

Sabian Religions

Wikipedia Articles

Contents

Articles

Sabaeans	1
Sheba	3
Sabians	7
Mandaeans	13
Harran	19
Fall of Harran	27

References

Article Sources and Contributors	28
Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors	29

Article Licenses

License	30
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Sabaeans

The **Sabaeans** or **Sabeans** (Arabic: السبأيون as-Saba'iyūn) were an ancient people speaking an Old South Arabian language who lived in what is today Yemen, in the south west of the Arabian Peninsula.^[1]

Some scholars suggest a link between the Sabaeans and the Biblical land of Sheba, and would dismiss any link or confusion with the Sabians.

History

The ancient Sabaean Kingdom established power in the early 1st millennium BC. It was conquered, in the 1st century BC, by the Himyarites.

After the disintegration of the first Himyarite Kingdom of the Kings of Saba' and Dhū Raydān, the Middle Sabaean Kingdom reappeared in the early 2nd century.^[2] The Sabaean kingdom was finally conquered by the Himyarites in the late 3rd century and at that time the capital was Ma'rib. It was located along the strip of desert called Ṣayhad by medieval Arab geographers, which is now named Ramlat al-Sab`atayn.

The Sabaean people were South Arabian people. Each of these had regional kingdoms in ancient Yemen, with the Minaeans in the north in Wādī al-Jawf, the Sabeans on the south western tip, stretching from the highlands to the sea, the Qatabānians to the east of them and the Ḥaḍramites east of them.

The Sabaeans, like the other Yemenite kingdoms of the same period, were involved in the extremely lucrative spice trade, especially frankincense and myrrh.^[3]

They left behind many inscriptions in the monumental Musnad (Old South Arabian) alphabet, as well as numerous documents in the cursive Zabūr script. The Book of Job mentions the Sabaens for slaying his livestock and servants.

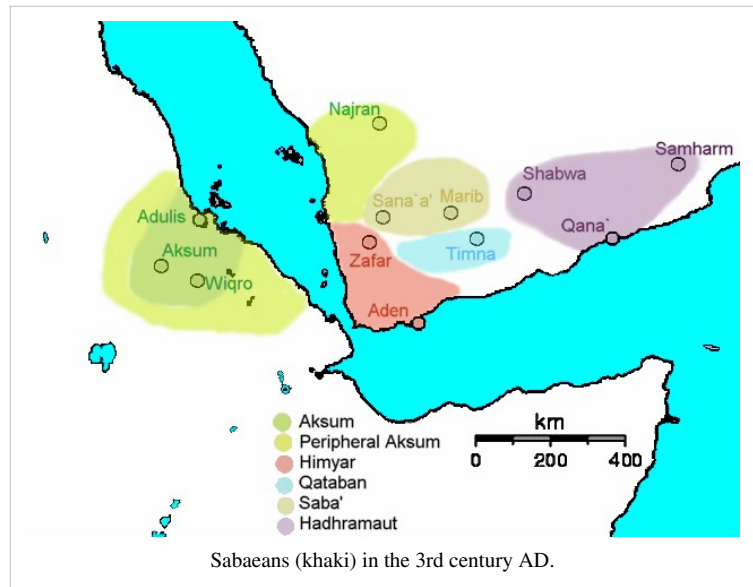
In the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, Augustus claims that:

By my command and under my auspices two armies were led at about the same time into Ethiopia and into Arabia, which is called the Blessed [?]. Great forces of each enemy people were slain in battle and several towns captured. In Ethiopia the advance reached the town of Nabata, which is close to Meroe; in Arabia the army penetrated as far as the territory of the Sabaeans and the town of Ma'rib.^[4]

Religious Practices

Muslim writer Muhammad Shukri al-Alusi compares their religious practices to Islam in his *Bulugh al-'Arab fi Ahwal al-'Arab*:

"The Arabs during the pre-Islamic period used to practice certain things that were included in the Islamic Sharia. They, for example, did not marry both a mother and her daughter. They considered marrying two sisters simultaneously to be a most heinous crime. They also censured anyone who married his stepmother, and called him dhaizan. They made the major [hajj] and the minor [umra] pilgrimage to the Ka'ba, performed the circumambulation around the Ka'ba [tawaf], ran seven times between Mounts Safa and Marwa [sa'y], threw rocks and washed themselves after intercourse. They also gargled, sniffed water up into their noses, clipped their fingernails, plucked their hair from their armpits, shaved their pubic hair and performed the rite



of circumcision. Likewise, they cut off the right hand of a thief.

