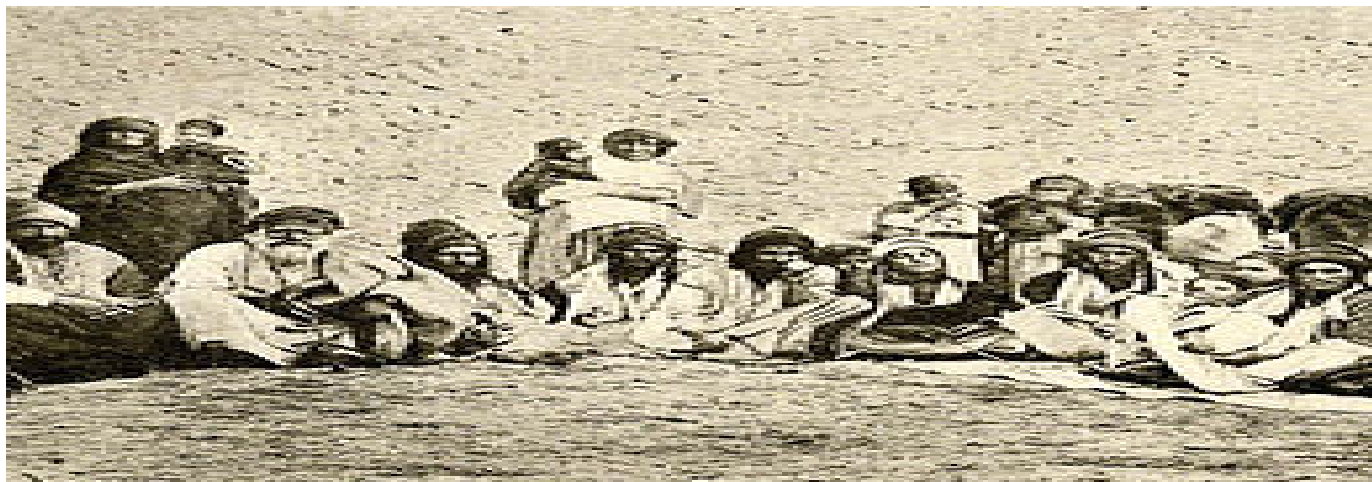


# Yazidis






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

## Total population

700,000

### Regions with significant populations

 Iraq 650,000,  Germany 60,000,  Syria 50,000,  Russia 40,586

 Armenia 35,272,  Georgia 20,843 (18,000 in Tbilisi),  Sweden 4,000

 Denmark 500,  Turkey 377 (Not including the refugees.)

## Scriptures

Yazidi Book of Revelation (Kitêba Cilwe)

Yazidi Black Book (Mishefa Reş)

## Languages

Kurdish (Latin)

The Yazidis (also Yazidi, *Êzidî*, Yazdani) (/jəz'ɪ:di:z/ *yah-ZEE-dees*) are a Kurdish ethno-religious community whose syncretic but ancient religion Yazidism (a kind of Yazdânism) is linked to Zoroastrianism and ancient Mesopotamian religions. They live primarily in the Nineveh Province of northern Iraq, a region once part of ancient Assyria and capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Additional communities in Armenia, Georgia and Syria have been in decline since the 1990s as a result of significant migration to Europe, especially to Germany. The Yazidis are monotheists, believing in God as creator of the world, which he has placed under the care of seven "holy beings" or angels, the "chief" (archangel) of who is Melek Taus, the "Peacock Angel." The Peacock Angel, as world-ruler, causes both good and bad to befall individuals, and this ambivalent character is reflected in myths of his own temporary fall from God's favor, before his remorseful tears extinguished the fires of his hellish prison and he was reconciled with God. This belief builds on Sufi mystical reflections on the angel Iblis, who proudly refused to violate monotheism by worshipping Adam and Eve despite God's express command to do so. Because of this connection to the Sufi Iblis tradition, some followers of other monotheistic religions of the region equate the Peacock Angel with their own unredeemed evil spirit Satan, which has incited

centuries of persecution of the Yazidis as "devil worshippers." Persecution of Yazidis has continued in their home communities within the borders of modern Iraq, under both Saddam Hussein and fundamentalist Sunni Muslim revolutionaries. In August 2014 the Yazidis were targeted by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in its campaign to "purify" Iraq and neighboring countries of non-Islamic influences

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### *Demographics*



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

Historically, the Yazidis 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 (50 mi) 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.

