaytan, the same name the Koran has for Satan.

Furthermore, the Yazidi story regarding Tawûsê Melek's rise to favor with God is almost identical to the story of the jinn Iblis in Islam, except that Yazidis revere Tawûsê Melek for refusing to submit to Adam, while Muslims believe that Iblis' refusal to submit caused him to fall out of Grace with God, and to later become Satan himself.^[1]

Tawûsê Melek is often identified by Muslims and Christians with Shaitan (Satan). Yazidis, however, believe Tawûsê Melek is not a source of evil or wickedness. They consider him to be the leader of the archangels, not a fallen angel. They are forbidden from speaking the name Shaitan. They also hold that the source of evil is in the heart and spirit of humans themselves, not in Tawûsê Melek. The active forces in their religion are Tawûsê Melek and Sheik Adî.



Melek Taus

Religious significance

The Yazidi consider *Tawûsê Melek* an emanation of God and a benevolent angel who has redeemed himself from his fall and has become a demiurge who created the cosmos from the Cosmic egg. After he repented, he wept for 7,000 years, his tears filling seven jars, which then quenched the fires of hell.

Tawûsê Melek is sometimes transliterated *Malak Ta'us*, *Malak Tawus*, or *Malik Taws*. *Melek* was borrowed from the Arabic term "king" or "angel". *Tawûs* is uncontroversially translated "peacock"; in art and sculpture, Tawûsê Melek is depicted as peacock. However, peacocks are not native to the lands where Tawûsê Melek is worshipped.

The *Kitêba Cilwe* "Book of Illumination", which claims to be the words of Tawûsê Melek, and which presumably represents Yazidi belief, states that he allocates responsibilities, blessings and misfortunes as he sees fit and that it is not for the race of Adam to question him. Sheikh Adî believed that the spirit of Tawûsê Melek is the same as his own, perhaps as a reincarnation. He is believed to have said:

I was present when Adam was living in Paradise, and also when Nemrud threw Abraham in fire. I was present when God said to me: 'You are the ruler and Lord on the Earth'. God, the compassionate, gave me seven earths and throne of the heaven.

Yazidi accounts of creation differ from that of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They believe that God first created Tawûsê Melek from his own illumination (*Ronahî*) and the other six archangels were created later. God ordered Tawûsê Melek not to bow to other beings. Then God created the other archangels and ordered them to bring him dust (*Ax*) from the Earth (*Erd*) and build the body of Adam. Then God gave life to Adam from his own breath and instructed all archangels to bow to Adam. The archangels obeyed except for Tawûsê Melek. In answer to God, Tawûsê Melek replied, "How can I submit to another being! I am from your illumination while Adam is made of dust." Then God praised him and made him the leader of all angels and his deputy on the Earth. (This likely furthers what some see as a connection to the Islamic *Shaytan*, as according to the Quran he too refused to bow to Adam at God's command, though in this case it is seen as being a sign of Shaytan's sinful pride.) Hence the Yazidis believe

that Tawûsê Melek is the representative of God on the face of the Earth, and comes down to the Earth on the first Wednesday of Nisan (April). Yazidis hold that God created Tawûsê Melek on this day, and celebrate it as New Year's Day. Yazidis argue that the order to bow to Adam was only a test for Tawûsê Melek, since if God commands anything then it must happen. (*Bibe, dibe*). In other words, God could have made him submit to Adam, but gave Tawûsê Melek the choice as a test. They believe that their respect and praise for Tawûsê Melek is a way to acknowledge his majestic and sublime nature. This idea is called "Knowledge of the Sublime" (*Zanista Ciwaniyê*). Sheikh Adî has observed the story of Tawûsê Melek and believed in him.

Yazidis believe that good and evil both exist in the mind and spirit of human beings. It depends on the humans, themselves, as to which they choose. In this process, their devotion to Tawûsê Melek is essential, since it was he who was given the same choice between good and evil by God, and chose the good.

The Yazidi believe that the founder of their religion, Sheikh Adi Ibn Musafir, was an incarnation of Tawûsê Melek.

Abrahamic interpretation of Melek Taus

Some Christians, Muslims and others identify Tawûsê Melek as Lucifer or Satan. According to the Yazidi Black Book, the Yazidi are forbidden to say the name "Shaitan" because their people would be religiously persecuted by other faiths.^{[2][3]}

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Order of the Peacock Angel

Order of the Peacock Angel is the name of a Yazidi-influenced secret society described in the 1961 book, *Secret Societies Yesterday and Today* (subsequently reissued as *A History of Secret Societies*). The pseudonymous author, "Arkon Daraul", describes encountering members of the organization in the suburbs of London and attending their rituals. Daraul appears to be the only source for the existence of this group.

