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# THE REMNANTS OF MITHRAISM

IN HATRA AND IRAQI KURDISTAN,  
AND ITS TRACES IN YAZĪDĪSM

THE YAZĪDĪS ARE NOT  
DEVIL-WORSHIPPERS

by

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*The Author established the first systematic  
Kurdish grammar *Dastūr i Zimān i Kurdī*  
(1929-30), which, with his other teachings  
and publishings in the subject, is the source  
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dialect.*

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The purpose of this paper is to publish my discovery in 1954, for the first time, of remnants of Mithraic elements in the sculptures and tablets excavated in Hatra, south west of Mosul, of traces of Mithraism in Yazīdīsm and, later on, my proving conclusively the Yazīdīsm not to be a cult of Devil-worship. This paper also contains suggestions on the existence of Mithraic traces in the area between the Tigris River and Zagros Mountains, a brief study of the religion of the Kurds until the appearance of Islam, and a few notes about some Batinī (esoteric) sects.

#### ERRATTA

Cover & Title page - for Sulamaini  
read Sulaimani  
Abbreviations - for Dilemma read  
Dilemma  
p.42, 1.15 - for Oshēdah read Oshēdar

. . .

The publisher wishes to apologise for the fact that in a few places the dot under 't' of Bāṭinī, and in one place under 'h' of Mashaf and under 'd' of Baidāwī and the signs over 'u' and 'i' of Damlūjī have been omitted in error.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- AHY. Abdūr-Razzāq al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Yazīdiyyūn fī Ḥādīrihim Wa Mādīhim*, 3rd ed.
- CLO. Franz Cumont, *Les Religions Orientales*.
- CMM. Franz Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra*.
- CTMM. Franz Cumont, *Textes et Monuments Figurés Relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra*, 2 Vols.
- DPA. R. S. Drower, *Peacock Angel*.
- EWTM. Esme-Wynne-Tyson, *Mithras, the Fellow in the Cap*.
- FBI. Faṣl Dar Bayān i Shinākht i Imām; ed. by W. Ivanow.
- GRN. *Gushāyīsh wa Rahāyīsh*; ed. by Dr. S. Nafīsī.
- HBI. *Haft Bāb of Abu Ishāq*; ed. by W. Ivanow.
- IY. Ismā'il Bag, *Al-Yazīdiyya Qadīman Wa Hadīthan*.
- PJI. *Pandiyyāt i Jawānmardī*; ed. by W. Ivanow.
- PSM. O. H. Parry, *Six Months in Syrian Monastery*.
- SDY. *Šiddīq al-Damlūjī, Alyazīdiyya*.
- TWK. Taufiq Wahby., *A Kayānian Castle north of Sulaimani* (reprinted from monthly *Al-Kitāb II*, Baghdad 1958).
- ZDZ. R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*.
- ZZD. R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan a Zoroastrian Dilemma*.

## INTRODUCTION

### The name Yazīdī

The 'Adawī order, which was founded by Shaikh 'Adī b. Musāfir who died about 1154 A.D. is known today as the Yazīdī sect. There is no evidence to invalidate the theory that this nomination arose from their deification of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya. On the contrary there is much convincing evidence to support this theory and such, indeed, is the opinion of the vast majority of those who have researched in this field. However the problem which has always been a cause of dispute amongst scholars is the origin of their Devil-worship.

### A Scholastic Omission

Scholars to date have sought for the birthplace of Devil-worship amongst the Yazīdīs, who are known as the "Devil-worshippers," but have neglected to verify or refute whether or not they do worship the devil. Indeed, they have implicitly accepted it as true without any final proof and have confined their efforts to siting its birthplace about which innumerable books have been written.

Some of these scholars believe that the Yazīdī Devil-worship is a relic of the worship of Ahriman, the Iranian Devil, which arose from Zoroastrianism (sic) but was opposed to it. Others believe that it appeared in the Islamic era as a result of the sayings of some of the great Ṣūfīs and philosophers in Baghdad. There is also the theory that it arose from the

fact that Shaikh 'Adī stated cursing to be anathema.

In my own articles and lectures I have expressed the opinion that Yazīdī Devil-worship was merely a continuation of the worship of Ahriman which was not a product of Zoroastrianism but was practised in Iran secretly and in spite of Zoroastrianism which was the official Iranian religion, and in its guise, until the Islamic conquest.

*A possible link between the Yazīdīsm and Mithraism*

Such was my belief about the origin of Yazīdī Devil-worship until the day Mr. Fuād Safar, who was in charge of the excavation at Hatra, visited me on his return after the first year of excavation there. He showed me photographs of two figures found amongst the remains there. Looking at these photographs I told him that one seemed to me to be the picture of Mithras, the Sun God, and the other the picture of Azhdahāk as the Persians used to portray him in the old manuscripts of the Shāhnāma.

Thus it was that I began to think that these two figures could be remains of Mithraism which was perhaps practised in Hatra. I knew that in Mithraism Ahriman, the Devil, was also worshipped. When the remains had been transferred from Hatra to the archaeological museum in Baghdad, I was able, with the assistance of Cumont's works, to identify many of them as Mithraic. It became clear to me, also, that the figure which I had likened to Azhdahāk was, in fact, Ahriman.

From these studies I decided that a form of Mithraism was, in fact, practised in the city of Hatra and that Yazīdīsm was connected with it.

Since in this article I shall compare Yazīdīsm with Mithraism, I think that it would be useful at this point to give a short account of the god Mithra and the appearance of Mithraism.

### Mithra

The great god Mithra is one of the deities which the Indo-Iranians used to worship in their native land and which they brought with them in their migration. This god is mentioned in the oldest of the Indian sacred books the Rig-Veda in the form of Mitra, and in the Avesta in the form Mithra. He is the god of light, guardian of the truth and enemy of the lie and error. (1)

Mithra is said in the Avesta to punish perjurers and those who deviate from truth and integrity, to destroy those tribes and peoples who oppose him, to bestow health, blessing and abundance on those who praise him and to be a powerful ally to those who devote themselves to him.(2)

Mithra is one of those deities whose worship continued in Iran in spite of their rejection by Zoroaster. In Iran the word "Mithra" has been modified to "Mihr" since the first century A.D., and Mihr became god of the sun and contracts. During the Islamic era Mihr remained a name of the sun and the idea of kindness and faithfulness.

### The Appearance of Mithraism

As a result of the contact of the Iranian and Baby-

(1) CMM. 1-2

(2) Ibid, 3-4

Ionian priesthoods after the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Great, 539 B.C., the Iranian priesthood adopted the belief in Zurvān (Time), and took him as father to the twins of the Gāthās, Spenta Mainyu (the Holy Spirit), and Angra Mainyu (the Destructive Spirit), after Spenta Mainyu had already been identified with Ahura Mazda. Thereby the gods of both cultures became identical and the Semitic worship of the stars was assimilated to the Iranian Nature legend. Amongst these identifications and assimilations is included that of Shamash with Mithra. He was in both religions the god of justice and truth, the light of the sky, the god who gives victory to the arms of warriors, and the protector of kings.<sup>(1)</sup> It seems that the Magians started to preach their new religion, Zurvānism, in Mesopotamia and among the mountaineer Kurds who were adherents of the Indo-Iranian traditional religion. Then they pushed their activities westwards, they established centres for the practice of Zurvānism in Asia Minor midway through the 5th century B.C.

In this Magian Zurvānism both Ahura Mazda (later contracted to Auhrmazd-Ohrmazd), wise Lord, the god of good, and Angra Mainyu (later contracted to Ahriman), the spirit of destruction, the god of evil (the Devil) were worshipped. Mithra, in Indo-Iranian god of light, gained a preponderant place in this Zurvānism. He had become god of redemption and the centre of a cycle of legends.