Yazidis 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. There may be between about 12,000 and 15,000 Yazidis in Syria today, though more than half of the community may have emigrated from Syria since the 1980s. Estimates are complicated by the arrival of as many as 50,000 Yazidi refugees from Iraq during the Iraq War.



Yazidi men

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 Yazidis have immigrated 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 Yazidis still in Armenia. Most Georgian and Armenian Yazidis have relocated to Russia, which recorded a population of 31,273 Yazidis in 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 men in Mardin, late 19th century.

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

The Salafist militant group Islamic State, which considers the Yazidis devil-worshippers, captured Sinjar in August 2014 following the withdrawal of Peshmerga troops, forcing up to 50,000 Yazidis to flee into the nearby mountainous region. Threatened with death at the hands of militants, they faced starvation in the mountains, and their plight received international media coverage, leading American President Obama to authorize humanitarian air drops of food and water onto Sinjar Mountain and US airstrikes against militants in support of the beleaguered religious minority. American humanitarian assistance began on 7 August 2014, with the United Kingdom's Royal Air Force subsequently contributing to the relief effort. At an emergency meeting in London, Australian prime minister Tony Abbott also pledged humanitarian support, while European nations resolved to join the US in helping to arm Peshmerga fighters aiding the Yazidis with more advanced weaponry. Although Kurdish troops managed to rescue several thousand Yazidi refugees via a humanitarian corridor, helping them cross the Tigris into Syria, one relief worker in the evacuation operation described the conditions on Mount Sinjar as "a genocide", having witnessed hundreds of corpses.

## Origins

The Yazidis are a mostly Kurdish-speaking people that adheres to the religion Yazidism (see Yazdânism), a religion rooted in Persian religions blended with elements of pre-Islamic Mesopotamian/Assyrian religious traditions, Mithraism, Christianity and Islam. In addition to the Kurdish-speaking majority, there are significant Yazidi communities that speak Arabic as their native language. Their ethnicity is obscure despite the fact that they mostly speak Kurdish. Commentators identify the Yazidis as predominately Kurds<sup>[41]</sup> but according to some sources, they tend to regard themselves as distinct from Kurds.<sup>[42][43]</sup> The United Nations recognizes the Yazidis as a distinct ethnic group.<sup>[44]</sup> A report from Human Rights Watch (HRW), in 2009, declares that to incorporate disputed territories in northern Iraq—particularly the Nineveh province—into the Kurdish region, KRG and Kurdish authorities have embarked on a two-pronged strategy of inducement and repression. The HRW report also criticizes heavy-handed tactics. According to report: “The goal of these tactics is to push Shabak and Yazidi communities to identify as ethnic Kurds. The Kurdish authorities are working hard to impose Kurdish identity on two of the most vulnerable minorities in Iraq, the Yazidis and the Shabak”. 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), and Yazidis themselves believe that their name is derived from the word *Yezdan* or *Êzîd* "God", denying the widespread idea that it is a derivation from Umayyad Caliph Yazid I (Yazid bin Muawiyah), revered as Sultan Ezi.<sup>[46]</sup> The Yazidis' cultural practices are observed 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, Yazidism, is a kind of Yazdânism and has many influences: Sufi influence and imagery can be seen in the religious vocabulary, especially in the terminology of the Yazidis' esoteric literature, but much of the theology 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, research published since the 1990s has shown such an approach to be simplistic.