— Muhammad Shukri al-Alusi, *Bulugh al-'Arab fi Ahwal al-'Arab*, Vol. 2, p. 122

Quran

The Sabaeans were mentioned in the Quran twice قَوْمِ سَبَأٍ people of Saba. The Qur'an, mentions the kingdom of the Saba in the 34th Chapter. The Qur'anic narrative, from sura 27 (An-Naml),[5] has Suleiman (Solomon) getting reports from the Hoopoe bird about the kingdom of Saba, ruled by a queen whose people worship the sun instead of God. Suleiman (Solomon) sends a letter inviting her to submit fully to the One God, Allah, Lord of the Worlds according to the Islamic text. The Queen of Saba is unsure how to respond and asks her advisors for counsel. They reply by reminding her that they are "of great toughness" in a reference to their willingness to go to war should she choose to. She replies that she fears if they were to lose, Suleiman may behave as any other king would: 'entering a country, despoiling it and making the most honorable of its people its lowest'. She decides to meet with Suleiman in order to find out more. Suleiman receives her response to meet him and asks if anyone can bring him her throne before she arrives. A jinn under the control of Suleiman proposed that he will bring it before Suleiman rises from his seat. One who had knowledge of the "Book" proposed to bring him the throne of Bilqis 'in the twinkling of an eye' and accomplished that immediately.[6] The queen arrives at his court, is shown her throne and asked: does your throne look like this? She replied: (It is) as though it were it. When she enters his crystal palace she accepts Abrahamic monotheism and the worship of one God alone, Allah

Notes

- [1] Stuart Munro-Hay, *Aksum: An African Civilization of Late Antiquity*, 1991.
- [2] Andrey Korotayev. *Pre-Islamic Yemen*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996. ISBN 3-447-03679-6.
- [3] Yemen (<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0108153.html>)
- [4] Res Gestae Divi Augusti, paragraph 26.5, translation from Wikisource

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- Info Please (<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0108153.html>)
- Article (<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-45966>) at Encyclopædia Britannica

External links

- S. Arabian "Inscription of Abraha" in the Sabaean language (http://www.mnh.si.edu/epigraphy/e_pre-islamic/fig04_sabaeon.htm), at Smithsonian/NMNH website

Sheba

Sheba (Ge'ez: ሳባ, *Saba*, Arabic: سبأ, *Sabā'*, South Arabian ḥ Π ḥ , Hebrew: שֶׁבָּא, *Šebā*) was a kingdom mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) and the Qur'an. Sheba features in Ethiopian, Hebrew and Qur'anic traditions. Among other things it was the home of the biblical "Queen of Sheba" (named *Makeda* in Ethiopian tradition and *Bilqīs* in Arabic tradition).

Modern archaeological studies support the view that the biblical kingdom of Sheba was the ancient Semitic civilization of Saba in Southern Arabia,^{[1][2][3][4]} in Yemen, between 1200 BC until 275 AD with its capital Marib.^{[5][6]} The Kingdom fell after a long but sporadic civil war between several Yemenite dynasties claiming kingship,^{[7][8]} resulting in the rise of the late Himyarite Kingdom.

Similar description in the Hebrew Bible is found in Strabo's writings and Assyrian annals about the Sabaeans^[9] Their civilization stretched as far as Aqaba with small colonies to protect the trade routes, these colonies included Yathrib and the central Arabian kingdom of Kindah^{[10][11]} and northern Ethiopia where archaeologists found an ancient temple dedicated to the Sabaeen chief god El-Maqah^[12] The study of the history and culture of this kingdom is still patchy. Especially the chronology of historical events and famous kings due to the instability in Yemen^[13]



A Sabaeen priestess, who intercedes with the sun goddess on behalf of the donor probably 1st century AD

Biblical tradition

The two names Sheba (spelled in Hebrew with *shin*) and Seba (spelled with *samekh*) are mentioned several times in the Bible with different genealogy. For instance, in the Table of Nations^[14] Seba, along with Dedan, is listed as a descendant of Noah's son Ham (as sons of Raamah, son of Cush). Later on in Genesis,^[15] Sheba and Dedan are listed as names of sons of Jokshan, son of Abraham Another Sheba is listed in the Table of Nations^[16] as a son of Joktan. Another descendant of Noah's son Shem.

There are possible reasons for this confusion; the Sabaeen established many colonies to control the trade routes and the variety of their caravan stations confused the ancient Israelites, as their ethnology was based on geographical and political grounds not necessarily racial^[17] Another theory suggests that the Sabaeen hailed from Southern Levant and established their kingdom on the ruins of the Minaean Kingdom^[18] It remains a theory however and cannot be confirmed.