It is because of the astounding feats accomplished by him that this god, who did not hold supreme rank in the celestial hierarchy has given his name to the

(<sup>1</sup>) Ibid, 10 ; and CLO. 229

Persian Mysteries that were disseminated in the Occident.<sup>(1)</sup>

With the coming of the Macedonians in 331 B.C., this time the Iranian gods were identified with the Greek gods ; Zurvān with Kronos, Ahura Mazda with Zeus, the conquering hero Verethraghna with Heracles and the goddess Anāhitā with Artemis, and Mithra, who was worshipped in Babylon as Shamash, was identified with Helios.<sup>(2)</sup> Thus, Mithraism grew up as a result of the mixture of the Zurvānian religion with the Greek faith<sup>(3)</sup>; Cumont says :

“The basal layer of this religion, its lower and primordial stratum, is the faith of ancient Iran, from which it took its origin. Above this Mazdean substratum was deposited in Babylon a thick sediment of Semitic doctrines, and afterwards the local beliefs of Asia Minor added to it their alluvial deposits. *Finally a luxuriant vegetation of Hellenic ideas burst forth from this fertile soil and partly concealed from view its true original nature.*”<sup>(4)</sup>

I shall deal more with Mithraism in relation to Yazīdīsm later, but here I must say a few words about it. Mithraism was a form of Zurvānism in which Mithra, the god of sun, and Angra Mainyu, the god of evil, the Devil, are worshipped. Its meetings used to take place in secret, and the initiates had to pass through secret and difficult rites. Mithraism was a religion of the army and it spread wherever the Roman armies went. It was dealt a final blow by Christianity in the 4th Century C.A.D.<sup>(5)</sup>

(1) CMM. 127-140

(2) Ibid, 20, 22

(3) Ibid, 22-24, CTMM. Vol I, 7

(4) Ibid, 30-31

(5) CMM. 203

### The form of Mithraism in Hatra

The Mithraism which was practised in Hatra was not a Roman Mithraism which had returned to the East, but was older than that. It was a Zurvānism established there in the Parthian period before it had crossed the Mediterranean sea to Rome; connections between them were, no doubt, established later. The garments of some gods in Hatra are of the Parthian era although all the sculptures were the works of Greek artists.

### Two cults of Devil-worship

- (i) Devil-worship as a separate religion which was practised in Ancient Iran in secret and continued under the guise of Zoroastrianism until the Islamic era.<sup>(1)</sup>

The basis of this Devil-worship is the worship of demons, practice of magic and disbelief in rewards and punishments.<sup>(2)</sup>

- (ii) Devil-worship in Mithraism as has already been mentioned.

The initiated into Mithraism practised appropriate rites and incantations to enlist the demons in his service and to employ them against the enemies whose destruction he was meditating.<sup>(3)</sup>

The Mithraism believed in the immortality of the soul, in a last judgment, and in a resurrection of the dead, consequent upon a final conflagration of the universe.<sup>(4)</sup>

(1) ZZZ. 15

(2) Ibid, 14, 35

(3) CMM. 14

(4) Ibid, 191

### Traces of Magic in Hatra

There is a legend which suggests that magic was practised in Hatra. This story, which is given in Yāqūt's "Ma'jam u'l-Buldān," tells of the falling of Hatra, under the influence of magic into the hands of Shāpūr 1st in 241 A.D.(<sup>1</sup>)

### Mithraic sculptures in Hatra

The Mithraic sculptures were the work of the Greek artists who were able to give the Iranian gods whom they knew by their Greek names, the form which they considered suitable to them with reference to their own Greek creed.(<sup>2</sup>)

Photographs of the figures found in Hatra have already been published in the Illustrated London News. For the sake of easy reference I shall give the date of the magazine in which they were published together with the classifying numbers of the pictures themselves and my own suggested identification of them with their Iranian and Greek names.

November the seventeenth 1951:

- No. 7 Manh The Iranian Moon god  
The Greek Selene.
- No. 3 The same in its three phases.  
New, full and waning.
- No. 8 Iranian Mihr, Greek Helios.
- No. 9 This has two images:—
  - (a) An Eagle represents the Sky  
(The Sky - Time-Zurvān).
  - (b) The Hatra-Mithraic standard on

(<sup>1</sup>) ZZD. 37

(<sup>2</sup>) CMM. 22-23 ; ZDZ. 129

which are the Sky and Mihr.

- No. 11 Ahriman - Pluto in the underworld with his wife Jeh-Hekate who is sitting far from him. She has a Hatra-Mithraic standard in the hand.

December the eighteenth 1954:

- Nos. 6 & 7 Two pictures of Zurvān-Kronos - Sky from behind and from in front.

December the twenty-fifth 1954:

- No. 2 Trinity of the Moon god in the form of Athene, in its three phases.  
No. 7 A group of Mithraists in the robes of their respective ranks.  
No. 8 Zurvān-Kronos, the god of Time.  
No. 10 Ahriman-Pluto, god of the underworld.  
No. 3 Verethraghna-Heracles.

### Traces of Mithraism amongst the Kurds

#### 1. The pre-Islamic religion of Iran.

The object of this essay is to search for traces of the Mithraism in the area between the Tigris river and Zagros Mountains, and to make some comparison between Yazīdīsm and Mithraism. The Yazīdīs are Kurds, were certainly the followers of the Indo-Iranian religion and its consecutive developments in Iran until the Islamic period.

At the rise of Zoroaster in the first half of the sixth century (c.) B.C. the following religions might have been practised in Iran:

- (i) The traditional Indo-Iranian religion as practised in Iran, it consisted of the worship of Daēvas (the

beneficent and maleficent gods of nature), Ahuras (gods protectors of moral and ethical principles), Haoma (the intoxicating beverage and god of immortality), Fravashis (the spirits of ancestors).

- (ii) The worship of the maleficent Daēvas (gods) together with the Indo-Iranian demons (Yātūs). Sorcery was the essential requirement of this religion.
- (iii) The worship of Ahuras, and the beneficent Daēvas under the name of Bagas (the Bagas of Darius I), which mean "bounteous ones." The name Daēva (Daiva of Xerxes) was left to the maleficent gods whose worship was banned. This religion was a reform of the traditional one.

The Zoroastrian reform failed to unify the Iranian religion, and even to preserve its own orthodoxy as it was preached by the prophet himself. It was never successful in its struggle against the existing religions which were in practice at the time of its rise, and even against the Zurvānian Zoroastrianism which appeared soon after his death.

But on the contrary it had helped the Daēva worshippers whom he called Devil-worshippers by giving them Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) as a god of evil to become their chief of the earthly Daēvas and demons, the prince of this world.

We pass over the Macedonian and Parthian periods in which the Iranian culture was exposed to decadence. The religious state of this period (about five and a half centuries) is not clearly known to us.

The Zoroastrianism which was revived by the Sassanian early Kings and had been canonized had to fight a number of Iranian heretic religions and some other non-Iranian religions until the Islamic conquest.

## 2. The religious condition of the Kurds in the Sassanian period

### (i) A Survey

Although among the Kurds there were people, especially in towns and villages, who had embraced Zoroastrianism and who were attracted by the propaganda of missionaries from different religions, the majority of Kurds conserved their traditional Indo-Iranian beliefs in the form of the Magian-Zurvānism.

In fact the *magnate* god of all the Kurds was their beloved Mihr (Mīr in the present Kurdish pronunciation), their god of oath, heroism and victory, redeemer, Sun-god. They worshipped him and offered sacrifices to him according to the rites of the different religions to which they belonged, in which Mihr was worshipped.

Mihr was for the Kurds approximately what 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭalib is, beyond comparison and representation, today for them. All the Kurdish sects (exc. Yazīdism) believe him to be their redeemer, they are excessive in reverencing him, or divinize, deify and worship him, according to their different cults. Myths and legends are arranged about him, and many war-like folk-tales have been restored or newly composed to include his divine or extraordinary deeds.

### (ii) The Ecclesiastical Records

According to the Aramaic Ecclesiastical sources the Missionaries in the third, fifth and sixth centuries A.D., encountered Idolaters, Tree-worshippers, Sun-worshippers and Devil-worshippers in certain areas lying to the east of the Tigris between Jazīrat Ibn-

'Umar, north of Mosul, and the neighbourhood of Khānaqīn in Iraq.

The missionary Mar Mari of Edessa was in the third century in the city of Shahr Kart located between Dāqūqā and Arbil. He preached Christianity to the inhabitants who were worshipping trees and idols made of copper. He converted them and their king to Christianity.

This petty kingdom might have been a survival from the Parthian federation system, which was abolished by the strict Sassanian centralization. The king and his people who were not Zoroastrian, must have been secret Mithraists, since the pure Devil-worshippers had not the cultural capacity necessary to establish a kingdom.

Shahr Kart was visited in 344 A.D. by Shāpūr the Second, who was a vigorous persecuter of heretics and non-Zoroastrians, among them Christians. In spite of this persecution Shahr-Kart had in 356 become a centre for the propagation of Christianity amongst the Kurds.