Yazidi man in traditional clothes

The origin of Yazidism 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 'Adī ibn Musafir, 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 Adī 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.

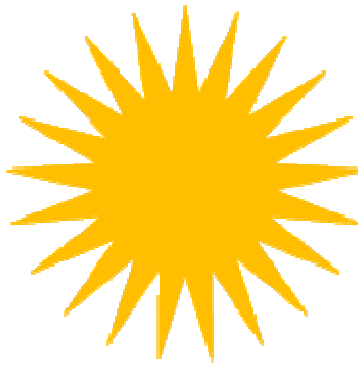
According to the Yazidi calendar, April 2012 marked the beginning of their year 6,762 (thereby year 1 would have been in 4,750 BC in the Gregorian calendar).

During the fourteenth century, important Yazidi 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 Mohammed Aş-Şahrastani, "The Yazidis are the followers of Yezîd bn Unaisa, who [said that he] kept friendship with the first Muhakkama before the Azariķa". "It is clear, then, that Aş-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." "Now, the first Muhakkamah is an appellative applied to the Muslim schismatics called Al-Ĥawarij. ... According to this it might be inferred that the Yezidis were originally a Ĥarijitesub-sect."<sup>[51]</sup> "Yezid moreover, is said to have been in sympathy with Al-Abadiyah, a sect founded by 'Abd-Allah Ibn Ibad."

### *Religious beliefs*

The origin of Yazidism is now usually seen by scholars as a complex process of syncretism, it is as follows:



The yellow sun with twenty-one rays represents Mithra, the Sun as symbol of God, in Yazdani faiths.

## **Branches**

- Yazidism (*Êzidîti*)
- Ishikism (*Elewîti*)
- Elî-Îlâhî (*Yezdânîti*)
- Yarsanism (*Yarsanîti / Ahl-e Haqq*)
  - Zoroastrian Yazdânism (*Zerdeştîti*)Blessed persons in Yazidi faith
- Sheikh ‘Adî ibn Musâfir al-Umawî (*Şêx Adî*)  
Yezidi holy scripture and worship
- Yazidi Book of Revelation (*Kitêba Cilwe*)
  - Yazidi Black Book (*Mishefa Reş*)
    - Melek Taus (*Tawûsê Melek*)Blessed persons in Yâresân faith
  - Epochs of Khawandagar (*God*)
- Alî ibn Abî Tâlib (*Elî*) · Shah Khoshin
  - Sultan Sahak (*Siltan Sahak*)Yâresân holy scripture and worship
- Kalâm-e Saranjâm  
History and culture
- Nowruz and Newroz in Kurdistan  
Adherents
- Mehrdad Izady · Hajj Nematollah
- Mullah Mustafa · Kurds · Nur Ali Elahi
- Hawraman · Hewrami · Auramani · Sirwan
- Zaza-Gorani · Soranî · Goranî · Goranîs
- Kurdistan · Iranian Kurdistan Province
- Iranian Kurdistan · Iraqi Kurdistan
  - Luristan · Lalish · Yezidis in Armenia

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 offshoot of another religion, 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.

"The Yazidis of Kurdistan have been called many things, most notoriously 'devil-worshippers,' a term used both by unsympathetic neighbors and fascinated Westerners. This sensational epithet is not only deeply offensive to the Yazidis themselves, but quite simply wrong." Non-Yazidis have associated Melek Taus with Shaitan (Islamic/Arab name) or Satan, but Yazidis find that offensive and do not actually mention that name.

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.

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. The Yazidi accounts of creation differ from that of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They believe that God first created Tawûsê Melek from his own (God's) 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 *çirōks* 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 *akoasasa*.

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 Kurmanji (changing the garment). Spiritual purification of the soul can be attained via continual reincarnation within the faith group, but it can also be halted by means of expulsion from the Yazidi community; this is the worst possible fate, since the soul's spiritual progress halts and conversion back into the faith is impossible. Alongside this notion of continuous rebirth, Yazidi theology 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 Yazidis 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 a sin punishable by death to restore lost honour. The current hereditary emir of the world's Yazidi is Prince Tahseen Said.