The most famous claim to fame for the Biblical land of Sheba was the story^[19] of the Queen of Sheba, who travelled to Jerusalem in search of King Solomon. The apocryphal Christian Arabic text *Kitāb al-Magall* ("Book of the

Rolls",^[20] considered part of Clementine literature) and the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* mention a tradition that after being founded by the children of Saba (son of Joktan), there was a succession of sixty female rulers up until the time of Solomon.

In Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, the Sheba who was Joktan's son is considered the primary ancestor of the original Semitic component in their ethnogenesis, while Sabtah and Sabtechah, sons of Cush, are considered the ancestors of the Cushitic element. Traditional Yemenite genealogies also mention Saba son of Qahtan (Joktan), however they claim Sabaeen descent not from him, but from yet another Saba not mentioned in scripture, who was said to be a grandson of Yarab and a great-grandson of Qahtan.

The Jewish-Roman historian Josephus describes a place called Saba as a walled, royal city of Ethiopia, which Cambyses afterwards named Meroe. He says "it was both encompassed by the Nile quite round, and the other rivers, Astapus and Astaboras" offering protection from both foreign armies and river floods. According to Josephus it was the conquering of Saba that brought great fame to a young Egyptian Prince, simultaneously exposing his personal background as a slave child named Moses.^[21]

Qur'anic tradition

In the Qur'an, Sheba is mentioned by name at 27:22 in a section that speaks of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon Qur'an 27:20-44.^[22] Also in the Qur'an, the people of Sheba are called the people of Tubba' (أهل تبّع) because *Tubba'* was used as the title for Sheba's kings. The Qur'an mentions this ancient community along with other communities that were destroyed by God.^[23] Muslim scholars, including Ibn Kathir, related that the People of Tubba' were Arabs from South Arabia.

Ethiopian tradition

In the medieval Ethiopian cultural work called the *Kebra Nagast*, Sheba was located in Ethiopia.^[24] Some scholars therefore point to a region in the northern Tigray and Eritrea which was once called Saba (later called Meroe), as a possible link with the biblical Sheba.^[25] Other scholars link Sheba with Shewa (also written as Shoa, the province where modern Addis Ababa is located) in Ethiopia.^[26] Some even believe that the Arabic word *Tubba'* in the Quran to be a perversion of the name "Ethiopia", with the letter P in "Ethiopia" being replaced with a B because the letter P doesn't exist in Arabic ^[citation needed]

Speculation on location

The actual location of the kingdom mentioned in the Bible was long disputed.^[27] On the one hand, archaeologists have no doubt that the kingdom was located in southern Arabia.^[28] The Sabaeans colonized northern Ethiopia during the rule of Karibill Watar I in the 7th century BCE^[29] and established several other colonies to control the trade routes that stretched from their capital Marib to Aqaba.^{[30][31][32]} Strabo referred to the Sabaeans in Southern Arabia and Nabateans as the same people.^[33] These colonies served the sole purpose of shortening the long and difficult journey for the caravans.^[34]

However, owing to the connection with the Queen of Sheba, the location has become closely linked with national prestige, and various royal houses claimed descent from the Queen of Sheba and Solomon. According to the medieval Ethiopian work *Kebra Nagast*, Sheba was located in Ethiopia.^[citation needed] Some scholars have long since linked Sheba with the Egyptian city of Thebes. Thebes is a Greek name, and apparently derived from the Greek word Thebai, while the correct Egyptian pronunciation of the city's name was She.wa or similar.^{[35][36][37]} Ruins in many other countries, including Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia and Iran have been credited as being Sheba, but with only minimal evidence. There has been a suggestion of a link between the name "Sheba" and that of Zanzibar (Shan Sheba),^[38] and even a massive earthen monument of the Yoruba people in Nigeria known as Sungbo's Eredo is held by local tradition to have been built in honour of the powerful chieftain Bilikis Sungbo, who is considered by them to be the

Bilqis of Arabic legend.^[39]

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- [8] Javad Ali, The articulate in the history of Arabs before Islam Voulume 2 p.420
- [9] [arabia felix humnet.unipi.it/](http://arabiafelix.humnet.unipi.it/) (http://arabiafelix.humnet.unipi.it/page_kingdoms/saba01.html)
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- [11] Javad Ali, The articulate in the history of Arabs before Islam Voulume 7 p.519
- [12] David W. Phillipson, *Ancient Churches of Ethiopia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 36
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- [14] Genesis 10:7.
- [15] Genesis 25:3.
- [16] Genesis 10:28
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- [18] HOMMEL, *Südarabische Chrestomathie* (Munich, 1892) p.64
- [19] 1 Kings 10
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- [33] Strabo's *Geography* XVI.iv.21
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- [35] *Empire of Thebes Or Ages In Chaos Revisited*, By Emmet John Sweeney, pg 30-32, at <http://books.google.co.za/books?id=F74JXoief34C&pg=PA31&lpg=PA31&dq=sheba,+thebes&source=bl&ots=r2yUEA5SIJ&sig=IhxU3VKFh4f4mhJ25x-PpRAxofQ&hl=en&sa=X&ei=dd4sUblLELO6Y0QWKh4H4BA&ved=0CDMQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=sheba%2C%20thebes&f=false>
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External links