I have no doubt that Shahr-Kart was a Kurdish town and its inhabitants were Kurds. In my opinion the name of the city was a later Sassanian derivation of the Median, from which Kurdish developed, Khshathro-Kereta, which literally means a palace built for kings or a royal building.<sup>(1)</sup> I believe also that the name Sadrakae which Strabo mentioned among the names of the localities of the Karkuk region <sup>(2)</sup> is a Greek derivation of the Median Khshatro-Kereta <sup>(3)</sup>; the Greeks had already changed the old Persian Khshatrapavan (which meant Ruler-of-the-Province)

(1) TWK. 16-19

(2) Strabo, 111 p. 144

(3) TWK. 19-24

to Satrapes. I also identify the location of Shahr Kart with the ancient ruins known as Julindi to the north west of Sulaimani.(1)

Amongst the missionaries of the fifth century was Mar Saba who preached amongst the Kurds (485 A.D.) and found that they were Sun-worshippers.

Mar Saba was from Beith Galāyā in Balāshpar, in the Hulwān region. Balāshpar (the glory of Valash) is the older name of Qasr i Shīrīn. Beith Gālāya which is Aramaic and means (the home of the Gals) may have been contracted to Bāgalāyā, pronounced by the Arabs as Bājalāyā. In the early Islamic period there was to the north of Mosul in the Khabur valley, a locality which the arab histories mention by the name of Bājalāyā, the Kurdish form of which should be Bājalān, as the Aramaic Kurdāyā is in the Kurdish "Kurdān" which means the Kurds; in Aramaic "āyā," and in Kurdish "ān" are plural suffixes. This may suggest the antiquity of Bājalān, which is today the name of a well-known tribe dwelling in the neighbourhood of the old Hulwān region.

Mar Li-Shu'ab had in the sixth century found Kurds near Thamānīn, a village in the neighbourhood of Jazīrat Ibn-'Umar, who worshipped the Devil. They were probably Mithraists.

(iii) Temple caves

The many caves existing in Iraqi Kurdistan require scientific investigation from the point of view of Mithraism. I mention but a few of them.

The sectarians of Mithra often chose for their rites rocky excavations, and preferably ones where a spring gushed forth or, at least, there was a running water.(2)

(1) TWK. 19-24

(2) CTMM. Vol. I, 55

### Galī Zardak

On the Northern side of the Jabal Maqlūb, east of Mosul, is a lovely valley with vertical sides of yellow rock which penetrates into the mountain. It is called Galī Zardak which means in Kurdish "The Yellow Valley." In it there is a constantly flowing stream. In the sides of the valley are caves in which rock sculptures have been carved.

It appears that this valley itself with its caves and sculptures was a sacred place to which the Kurds made pilgrimage and where they held the Mihragān festival and carried out mysterious rites exactly like the Lālish valley which the Yazīdīs hold sacred and to which they make pilgrimage and in which they hold their Communal Festival.

### Shaikh 'Adī's Temple Cave

The sacred cave under the temple of Shaikh 'Adī in the holy valley of Lālish is the Yazīdīs holy of holies. The foreigner is not allowed to enter it and even the Yazīdīs themselves cannot with the exception of the Bābā Shaikh and a few others who are responsible for it. In it is the Kānī Spī, The White Spring, which Shaikh 'Adī caused to flow forth with a blow. It seems probable that this cave and its spring was a place of worship to the god Mihr and the goddess Anāhitā (later Nāhīda, Nāhīd) who was the goddess of flowing springs and running fertile waters, and that a fire temple was built over it.

I believe that this cave was the place of retreat of Shaikh 'Adī during the forty days of his self-discipline when he first arrived in the region. Shaikh 'Adī made this cave the base for his first missionary activities

and in his time the alteration and extension of the building above it was undertaken. Ismā'īl Bag has described this cave as the "old temple cave of Shaikh 'Adī." (1)

There is a small cave North of Mosul, a cave which had been dug out and arranged as a Mithraic Temple.(2)

There is another cave near the town of Shaqlāwa on the northern slopes of Mt. Siffīn. It is called the Shakhsurahmān cave after the name of a Kurdish Ṣūfī who retired there five centuries ago. This cave was used by Christian Monks and I believe by Mithraists before them. There is a spring nearby.

There is another such cave east of Jāsana village on the side of the Surdāsh Valley north of Sulaimani.

The holy cave visited by Lady Drower in Bahzānī (See E. S. Drower, Peacock Angel, p. 55 for details.)

#### Mithraism at the town of 'Āna on the Euphrates

In 1920 I spent a month at the town of 'Āna where I was told that a group of the Muslim inhabitants worshipped the Sun and held secret meetings and rites in the caves nearby. When I asked their names I discovered that I already knew them. There is no doubt that this is a survival of Mithraism.

(1) IY. 8

(2) Two Photographs of this cave are in the offices of the Directorate General Antiquities in Baghdad

# TRACES OF MITHRAISM IN YAZĪDĪSM

## PART ONE

### 1. Principles of the Creation in Bāṭinīsm

Orthodox Islam believes that Almighty God created the universe out of nothing with the command: "Be," but the Bāṭinīs have an esoteric interpretation of this Qur'ānic truth saying that the universe was not created out of nothing but it is a manifestation of God's essence. They believe that nothing exists except God; the foundation of Bāṭinīsm is monism.

The Ismā'īlīsm, which appeared centuries before the actual Yazīdīsm, believed that the universe was an emanation from the One Essence in a sequence which can be shown as such:

The One - the command "Be" + the Universal Reason (this is the creator) - the Universal Soul (this is the maker which made out of itself a body for itself which is the Universe) - The Four Elements - The Three Matters (inorganic matters, plants, animals).

Compare this belief with the Neo-Platonism.

The Drūses also have founded their belief on the same principle.

The Bektāshīsm is similar to the Ismā'īlīsm, in that they believe that the universe is a manifestation of the essence of Almighty God. Indeed, anyone who opposes this belief — in other words claims that the universe has an existence separate from God — they

brand as dualists.

In Kākayīsm, although the fundamental concept of manifestation is retained, there is an important difference in the manner of the manifestation. For the Kākayīs believe that the Universal soul is incapable of making a universe out of itself as a body for itself, and they therefore distinguish between divine manifestation as spirit and divine manifestation in the form of visible objects. Thus they believe that the spiritual beings are drops directly from the light of Almighty God. The four elements and the heavenly bodies, although they are also from His light, are indirect, that is they appeared from a pearl which God made from His light. It should be noticed that the pearl is considered matter but luminous.

The Yazīdīs who believe that the universe was not created out of nothing join the Kākayīs in admitting two kinds of manifestation — spiritual and material. They believe that their seven gods appeared from the light of God by emanation and that the visible universe is made from limbs of pearl which Almighty God had made from His light to be his abode in the beginning. But they mix this belief with the Platonic Theory of Ideas with which the Muslim and Ṣūfī philosophers of the time were familiar. They say that while Almighty God was within the white pearl he created the forms of the seven heavens, of the earth, sun, moon, man, beasts, birds and wild animals and put them in the pockets of Khirqa.

## 2. Yazīdī Theology

Yazīdīsm is a synthetic religion which appears to have been founded by one, or several successive Ṣūfīs, who, being well versed in their mother religion, Islam,

and skilful in esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses were also conversant with Greek and neo-Platonic philosophies which were popular with the 'Ulamā of the time. This seems probable in spite of the obscure and defective texts of the Mashaf i Rash and Jilwa which are collections of essays on the principles of various philosophies and beliefs about creation and theology, and simple myths and legends. But whence they derive the last of their principles which involve some of the tenets of Mithraism, which is of Iranian origin, is not at all clear.

It is stated in the Maṣḥaf i Rash that Almighty God made seven angels, one on each day of the week. One of them, the Peacock of the Angels, he created on the first day of the week (Sunday) and made him chief of the others. This is the Sun Angel.(<sup>1</sup>)

It is also said in this book that Almighty God created six (or perhaps originally seven) deities out of his essence and light as a man lights one candle from another. Then He Himself created the sky, and commanded each deity to go up into the sky and create a heavenly body. There is much confusion and disagreement in different copies of this book about the names of the heavenly bodies thus created, but they all agree that the first god created the sun, the second the moon and the fifth Venus. The remaining three are not named after planets.

There can be little doubt, with this evidence, that the six gods who are said to have been created by Almighty God out of his essence and light, and who are his hypostases are the same as the Seven Angels who were created by Him, one on each day of the week. In fact the Yazīdīs know no gods besides these

(<sup>1</sup>) IV, 101

Seven Angels whom they believe to be one personality with the Peacock of the Angels.