"Peacock Angel" is the customary translation of "Melek Taus", the divinity honored by the Yazidi. According to Daraul, the English version of the cult was brought to Britain in 1913 by a Syrian whose name is only known to initiates. Membership grew to encompass "several hundred members throughout Britain" as well as three lodges in the United States".

The group subscribes to a belief in a power governing human affairs, symbolized by a peacock. Recruits are instructed through a series of mental and physical exercises intended to place the experience of emotion under the control of the will. Daraul described a ceremony where robed members engaged in an ecstatic dance in the presence of a large statue of a peacock.

As a sign of identification, "the right hand is placed, with the fingers spread out (perhaps to represent the tail of the peacock) on the left breast, just above the heart." Some members are said to keep live peacocks.

Fiction

Edward D. Hoch's 1965 short novel, *People of the Peacock*, featured an "Order of the Peacock Angel" which matches the description given in *Secret Societies Yesterday and Today*:

The society had an uncertain origin in the area that is now Syria and Iraq, some hundreds of years ago. It was imported into England by a mysterious Syrian back in 1913, and has enjoyed some success there. ... The rites of the Peacock Angel consist mostly of white-robed worshippers dancing madly before an eight-foot ebony statue of a peacock.

The novel describes a chapter of the organization in the United States run by a British emigrant.

In Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson's 1975 *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*, "Order of the Peacock Angel" appears in letterhead as the title of an organization taking part in the Discordian "Operation Mindfuck" project outlined in "Appendix Yod".

Cooper McLaughlin's 1987 short novel, *The Order of the Peacock Angel*, published in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, claims historical sources for its tale of a 1,000 year old society that continued into the 1960s. [1]

Notes

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Yazidi Black Book

The *Yazidi Black Book* or *Meshaf Resh* (Kurdish: ش مسحهفنا *Mishefa Reş*) is one of the two holy books of the Yazidi religion, the other being the *Book of Revelation* (*Kitêba Cilwe*).

Yezidis believe the *Black Book* originated when the Lord descended Black Mountain. The Yazidi holy books are written in the Kurmanji dialect of the Kurdish language. The *Black Book* is not divided into chapters and is longer than the Book of Revelation. The first half of it contains a creation myth, beginning with the creation of a white pearl and Melek Taus, the Peacock Angel. There follows an account of the Fall (in which the forbidden comestible is wheat), and the creation of Eve after Adam has been driven from Paradise.

This is followed by the names of ancient kings who belonged to the Yazidi community. Next comes a statement of food taboos of the Yazidis, prohibitions connected with personal hygiene and verbal taboos.

The discussion then reverts to the subject of ancient Yazidi kings, and the Book concludes with another account of the Creation, which diverges quite considerably from the first.

The original text of the Yazidi *Black Book* is kept in the village of Qasr 'tzz at-Din. Nevertheless, scholars generally agree that the manuscripts of both books published in 1911 and 1913 were forgeries written by non-Yazidis in response to Western travelers' and scholars' interest in the Yazidi religion; they do reflect authentic Yezidi traditions, however.^[1] The real core texts of the religion that exist today are the hymns known as *qawls*.

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Yazidi Book of Revelation

The **Yazidi Book of Revelation** (*Kitêba Cilwe* in Kurdish; also transliterated as *Kitab Al Jilwah*) is one of the two holy books of the Yazidi religion, the other being the Yazidi Black Book (*Mishefa Reş* in Kurdish). It is claimed that the original text of the Book of Revelation is kept in the Yazidi village of Ba'idn and the original text of the Yazidi Black Book is kept in the village of Qasr 'tzz at-Din.

Scholars generally agree that the manuscripts of both books published in 1911 and 1913 were forgeries written by non-Yazidis in response to Western travelers' and scholars' interest in the Yazidi religion but do reflect authentic Yazidi traditions.^[1] The real core texts of the religion that exist today are the hymns known as *qawls*.

Chapters

The Book of Revelation contains five chapters, arranged like the *surahs* of the Qur'an, in order of decreasing length. In all five chapters of this book, the words of God are given in the first person, in contrast to the Black Book, which records the acts of God in the third person.

- Chapter one of the Book of Revelation discusses the Yazidi doctrine of the nature of God, who is made to declare that he is the author of what "outsiders call evils". The rest of the chapter deals with the exercise of divine power.
- Chapter two describes the omnipotence of God.
- Chapter three treats of the omnipotence of God, and begins with the statement that God guides without a scripture.
- Chapter four contains a warning against outsiders, and enunciates a doctrine concerning the "corruption" of holy books very similar to that of the Muslims.
- Chapter five is a short exhortation to the faithful.

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