- "Queen of Sheba mystifies at the Bowers" (<http://www.newu.uci.edu/article.php?id=3141>) – UC Irvine news article on Queen of Sheba exhibit at the Bowers Museum
- "A Dam at Marib" (<http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/197802/a.dam.at.marib.htm>) from the 'Saudi Aramco World' online – March/April 1978
- Queen of Sheba Temple restored (2000, BBC) (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1082648.stm)
- "Africa's Golden Past: Queen of Sheba's true identity confounds historical research" ([http://books.google.com/books?id=M94DAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA136&dq="Sheba's true identity"&pg=PA136#v=onepage&q="Sheba's true identity"&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=M94DAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA136&dq=)), William Leo Hansberry, E. Harper Johnson, *Ebony Magazine* April 1965, p. 136 - thorough discussion of previous scholars associating Biblical Sheba with Ethiopia

Sabians

The **Sabians** (Arabic: **صابئة**) of Middle Eastern tradition are a variety of monotheistic: Gnostic (*Mandeans*), Hermetic (*Harranian*) as well as Abrahamic religions mentioned three times in the Quran with the people of the Book, "the Jews, the Sabians, and the Christians."^[1] In the *hadith*, they are described merely as converts to Islam,^[2] but interest in the identity and history of the group increased over time, and discussions and investigations about the Sabians begin to appear in later Islamic literature.

In the Quran

The Qur'an mentions briefly the Sabians in three places and the Hadith provide additional details as to who they were:

- "Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans [before Prophet Muhammad] - those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness - will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve." [Quran 2:62 [3]]
- "Indeed, those who have believed [in Prophet Muhammad] and those [before Him] who were Jews or Sabeans or Christians - those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness - no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve." [Quran 5:69 [4]]
- "Indeed, those who have believed and those who were Jews and the Sabeans and the Christians and the Magians and those who associated with Allah - Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed Allah is, over all things, Witness." [Quran 22:17 [5]]

In later Islamic sources

According to Muslim authors, Sabians followed the fourth book of Abrahamic tradition, the *Zabur*, which was given to the prophet King David of Ancient Israel according to the Qur'an. The "Zabur" is identified by many modern scholars as the biblical Book of Psalms. Most of what is known of them comes from Ibn Wahshiyya's *The Nabatean Agriculture*, and the translation of this by Maimonides.

Other classical Arabic sources include the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadim, (c. 987), who mentions the *Mogtasilah* ("Mughtasila," or "self-ablutionists"), a sect of Sabians in southern Mesopotamia who counted El-Hasaih as their founder^[6] and academics agree that they are probably the enigmatic "Sobiai" to whom Elchasai preached in Parthia. According to Daniel Chwolsohn (1856) they appear to have gravitated around the original pro-Jewish Hanputa of Elchasai out of which the miso-Judaic prophet Mani seceded and are identified therefore as the pro-Torah *Sampsaeans* but also less accurately with the anti-Torah Mandaean. They were said by Khalil Ibn Ahmad (d.786) to believe that they "belonged" to the prophet Noah.^[7]

Some Wikipedia:Avoid weasel words supposed that they influenced the practices of the Hellenic Godfearers (*theosebeis* Greek: Θεοσεβείς) while their angelology (based around the movements of the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus and Saturn) found its greatest development in the community which was based in the Harran region of south-eastern Anatolia and northern Syria. Ibn al-Qayyim distinguished them as the Sabians of Harran from the south Mesopotamian *Sābi'ūna Hunafā*.^[citation needed]

Etymology

There has been much speculation as to the origins of the religious endonym from this practice. Segal (1963)^[8] argued that the term *Sābi'ūn* derives from the Syriac root *S-b-'*, referring to conversion through submersion.^[9]