On this basis, then, the first Angel is the first god, the creator of the sun and is the Sun-god, and the second Angel is the second god, the creator of the moon and is the Moon-god.

The clear inference of this, then, is that the founder of secret Yazīdism thought that each of the seven planets represented the god that created it, but at the present day it is doubtful whether the Yazīdīs have any knowledge of the planets except the sun, the moon and Venus.

The Yazīdīs incarnated these seven gods into their seven Shaikhs, who are represented by their shrines on earth called "Idols," so that they may have recourse to them for supplication. The Yazīdīs stopped deifying their shaikhs when they reached the requisite number, seven, influenced by the number of the planets, the seven Mithraic gods.

### 3. The Naming of the two Yazīdī Holy Books is Controversial

#### (i) Jilwa

"Jilwa" which literally means "manifestation," in ṣūfī terminology means "Nature, the Universe," but the Yazīdī book that bears this name does not deal with creation; it is devoted entirely to the exposition of the personality of their god, the Peacock of the Angels, in his power, dominion, commands, prohibitions, instructions, warnings, promises and threats. It may be that the text of this book is the legacy of some shaikh who had a large following and was later

deified. If you compare it with Qaṣīda attributed to Shaikh 'Adī<sup>(1)</sup>, you find that the Qaṣīda is the first stage in the composition of the book Jilwa. There is, however, no mention in it of Sun-worship.

(ii) Maṣḥaf i Rash

I believe that the original object of the Yazīdīs — which they have certainly forgotten — in qualifying Maṣḥaf, which means the Qur'ān, with the epithet “rash,” was not to denote the colour black. The Kurdish epithet. “rash,” which means “black,” in “Maṣḥaf i Rash,” is used only to mean “majestic, omnipotent, avenger.” The Maṣḥaf i Rash by them is, or was, the book which punishes quickly and severely those who contravene its ordinances and precepts, or who swear a false oath by it. In fact, this epithet has the same meaning as “rash” in “rashabā” which is the Kurdish for a strong, violent or powerful wind, not for a black coloured wind; much as in English one speaks of “black misfortune” to signify “terrible misfortune.”

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It seems, therefore, to me that we use the names of these two books in a misleading way, for the name “Jilwa” applies best to that book which deals with the creation — i.e., Jilwa in the mystical sense, and the name “Maṣḥaf i Rash” (the powerful book) to that book which contains the ordinances of power in the form of commands and prohibitions.

Nevertheless, it is possible that these two books were originally parts of a single book called “Jilwa” by its Ṣūfī writer, and later given the name “Maṣḥaf i Rash” in order to divert the people's attention from

(<sup>1</sup>) SDY, 94-97

the Holy Qur'ān. For this motive can be seen in many of their other actions, for instance, they called the annual visit to Shaikh 'Adī's tomb and the pilgrimages set up in Lālesh, the "Hajj"; they gave a mountain to the East of Shaikh's tomb, the name "Mount 'Arafāt"; they called the Kanī Spī (the white spring), "Zamzam"; and a stone "the Black Stone," and so on. The motive of these actions was to distract people from visiting the Holy City, Mecca, and to strengthen their hold upon them in the Lālesh valley and so in Yazīdism.

## PART TWO

### Traces of Mithraism in Yazīdīs Theology

#### The seven gods in Yazīdīsm

It is clear that the number of the seven gods in Yazīdīsm and the manner of their emanation from God and from one another are both borrowed from the Zoroastrian beliefs in the six hypostases of the god of good, Ohrmazd, and their emanation from him. These six are called the "Amshaspands" the bounteous immortals. But although the Yazīdī gods emanated from Almighty God's light and essence, the facts that one was born on each day of the week and that they are represented by the seven planets, as mentioned above, point firmly to the seven planets whom the Mithraists believed to be gods. The chief of these gods was Mithra whom they identified with the Sun and to whom sacrifices were offered at dawn.<sup>(1)</sup>

Each of these was also believed to have the charge of one of the days of the week <sup>(2)</sup> which was called by his name, for example Sunday was called "Sun-day," Monday "Moon-day," Tuesday "Mars-day," etc., and this system is commonly to be found in Europe to this day.

In Mithraism the seven planets were believed to be divinities involved in human destinies, and were

(1) CTMM, Vol. I, 128

(2) CMM, 120

likened to human forms that saw and heard, that rejoiced or lamented, whose wrath might be appeased, and whose favour might be gained by prayers and by offerings.<sup>(1)</sup>

In Yazīdism this belief continues unchanged. They offer their prayers, sacrifices and offerings at the shrines of their deified shaikhs which are called Idols and represent the shaikhs — the seven planets — the object being to appease their wrath or secure their sympathy.

### The Descent of the Deities

In Maṣḥaf i Rash there is a passage which reads “From the flood to the present day are seven thousand years; and in each thousand years one of the gods has descended to the earth, he institutes for us texts, laws and legislations, then he ascends.”

The source of this myth seems to be an interpretation of this Qur’ānic verse: “He (God) regulates the affair from the heaven to the earth, then shall it ascend to Him in a day the measure of which is a thousand years of what you count <sup>(2)</sup>, (The Adoration — 5).”

The scholar Yazīdī was skilled in exploiting an interpretation of the above-mentioned Qur’ānic verse and an interpretation of the Qur’ānic verse “And one day to your Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning (the Pilgrimage — 46),” to synthesise them

(1) CTMM, Vol. I, 113-114; CMM, 126

(2) Here is one of the interpretations of this verse, mentioned among others by Baidāwī (d. 1388): “God decrees the decree for one thousand years which the Angel brings down; then it ascends back after that thousand years for a fresh decree for another thousand years.”

with the relationship between the seven Mithraic gods and seven days of the week in order to institute the fundamental principle of the Yazīdī theology which inspires strong hope and patience in the followers of Yazīdīsm and increase its status.

This is a striking example of the twists which the scholarly mystic leaders employed in collating sections of various different beliefs and shaping them together in new guises in order to form a sect which they had invented.

It would not, I think, be out of place to mention here that the Ismā'īlī Day of Religion is 1,000 years and that their Week of Religion is seven thousand years.<sup>(1)</sup> Also they believe in the coming of the Lord of the Time every 1,000 years in repeating cycles of 7,000 years.

The belief held by the Yazīdīs in the descent of the Peacock of the Angels to the earth for the sake of their much-suffering people <sup>(2)</sup>, after the spread of the human race over it, may be an appropriation of the story of Ohrmazd despatching Mithra to bring means of life to the earth and to guard man from the destructive hostility of Ahriman.<sup>(3)</sup>

### *The Four Elements, Times and Pillars*

#### *The Yazīdīs' Tetrads*

We find in the Jilwa, mention of "four elements, four times and four pillars bestowed for the necessities of creation." But as this text deals with creation, its

(1) FBI, 3

(2) PSM, 378; SDY, 7

(3) CMM, 132-138

place is really in the Maṣḥaf i Rash, and it is strange to find it in the Jilwa.

### The Four Elements

The four elements are Air, Fire, Water and Earth which in Mithraism are deified. On this analogy it is tempting to suggest that the Sabians worshipped the four elements and this is borne out by the four pictures found in their sacred seal, Skandola, which show the bee, the lion, the scorpion and the snake. These, I believe, represent the four elements; the bee air, the lion fire, the scorpion water and the snake earth.

### The Four Times

The four times here referred to are the four seasons. In Mithraism they were each composed of three zodiacal signs and were worshipped with those signs.<sup>(1)</sup> The founder of Yazīdīsm seems to have rejected the worship of the signs of the Zodiac because they numbered twelve, in order to avoid acknowledgment of the Ithnā-‘asharī sect and ‘Alawīsm. He contented himself with prescribing worship of the four seasons alone, still composed of three signs each, but signs which no longer had any share in the worship. In each of the seasons he established a festival for the performance of the rites as follows:

- (i) The Spring Festival, one day, on the first Friday of April (Nawrūz, New Year).
- (ii) The Summer Festival lasting three days, 18th-21st July.

(1) CMM, 121

(iii) The Autumn Festival lasting seven days, 23rd-30th September. This is certainly Mihragān.

(iv) The Winter Festival of one day on the first Friday of December.

These festivals have been fixed in the amendment of the law of official holiday of 1960, the Ta'dīl Qānūn al-'Atalāt ar-Rasmiyya for 1960.