The current religious leader of the Yazidis, the Baba Sheikh, is Khurto Hajji Ismail.



# Religious practices

## Prayers



Temple entry at Laliş

Yazidis have five daily prayers: *Nivêja berîspêdê* (the Dawn Prayer), *Nivêja rojhilatinê* (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, on the first Wednesday of April (**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 *Tawûşgeran* (circulation of the peacock) where *Qewals* and other religious dignitaries visit Yazidi villages, bringing the *senjaq*, sacred images of a peacock made from brass symbolizing Tawûşê 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 Laliş, 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



Tomb of Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir (*Şêx Adî*) in Laliş

The most important ritual is the annual seven-day pilgrimage to the tomb of Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir (*Şêx Adî*) in Laliş, 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 Laliş 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, Yazidis 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.

## Purity and taboos

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

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 Yazidis 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".

Yazidis refrain from wearing the colour blue (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.

Yazidis are dominantly monogamous but chiefs may be polygamous, having more than one wife. Yazidis 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—stoning of Du'a Khalil Aswad—made world headlines.



The Chermira 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

### Folklore

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 Yazidis are regarded as descending from Adam alone, while other humans are descendants of both Adam and Eve.

### In other cultures

Under the Ottoman Empire

A large Yazidi community existed in Syria, but they declined due to persecution by the Ottoman Empire. Several punitive expeditions were organized against the Yazidis by the Ottoman governors (Wāli) of Diyarbakir, Mosul and Baghdad. The objective of these persecutions was the forced conversion of Yazidis to the Sunni Hanafi Islam of the Ottoman Empire.

## In Europe

**Feleknas Uca, a Yezidi 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 "honor" 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 journeyman 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 Yazidis hold religious beliefs that are mostly unfamiliar to outsiders, many non-Yazidi people have written about them and ascribed to their beliefs facts that have dubious historical validity. The Yazidis, perhaps because of their secrecy, also have a place in modern occultism. George 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. Also, in Peter Ouspensky's book "In Search of the Miraculous", he describes some strange customs that Gurdjieff observed in Yezidi boys: "He told me, among other things, that when he was a child he had often observed how Yezidi boys were unable to step out of a circle traced round them on the ground"**

**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 Iraq, 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).**

**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." Shah claimed that Tawûsê Melek could be understood, from the Sufi viewpoint, as an allegory of the higher powers in humanity.**

## In Western literature



Image from *A journey from London to Persepolis*, 1865

**In William Seabrook's book *Adventures in Arabia*, the fourth section, starting with Chapter 14, is devoted to the "Yazidis, and is titled "Among the Yazidis". He describes them as "a mysterious**

sect scattered throughout the Orient, strongest in North Arabia, feared and hated both by Moslem and Christian, because they are worshipers of Satan." In the three chapters of the book, he completely describes the area, including the fact that this territory, including their holiest city of Sheik-Adi, was not part of "Iraq".

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

A fictional Yazidi character of note is the super-powered police officer King Peacock of the *Top 10* series (and related comics). 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 perceive and strike at his opponent's weakest spots, a power that he claims is derived from communicating with Malek Ta'us. The Yazidis play a significant role in the thriller *Genesis Secret*, by Tom Knox, which was an international bestseller in 2006, published in 23 languages. In the book the Yazidis are portrayed as ancient guardians of the megalithic site, Gobekli Tepe, in Kurdish Turkey.

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.