### The Four Pillars

The four pillars referred to here must be the winds that blow from the four principal points of the compass. (In Arabic the points of the compass are called the "Pillars of the earth"). In Mithraism the four chief winds are said to be bound up with the four divine seasons and to whisper like Jinn, sometimes inspiring fear and sometimes love.<sup>(1)</sup>

(1) Ibid, 115

## PART THREE

### Traces of Mithraism in some Yazīdī Ceremonies and Rites

#### The Communal Festival

Of all the Yazīdī festivals the most comprehensive and most important is the one that they call the "Jamā'īya" in which they perform their rites for seven days, 23rd-30th of September. I have no doubt that the days of the festival are identical to the days of Mithrakān, or Mihragān which was officially established in Iran and was the Autumnal Festival in Pre-Islamic days.

The Yazīdīs may have forgotten the origin of this festival because they were wrong in its days which have been accepted in the Ta'dīl Qānūn al-'Atalāt ar-Rasmiyya. Mihragān was a festival dedicated to the god Mihr in connection with the setting in of the day of Mihr in the month of Mihr each year. The Iranians used to call the middle day of the month, the 16th, Mihr and the middle month of the year, the seventh, Mihr which commences usually on the 17th of September. By this reckoning the day of Mihragān, i.e., the day of Mihr in the month of Mihr falls usually on the 2nd of October. It seems that the Yazīdī leader, who proposed the communal festival in order to gather the Yazīdīs together in the holy valley of Lālesh for the pilgrimage, for the initiation rites into Yazīdīsm

and to perform their annual secret nocturnal rite, chose for its days the days of the festival of Mihragān. Now I will describe some of the ceremonies and rites which take place during the festival and try to find in them traces of Mithraism.

### The ceremony of Samā

Damlūjī mentions a devotional ceremony which takes place with extreme secrecy (1) on the nights of the Communal Festivals. They call it, he says, Samā, or Samāyī, in reference to their invoking abundances and revelations from heaven.

This ceremony, he writes, is performed by a group of twenty persons in the courtyard opposite the mausoleum of Shaikh 'Adī, around a candlestick called "Chaqaltū" (?) stood in the middle of the courtyard upon which a vessel full of olive oil has been set, a number of wicks ranged round the vessel and another wick made in the form of a large rose placed in the middle of the vessel.

Damlūjī having mentioned the ranks or classes of those twenty persons in the order, and their position in a circle around the candlestick the wicks of which have been lit, tells us that the ceremony is performed by their turning slowly around the candlestick three times in four hours (sic), while the Qawāls sitting in front of the door of the mausoleum sing hymns and play tambours and pipes (sic).

The following are my comments on this ceremony as far as the short description of Damlūjī will permit :

(1) SDY, 195-196. Damluji pretends that nobody has seen this ceremony except himself.

I have no doubt that genuine mystical ceremonies such as this are performed by the Yazīdīs during the Communal Festivals, and that it is for the sake of this ceremony that the Mihragān of the autumnal festival has been changed by them to "Jamā'ī," derived from the mystical term "Aynu'l-Jam'" which means "the essential meeting, the meeting in the presence of, or with, God or with the divinities."

It seems to me that what Damlūjī calls a candlestick is a pole in the form of that of their "Sanjāq" (see Sanjāq), which forms together with the bird upon it the "Sanjāq." But here the pole forms a "Sanjāq," together with a lamp on top instead of the usual bird; and as the "Sanjāq" represents their seven-fold spiritual hierarchy, so the number of wicks of the lamp must be specified as seven, the greater one in its middle part representing "Tāwūs ē Malak" the Sun-god and the other six, the other six deities.

The seven lights of this secret Sanjāq reveal the identity of this symbol, and can be taken as further evidence for confirming our belief that the seven Yazīdī gods are deities of light, originally the seven planets of Mithraism.

I see in the circling of the Yazīdīs around their deities a relation with the circling of the planets around the earth (according to ancient belief).

Damlūjī appears to be confusing "Samā" with the Arabic "Samā'" which means "sky, heaven." The name "Samā'" used by the Yazīdīs to designate this particular secret ceremony is the term used by the mystics for the ceremonies with dance, music and song. The origin of the ritual dance, "Samā'" is attributed by the Bāṭinīs to the first "Samā'" performed by the Invisible Forties, certainly without music and

song, at the descent of Muhammad (see the Origin of Chilmērān). This word too is of Arabic origin being the Arabic "Samā" that is "hearing." In Kurdish "Sama" means "dance," it may have been borrowed from the Darwīsh orders in remote times.

The Mawlawīs call "Samā" the ceremony performed by whirling around the Shaikh, the pole, to the tunes of an orchestra of stringed instruments. The most important symbol and sign which I note in this ceremony is the posture and movement of whirling Darwīshes. The Mawlawī Darwīsh wearing his conical hat and skirt, and barefooted, whirls, his right arm stretched to the side, the hand at the level of the head with palm upwards, his left arm inclined to the side with the palm downwards, and his head inclined to the left.

It seems to me that the Mawlawī Samā contains traces of Mithraism. The Mawlawī Darwīsh in this rite with the posture of his body, and his whirling represents "Mithra" with his two "Dadophori," the members of his trinity, one on his right with an uplifted, the other on his left with an inverted torch,<sup>(1)</sup> and his continuous travelling in the sky around the earth.

Among the candlesticks lit by the Bektāshīs in their "Āyīn i Jam" ceremony there is one larger in size than the others, with three wicks, which represents the Bektāshī trinity "Allāh-Muhammad-'Alī" (the mystic Wisdom-Beauty-Glory), on the other hand originally the trinity of Mithraism, "Muhammad" and "'Ali" being the two "dodophori." This greater candlestick of the Bektāshīs bears four and twelve signs also; the four signs which must represent their

(1) CMM, 129

four Angels and mystic doors can have no other origin than the tetrads (elements, winds, seasons) of Mithraism; the twelve signs which represent the twelve Imāms are originally the signs of the Zodiac.

### The Ceremony of Qabakh

On the fifth day of the Communal festival the Yazīdīs perform the rite of Qabakh. A group of Yazīdīs climb to the summit of the mountain overlooking the mausoleum of Shaikh 'Adī where they begin to let off their guns and to celebrate their rejoicing at the beginning of the ceremony. After this they come down to the mausoleum of Shaikh 'Adī where both men and women dance together to the strains of flute and drums. Meanwhile the Mīr of Shaikhān prepares a large bull and asks those present to protect it from all harm. Armed youths then receive it and take it to the tomb of Shaikh Shams promising to return it to the mausoleum of Shaikh 'Adī safe from all harm. While they are repeating a litany and prayers which are unintelligible to non-Yazīdīs, two Yazīdīs penetrate their ranks secretly and one of them, by a strategem steals the bull. A great wailing goes up and the people recover the bull at once but give no indication of who is the thief, pretending to be ignorant of his name and ignoring his presence. They then lead the bull to the mausoleum of Shaikh 'Adī amidst great cheering and rejoicing.

The tribes are then assembled in a place called the Maydān ē Jihād and ten brave men come forward to protect the bull. But at this juncture the Mīr announces that there is no need for them as the bull has run away. This is because the two men who had

previously stolen the bull had entered the mausoleum in the guise of being two of the Mīr's men to protect it. They then ran away with it to the tomb of Shaikh Shams which is near the mausoleum of Shaikh 'Adī. There the Yazīdīs beat the bull soundly with sticks and with whips and then slaughter it.<sup>(1)</sup>

This ceremony is not, as has been claimed, one of the games of the festival. It was originally a religious rite to bring blessing and fertility upon agriculture and the Yazīdīs perform it in the traditional way. We don't know how far their chieftains are acquainted with its origins. The outstanding thing about this ceremony is that the animal which is sacrificed is a bull and that it is sacrificed in front of the tomb of Shaikh Shams. Shams is Mihr. Thus it can be said that the ceremony is concerned with Mithra and that it is a debased form of Mithra's capture and slaughter of the bull.

I give here the Mithra legend in an abridged form from Cumont:

"Mithra captured the first of living animals which was a bull. This Ohrmazd had created and Mithra succeeded in dragging it back to his cave. But the bull escaped from its prison and Mithra, on a command from Heaven (through the Sun), found the bull again and killed it plunging his hunting knife right up to its hilt in its flanks.

From the body of the moribund victim sprang all sorts of useful herbs and plants which cover the earth with their verdure. From its spinal cord sprang the wheat that gives us our bread, and from its blood the vine which produces the sacred drink of the mys-

(1) For this ceremony see AHY, 128-130; and SDY, 149 and DPY, 157

teries.<sup>(1)</sup>

### The Rite of beating the bull

As for the Yazīdīs beating the bull soundly with whips and sticks before slaughtering it, this was common practice with the later Zoroastrians. "The Zoroastrians struck their victim with a log before applying the knife."<sup>(2)</sup>

The Yazīdīs do not follow this Zoroastrian custom in the slaughtering of all animals but only in the case of the bull in the Qabakh ceremony. This is conclusive proof that this ceremony goes back to Pre-Islamic days.

### The Banquet of Chilmērān

They say that Shaikh 'Adī had forty dutiful disciples who served him sincerely and of these the chief was the Fakhr Chilmērān. He was from 'Ayn Sufnī and for this reason they set up a monument to him there. When the days of the communal festival come to an end they slaughter a bull and cook it until it is thoroughly done. This they call the banquet of Chilmērān and all the Yazīdīs attend it to claim their share of the meat. Each of the Mīr, Wazīr Shaikh (?) and Bābā Shaikh takes a large piece out of the pot and throws it on the heads of the people. Those present catch it with great eagerness and share it out so that each man gets a piece no matter how small. Some even have to put their hands in to the boiling water in the belief that whoever eats a piece of this

(1) CMM, 132-137

(2) ZZD, 42, 52

meat, no matter how little, acquires a portion of Truth.<sup>(1)</sup>

I am inclined to believe that this rite is a corruption of that which was performed by the mystical love feasts in the ceremony of initiation. This ceremony included the bull-sacrifice to commemorate the last supper at which Mithra celebrated with Helios and the other companions of his labours, the termination of their common struggles before their ascent to the heavens.<sup>(2)</sup>

Other Baṭīnī sects perform this rite of the supper at the conclusion of their initiation rites, for example in Kākayīsm or 'Alī-Ilāhīsm in their meeting which they call "Jam" and in Bektāshīsm in their "Āyīn i Jam"; (Jam is a corruption of "Jam<sup>c</sup>" and "Āyīn i jam" for " 'Aynu' j-jam<sup>c</sup>").

### The origin of Chilmērān

As for the Chilmērān whose origin the Yazīdīs have forgotten and whom they describe as the disciples of Shaikh 'Adī, they are the Forty Spiritual Hierarchy, who were incarnated in the persons of well-known saints. There is some disagreement amongst the various sects as to their personification in accordance with their various beliefs and traditions. The Forty Mysterious Ones are companions of the Incarnated God, indeed, they have one and the same existence with Him. They have mystical unity as of one body.

The Spiritual Forties are well-known to the Sūfīs for the first assembly which they held at the end of Muhammad's ascent, and over which Muhammad pre-

(1) AHY, 131-132

(2) CMM, 138

sided. But to the Baṭīnīs it was 'Alī who presided over it and Muhammad was accepted into it only after supplication ; and it was in this assembly that Muhammad understood the real nature of 'Alī being God.

The Kākayīs call them Chil-Tan (the Forty Bodies). The Bektāshīs call them Kirklar (the Forties), and the Kirklar meydānī is a name of the hall in which they carry out the "Āyīn i Jam" during the night.

The origin of the holy number must be the forty days in the middle of the two seasons, summer and winter on which are based seasonal, agricultural and anthropomorphic legends.

### The Rite of Eucharist

#### In Mithraism

It is possible that the origin of this rite in Mithraism refers back to the rite of the holy bread and water mixed with the intoxicant Haoma of the Zoroastrians, which the Mithraists took from them with the exception of the use of wine instead of Haoma which was not known to them.

In Mithraism the rite of Eucharist was performed by placing a loaf of bread and a goblet of water mixed with wine in front of the mystic, over which the priest pronounced the sacred formula.(<sup>1</sup>)

#### In Mysticism

In the above mentioned assembly of the Forty Mysterious Individuals this ritual occurred. They

(<sup>1</sup>) CMM, 158

drank together the juice of a single grape which one of those present had crushed. Some say he was Muhammad, others Salmān.

Amongst all the Mystics this rite is practiced with the drinking of sweet sharbat or an intoxicant, depending on the particular order. The Batīnīs talk of the rite of bleeding in the first invisible assembly of the Forties.

### In Yazīdism

It does not seem to me reasonable to think that the wide awake Yazīdī law-giver could have neglected such an important rite as Eucharist which is a symbolic swearing devotion to the faith.

Although the rite of bread and soup <sup>(1)</sup> is performed in the mornings throughout the Communal Festivals and a rite of bread and water is performed on the day of 'Arafāt (9th Dhi' l-Hajja), the day before the 'Īd of Qurbān <sup>(2)</sup>, both may be regarded as the Eucharist, I am sure that the rite of water and clay (see Sanjāq, Barāt and Qawāl) which is performed during the ceremony of visiting the Sanjāq is the rite of Eucharist. We find this rite in their marriage ceremony also. The marriage ceremony must be ended by the ritual partaking by the bride and bride-groom of a piece of bread, brought from a Shaikh's house,<sup>(3)</sup> with which they certainly take a drink of water. A little quantity of clay from the tomb of Shaikh 'Adī may be swallowed instead of bread.<sup>(4)</sup>

(1) SDY, 196

(2) AHY, 126-127

(3) AHY, 98-99

(4) Ibid

## Baptism

Amongst the other rites that the Yazīdīs may have inherited from Mithraism is baptism. The Yazīdīs baptise their children by dipping them three times in the font of water of the Kanī Spī. If circumstances do not allow them to be baptised when they are children, then baptism may be carried out at any age.<sup>(1)</sup>

As for baptism in Mithraism, Cumont in his investigations of the rivalry between Mithraism and Christianity in the third century says: "The rites that they practiced offer numerous analogies. The sectarians of the Persian god Mithra, like the Christians, purified themselves by baptism".<sup>(2)</sup>

(1) DPA, 159-160

(2) CMM, p. 190

## PART FOUR

### Traces of Mithraism in some Yazīdī Symbols and Traditions

#### The Badge

When they have finished the banquet of Chilmērān, the Mīr's deputies tie round the heads of the Yazīdīs white bands for which they have to pay. Then they return to their homes the same day singly or in groups.<sup>(1)</sup> What the writers call a band is a piece of white gauze. Bāṭinī orders maintain that this rite was first carried out at the end of Eucharist in the meeting held by the Forties.

In Mithraism a mark was given to the initiates.<sup>(2)</sup>

#### Barāt

Every Yazīdī must carry about with him his certificate which he wears to repel misfortune and which he kisses every morning and evening. This certificate, called Barāt, is a small bead the size of a hazel nut made by the Qawāls from clay from the mausoleum of Shaikh 'Adī and holy water and is sold by them to pilgrims and to the Yazīdīs when they visit the Sanjāq. The Qawāls also sell them the clay in powder form. These beads may be and the powder must be eaten by the Yazīdīs.<sup>(3)</sup>

(1) AHY, 132

(2) EWTM, 155

(3) For details of the use of Barat and the clay see SDY, 65, 66, 137-138; and AHY, 93, 98-99, 120

The following might perhaps indicate the Mithraic origin of the certificate: "St. Augustine speaks of engraven stones that were given to the initiates at the end of their probation, tokens of admission into the fraternity and a means of recognition amongst the members."<sup>(1)</sup>

### Qawāl

Mithra having been identified with the Sun, his servitors invested themselves with the name of "Runners of the Sun" (Heliodromus); this was the name of the members of the sixth degree in Mithraism.<sup>(2)</sup>

It is a strange coincidence that in Yazīdism some functions of the members of a class, i.e., the Qawāls and their title have some resemblance to the functions and name of the Mithraic "Runner of the Sun."

One of the duties of the Qawāl is to accompany the Sanjāq wherever it goes amongst the Yazīdīs to perform the rite of introducing the Yazīdīs to the worship of it.

Moreover the Princes employ these Qawāls as their ambassadors to the Yazīdīs from whom they are far removed.

The Yazīdīs called them "Tāzīs," i.e. "Saluqi dogs." The Qawāls rejoice in this name and claim that it was Shaikh 'Adi who gave it to them because they were like "saluqi dogs" in his service.<sup>(3)</sup>

The word "tāzhī" or "tānjī" or "tāzī" in the Kurdish dialects is the name for "saluqi dogs"; but its original meaning is "running" and is derived from the Avestan root "tach-" (to run).