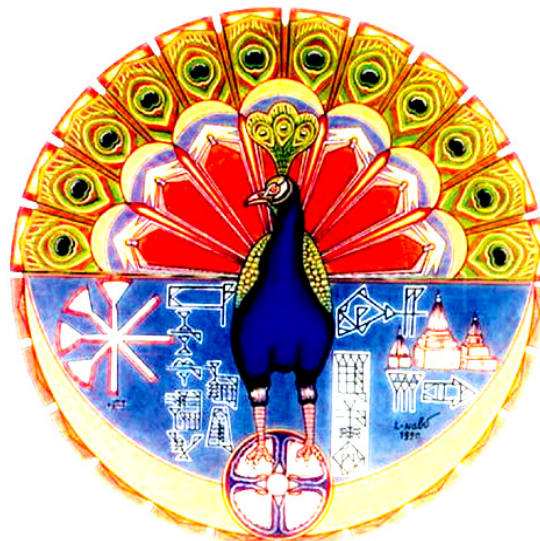
### Persecution by Islamic State (ISIS)

In 2014, with the territorial gains of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) there was much upheaval in the Iraqi Yazidi population. In early August the town of Sinjar was nearly deserted as Kurdish Peshmerga forces were no longer able to keep ISIS forces from advancing. ISIS had previously declared the Yazidis to be devil worshippers and had taken the two nearby small oil fields and the town of Zumar as part of a plan to try to seize Mosul's hydroelectric dam.

In Sinjar, ISIS destroyed a Shiite shrine and demanded that the remaining population convert to their version of Islam, pay *jizya* (a religious tax) or be executed. Up to 200,000 people (including an estimated 40,000 Yazidi) fled the city before it was captured by ISIS forces, giving rise to fears

of a humanitarian tragedy. Alongside the local Yazidis fleeing Sinjar were Yazidis (and Shiites) who fled to the city a month earlier when ISIS captured the town of Tal Afar.

Most of the population fleeing Sinjar retreated by trekking up nearby mountains with the ultimate goal of reaching Dohuk in Iraqi Kurdistan (normally a five-hour drive by car). Concerns for elderly and those of fragile health were expressed by the refugees, who told reporters of their lack of water. Reports coming from Sinjar stated that sick or elderly Yazidi who could not make the trek were being executed by ISIS. Yazidi parliamentarian Haji Ghandour told reporters that "In our history, we have suffered 72 massacres. We are worried Sinjar could be a 73rd." UN groups say at least 40,000 members of the Yazidi sect, many of them women and children, have taken refuge in nine locations on Mount Sinjar, a craggy, mile-high ridge identified in local legend as the final resting place of Noah's ark, facing slaughter at the hands of jihadists surrounding them below if they flee, or death by dehydration if they stay. United States President Barack Obama has authorised "targeted airstrikes" against Islamic militants to protect American military personnel and airdrops of meals and water to thousands of Yazidi and Christian religious minorities trapped on the mountaintop in northwest Iraq. Between 20,000 and 30,000 Iraqis, most of them women and children, besieged by Isis, escaped from the mountain after US air strikes. Yazidi minority surrounded by Islamist militants on Mount Sinjar were escorted back to Iraqi Kurdistan by The Kurdish Peshmerga forces after fleeing via Syria, Kurdish officials have said.<sup>[81]</sup> In a dusty camp here, Iraqi refugees have new heroes: Syrian Kurdish fighters who battled militants to carve out an escape route for tens of thousands trapped on a mountaintop. While the U.S. and Iraqi militaries struggle to aid the starving members of Iraq's Yazidi minority with supply drops from the air, the Syrian Kurds took it on themselves to rescue them. The move underlined how they "like Iraqi Kurd "are using the region's conflicts to establish their own rule. For the past few days, fighters have been rescuing Yazidis from the mountain, transporting them into Syrian territory to give them first aid, food and water, and returning some to Iraq via a pontoon bridge. The U.N. estimated around 50,000 Yazidis fled to the mountain. But by Sunday, Kurdish officials said at least 45,000 had crossed through the safe passage, leaving thousands more behind and suggesting the number of stranded was higher.



Tawûsê Melek (Melek Taus),  
the Peacock Angel