(1) EWTM, 155

(2) CMM, 152, 154

(3) SDY, 51-53

## The Sanjāq

The most important of the widely known Yazīdī symbols, is a standard which they call Sanjāq, or wrongly Ṭāwūs (Peacock). The bird on its pole is not a peacock. In the fatwā of Shaikh ar-Rabtakī, which will be mentioned afterwards, this Sanjāq is called the "standard of Shaikh 'Adī." Sanjāq in Turkish means "standard." This word has been well known since the 11th century, used by the Saljūqs as a symbol of autonomy.

The Yazīdīs nowadays have seven Sanjāqs according with the number of the Deities which they are now believed to represent; and all of them are one, and believed to represent Ṭāwūs ē Malak.

I see in the Sanjāq of the Yazīdīs a corrupted form of the Mithraic standard of Hatra. The standard of Hatra is composed of a number of symbols set up along a pole which ends with a crescent-shaped trident, on its centre an eagle like the eagle representing the Firmament which is seen beside the standard.(<sup>1</sup>)

The Sanjāq of the Yazīdīs is accompanied by two things; the first is what 'Abd u'-Razzāq al-Ḥasanī, who discovered it, called "cushions," (<sup>2</sup>) and the second is a goblet for drinking water.

As for the thing called "cushions," it seems to me that it represents the drapery hanging down behind the Mithraic standard of Hatra, and the goblet as we know is the sacred one from which the Qawāls give water to every Yazīdī whom they introduce to the Sanjāq. This rite is accomplished by giving the visitors Barāts, and also powder from the clay of Shaikh 'Adī's

(<sup>1</sup>) See 9-a picture of Nov. the 17th, 1951, the Illustrated London News

(<sup>2</sup>) AHY, 47, 48

Mausoleum which they swallow with the help of water that the Qawāls give them from the sacred goblet (see the Barāt and the rite of Eucharist).

Two other myths of Mithraism in Yazīdīsm

1. The Yazīdīs believe that "Kanī Spī" (the white spring), in Shaikh 'Adī's temple cave was one of his miracles, as it said in the third line of the qaṣīda attributed to Shaikh.<sup>(1)</sup>

The Bektāshīs also believe that Hājī Bektāsh has made a spring gush by a miracle near Hājī Bektāsh village (in Turkey); it is strange that they also call it "Āk Punār" which in Turkish means the white spring, as "Kanī Spī" of the Yazīdīs means in Kurdish.

The origin of this legend goes back to Mithra. Mithra made the water flow from the rock by firing his arrows at it to rescue man from the drought which had spread over the earth.<sup>(2)</sup>

The Bātinīs in Iran believe that there are springs of water that the Imām 'Alī opened up. Thus in the town of Sulaimani and its surrounding districts there is a belief that the spring of Sarchinār, which is the greatest spring in the neighbourhood of the town was opened by the Imām 'Alī with a blow from his sword Dhu'l-Fiqr. This belief has remained from a time when the Bātinīsm was spread all over the Shahrāzūr district.

The Sarchinār spring was in the past a sacred place. I think that it was in pre-Islamic time a place of worship sacred to the Iranian goddess of running waters, springs and fertility, "Anāhitā." Perhaps

(1) SDY, 94, 95

(2) CMM, 197, 228

Sarchinar was the place of the same temple of "Aneia" mentioned by Strabo as being near Karkuk<sup>(1)</sup>; "Aneia" is corrupted from "Anaitis" which is the Greek pronunciation of "Anāhitā." There is a village in the neighbourhood called "Zargata"; "Zargata" can be derived from "Āzarkata" which means "fire temple."

2. The Yazīdīs believe that on the resurrection day Shaikh 'Adi will cause them to enter into paradise without any judgment or punishment.<sup>(2)</sup>

As to the Mithraists, Mithra was the celestial father that received them in his resplendent mansion, like children who had returned from a distant voyage.<sup>(3)</sup>

#### Maliku' s-Salām, Mīrān b. Nūh

In the Maṣḥaf i Rash it says that the Yazīdīs were the descendents of Maliku' s-Salām, Mīrān b. Nūh. I think that these names are significant.

#### (a) Maliku' s-Salām

In the Ismā'īlī beliefs, Maliku' s-Salām is the Lord of the Time, the third of the six who came, one in every 1,000 years of the present cycle of 7,000 years. Each of these was accompanied by one of the six prophets from Adam to Muhammad. The seventh Lord of the Time was Mawlānā Hasan (1164 A.D.), who was the Lord of the Great Resurrection.<sup>(4)</sup>

Maliku' s-Salām lived in the time of the prophet

(1) Strabo, iii, p. 144

(2) PSM, 371; and DPA, 25; and SDY, 435

(3) CMM, 145

(4) HBI, 39-42, and Introduction 010, 011, 015

Abraham and was his son, Ishmael. His father Abraham was his Proof. The Ismā'īlīs called him also Oshēdar and Oshēdarmāh. There is a tradition that Zoroaster was his Proof and that he appeared at the end of the epoch of Abraham.<sup>(1)</sup>

I must confess to being unable to answer the question how the legend of Maliku' s-Salām, who was peculiar to the Ismā'īlīs, was adopted by the Yazīdīs. But the link of Maliku' s-Salām with Oshēdar and Oshēdarmāh is clearer. In Zoroastrianism there is a belief that Zoroaster will have three sons, Oshēdar, Oshēdarmāh and Saoshyāns, between each of whom are one thousand years. These will be the Lords of the Time. At the beginning of the millennium of Oshēdah and of Oshēdarmāh the religion of Zoroaster will be renewed. In the time of Saoshyāns will be the Resurrection; after everybody has passed through the molten mines and been affected by them in accordance with their lives on Earth, all mankind will live a life of eternal bliss.

(b) Mīrān

Mīrān is the Kurdish pronunciation of the name Mihrān which is derived from Mithra. For Mithra was pronounced "Mihr" from the first century A.D. onwards, as was mentioned above, being the name of the Sun-god and the protector of contracts and truth. The "ān" is an honorific plural suffix as it is in "Yazdān." The proper noun "Mihrān" is a relic of the Sassanian period and it is still used by the Persians and Armenians; but the Kurds have changed the pronunciation to "Mīrān" which they use to this day. It may or may not be that the honorific title "Mīrān"

(1) Ibid

which the Kurds use for people, such as Mīrān Sidīq Bag is of similar derivation; "Mīr" and "Mīrān" may also be derived from the Arabic word "Amīr."

But the name "Mīrān" of Maliku' s-Salām is certainly derived from the Iranian "mihr," and this being the case, it may be that the claim of the Yazīdīs to relationship to this legendary King Mīrān, could have its roots in the forgotten past of their Princes. Is it, perhaps, possible that the first fathers of their present Princes were Mithraists?

## PART FIVE

### The Yazīdīs Do Not Worship the Devil

#### I

### ṬĀWŪS Ē MALAK

#### The proper pronunciation of the name

This name is usually pronounced “Ṭāwūs Malak,” meaning “Peacock Angel,” but the proper pronunciation as used by the Yazīdīs themselves is “Ṭāwūs ē Malak,” with “ē” representing “i” izafa in the Northern Kirmanjī dialect, which means “Peacock of the Angels.”

#### The use of the title Ṭāwūs

The use of this title as a token of esteem and respect, and as a recognition of glory, splendour and pride had been long known to the Ṣūfīs who gave to the great ninth century Saint, Bāyazīd of Bastām, the name “Peacock of the Saints.” I myself have a book on Ṣūfīsm, published in 1431, in which Gabriel is given the title “Peacock of the Angels.”

In classic Persian literature we find the sun described as “Ṭāwūs i atīshpar” (the fiery winged Peacock) and also “Ṭāwūs i ‘ulwī āshyān” (the Peacock of the heavenly nest).

Ṭāwūs ē Malak is Gabriel, Sun-god (Mihr: Mithra)

It is not, I think, unreasonable to suggest here that the founder of Yazīdī Sun-worship originally gave to Gabriel, the chief of the four Angels, the title "Peacock of the Angels," Ṭāwūs ē Malak. Later when he raised the number of the Angels to seven to be equivalent to the seven Mithraic Gods, Ṭāwūs ē Malak retained his supremacy over all other Angels and became equated with the Sun-god, Mihr (Mithra). Indeed the chief Qawāl had told Lady Drower that Ṭāwūs ē Malak is the chief of the seven angels, and is one with Gabriel.<sup>(1)</sup>

Iblīs (the Devil) was a Jinn

It is fundamental that the control of the people's religion was firmly in the hands of their supreme spiritual leader and the source of every established creed must be in him. It was, therefore, impossible for the people to take a new god and to make their highest spiritual leader, who was himself deified, worship it. This being so, it is hardly credible that the Yazīdī Shaikh who was a learned Ṣūfī capable of skilfully and minutely composing a new religion from selected portions of various religions and philosophies, was unable to find any other god to be chief of his seven gods besides Iblīs; especially as Iblīs is not even an angel, but a jinn. For Almighty God said: "When we said to the angels, 'Bow down to Adam,' and they all bowed down except Iblīs. He was a Jinn and departed from the command of his Lord" (the Cave — 50).

<sup>(1)</sup> DPA, 92

The book "Jilwa" cannot derive from the god of Evil

In order to contend that the god whom the Yazīdīs worship is the Iranian god of Evil, one must accept that the book "Jilwa" is the word of the god of Evil. But this position is untenable because the Peacock of the Angels appears no more severe than Mithra in punishing his enemies, for it is Mithra who protects man from the enmity and enticements of the Devil and his followers, who is the prime bestower of blessings upon man, who "annihilates the tribes and the nations that are hostile to him." (1), (see also Part One, 3 - 12 Jilwa).

Comparison between "The Peacock of the Angels" and the Devil

<u>The Devil (Shayṭān)</u>	<u>Peacock of the Angels</u>
He is a jinn, created from fire,	He is an emanation from God,
Expelled, profane and accursed,	God's lieutenant for the preservation of the world,
The enemy of mankind,	Not an enemy of mankind,
He has no power over man,	He has divine power over man,
He seduces and deceives human race,	He does not seduce nor deceive humans,
He is mortal and will be cast into Hell.	He is eternal god.

(1) FMM, 4

## The Peacock of the Angels and Mithra

From the evidence I have briefly extracted from the *Maṣḥaf i Rash* it is reasonable to conclude that the seven Yazīdī gods were inspired by the Mithraic planet gods and that the Ṭāwūs ē Malak is the equivalent of the Sun, that is Mithra (see also Part Five, I). But the resemblance does not stop there, even their rank in God's hierarchy is the same. Cumont says that Mithra is like the ancient Logos — which is an emanation from God and shares in his power.<sup>(1)</sup> It seems likely that the Ṭāwūs ē Malak is in Yazīdī belief an emanation from God, responsible as his lieutenant for the preservation of the world. From him in turn emanated six other gods who are, with him, a single personality.

## II

### The Accusation that the Yazīdīs were Devil-worshippers

#### 1. Deification of Yazīd

The Yazīdīs have never tried to conceal the fact that they deified Shaikh 'Adi. In fact they went further and deified and worshipped Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya as well. It seems that Yazīd was taken as a god as a token of defiance when the 'Adawī position was threatened by the 'Alīd Bābāyīs who had come from Khorasan, followed by tens of thousands of darvīshes, fleeing from the Mongols and seeking refuge in Sanjār and the other mountainous areas of the Iraqi Kurdistan.

(1) FMM, 140

The 'Adawī Shaikh of the time was opposed to the choice of Yazīd and, indeed, the deification of this, the most execrated figure of all Islamic history, has had unwelcome consequences for the sect. For as a result of this act, the sect was rejected by the Islamic world and the accusations which were later levelled against them were given the greater credence thereby, particularly the accusation of Devil-worship.

### The accusations

The accusations that first begun by forging slanders against their beliefs, creeds and chastity were later surmounted by attaching to them the heresy of Devil-worship. But having presented the available facts about the Yazīdīs and their alleged Devil-worship, I would like to suggest that there is, in fact, no conclusive evidence for it and that this, together with other accusations, are all malicious fabrication of fancies goaded on by the close guard kept by the Yazīdīs on their sect and its rites. In this they suffer the same as the Kākayīs and the Qizil Bāshīs and other secret sects which give rise to entirely unwarranted misrepresentations. These however were never accused of being Devil-worshippers.

But the spiteful and the unscrupulous have taken full advantage of these accusations and have encouraged the pronouncement of unjust fatwās as an excuse for hostility towards the sect, the execution of its members and the appropriation of its property.

The fatwās

The Yazīdīs were not accused of Devil-worship before the middle of the 18th century

The earliest of these fatwās is claimed to be that attributed to the Shaikhu' l-Islam Abu Sa'ūd al-'Amādī (1490-1574) quoted by Damlūjī.<sup>(1)</sup> In this fatwā occurs the following passage: "Their total love for the Devil and his for them, and their belief that he is the Peacock of the Angels . . ."

About this fatwā Damlūjī says: "This is the works of an ignorant fool; I cannot believe that this was the muftī al-'Amādī." <sup>(2)</sup> Damlūjī would appear to be right in this opinion and there are four reasons which seem to show that this fatwā in which it is mentioned that the Yazīdīs call the Devil "Peacock of the Angels" was not written until after the middle of the 18th century A.D. These are as follows:—

A. The Sharafnāma of Amīr Sharafu' d-Dīn al-Bitlīsī, who knew more about the Kurds at that time than any other person, was completed in 1596 but makes no mention of Devil-worship amongst the Yazīdīs. There are passing references to their religion as in a discourse on the Rulers of the Jazira, about which he says: "For a while they adopted the modes and customs of the inauspicious Yazīdī party, but they finally turned from this heresy and resumed their holy faith." And in the course of the treating to the Dunbulī tribes and their Rulers he defines Yazīdism as a "disapproved mode." <sup>(3)</sup>

(1) SDY, 428-433

(2) Ibid, 433

(3) Sharafnama, Petersburg ed., 115, 312

B. The Turkish traveller Awliyā Chalabī who visited Sinjār in 1654 and forged nonsensical accusations against the Yazīdīs, does not mention their worshipping the Devil, nor the name of the Ṭāwūs ē Malak.

C. In spite of many false accusations against the Yazīdīs in the fatwā of Shaikh 'Abdu'llāh ar-Rabtakī, a scholar Kurd in the neighbourhood of the Yazīdīs, written in 1724,<sup>(1)</sup> there is again no mention of the Ṭāwūs ē Malak nor of any Devil-worship.

D. In the above fatwā of Shaikh 'Abdu'llah the standard which is now called "the Peacock" is named the "standard of 'Adī" <sup>(2)</sup> which is clear evidence that Yazīdīs were not accused with Devil-worship and even their god called Ṭāwūs ē Malak was unknown to outsiders in the mid-18th century.

The most explicit declaration of Sun and Devil-worship amongst them is to be found in an article by Mohammad Amīn al-'Umarī written in 1785.<sup>(3)</sup>

### III

## THE CONCLUSION

*The Yazīdīs cannot, in fact, believe in the existence of the Devil*

We mentioned above, in the passage on the creation, that the Bāṭinīs who believe that the universe is

(1) SDY, 433-439

(2) SDY, 435

(3) SDY, 441

an emanation from God's essence, do not believe in the existence of the Devil. The Yazīdīs, therefore, in as much as they share this belief about the creation, also reject the existence of the Devil. Take as an example of the Ismā'īlī belief about the source of evil what Naṣir i Khusraw (11th century) said: "The inordinate appetite is the Devil of the heart." (1) Mustanṣir Billāh, the 15th century Nizārī Ismā'īlī, also said: "Whatever good befall you is from God and the light of your minds, but whatever ill befall you is from your own sins." (2) In reference to the belief that the Peacock of the Angels is the Devil the chief Qawāl said to Lady Drower words to the following effect: "The evil that is in men's hearts is not from the Peacock of the Angels but from themselves." (3) In other words the Devil does not exist.

*The Yazīdīs are not Devil-worshippers, but are secret Sun-worshippers*

The fact that the Yazīdīs do not believe in the existence of the Devil is in itself sufficient (in addition to the facts mentioned in this and the previous parts) to remove the accusation of Devil-worship from them. But I find it useful to end my study with a reminder that Devil-worship has two fundamental principles:—

1. The use of magic to enlist the Devil's aid in achieving one's aims.
2. The disbelief in punishment and retribution in the after life.

(1) GRN, 105

( ) PJI, 92

(3) DPA, 92

The Yazīdīs however practice no magic, and they believe in punishment by transmigration and in paradise in the next world. So we are to conclude surely that the Yazīdīs do not worship the Devil.

On the other hand the actual Yazīdīsm being a synthetic religion composed of a Bāṭinīsm and Mithraism (save its Devil-worship), could soundly be called "secret Sun-worship."