The Syriac (and Hebrew) nouns derived from this root refer to proselytes, both "Judaizers" — non-converts who followed certain basic rules of Judaism — and early Christian converts of non-Jewish origin and practice. These latter were called *Theosebeians* "God-believers", *Theophobians* "(God-fearers)", *Sebomenoi* "Believers", or *Phobeomenoi* (Φοβεόμενοι) "fearing or "pious ones" in Greek sources. The Greek etymology of *sebomai* (σέβομαι), applied to the proselytes, is in the word *eusebian* (εὐσέβειαν), meaning a kind of godliness and reverence or worshipfulness. Wikipedia:No original research

According to Islamic scholars, the word *Sābi'ūna* (Sabian) is derived from the verb *saba'a*, which refers to the action of leaving one religion and entering another.^[10]

Tabari said: *as-Sābi'ūn* is the plural of *Sābi'*, which means "proselyte" who has left his original religion, or anyone who has left the religion that he used to follow and joins another. The Arabs called such a person *Sābi'*.

Sabians practiced initiation through submersion in water, intended to harken to the inundation of the world during the deluge of the time of Noah which cleansed man's sinful nature from the face of the earth [as found in 1 Peter 3:20-21].^[citation needed]

Overview

In the later ninth century CE, Arab authors focused upon the origins of the "Abrahamic" Sabians from the "Hellenistic" Sabians Wikipedia:Please clarify and went into much detail on the Harranian period before the time of Abraham. Most of this knowledge was translated in 904 CE from Syriac sources into the book called "The Nabatean Agriculture" by Ibn Wahshiyya; Maimonides considered it an accurate record of the beliefs of the Sabians, whose role as a pre-Judaic monotheistic movement he commented on at length.^[citation needed]

Despite substantial and clear documentation about both kinds of Sabians spanning many centuries from sources as diverse as Greek Christian, Arabic Muslim, Arabic and Persian Bahá'í, as well as Jewish sources and documents, the actual nature of the Sabians has remained a matter of some heated debate among Orientalists. Therefore, "Sabian" has been used mistakenly in many literary references for decades and though, the spelling "Sabian" usually refers to one of the People of the Book mentioned in the Qur'an, it is also used by the Mandaeans under the variation of "Sabaeans" detailed below. The variation "Sabean" has been employed in English to distinguish the ancient Harranian group, but the usage is not universal.^[citation needed]

The confusion of Sabaeans and Sabians began with Marmaduke Pickthall's spelling mistake in his translation of the Qur'an.^[citation needed] The word "Sabaeans" comes from a completely different root spelling, beginning with the Arabic letter "Sin" instead of the Arabic letter "Sad". The Sabaeans were in fact the people of ancient Saba in Yemen who scholars Wikipedia:Avoid weasel words have shown to have no connection to the Sabians of the Qur'an, except for their Ansar tribe, which practiced Qur'anic Sabianism.^[citation needed]

Al-Biruni (writing at the beginning of the eleventh century CE) said that the "real Sabians" were "the remnants of the Jewish tribes who remained in Babylonia when the other tribes left it for Jerusalem in the days of Cyrus and Artaxerxes[11]. According to Ethel Drower (1937) these remaining tribes ... adopted a system mixed up of Magism and Judaism."^[12]

Islamic reference

The recent debate on who the Sabians were is directly connected to how to best translate the following verses from the Qur'an out of the original Arabic.

The Sabians existed before Muhammad, and are said to have read from a book called the *Zabur* ("Psalms"). They came under Islamic rule about 639 CE. At that time in history they were described as Greek immigrants^[citation needed] but were grouped together with the Nabataeans.

Many Islamic writers from the period of about 650 CE onward gave further descriptions of the Sabians. They wrote that the Sabians lived in Iraq around Sawad, Kutha and Mosul and they "wash themselves with water", had "long hair", and "white gowns".^[citation needed] They had a monotheistic faith with religious literature (the *Zabur*) and acknowledged the prophets. Their theology resembled that of Judaism and Christianity yet were neither, nor were they Magians.

With regard to their beliefs, Ibn al-Qayyim said: "The people differed greatly concerning them, and the imams were unsure about them because they did not have enough knowledge of their beliefs and religion." Al-Shaafa'i said: "Their case is to be examined further; if they resemble the Christians in basic matters but they differ from them in some minor issues, then the *jizya* is to be taken from them. But if they differ from them in basic issues of religion then their religion cannot be approved of by taking the *jizya* from them." And he elaborated elsewhere: "They are a kind of Christian," a view consistent with a comment about some of them mentioned in Bahá'í writings.^[citation needed]

Ibn al-Qayyim said: "The Sabians are a large nation among whom are both blessed and doomed. They are one of the nations who are divided into believers and disbelievers, for the nations before the coming of the Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allāh be Upon Him) were of two types, *kāfir* nations all of whose people were doomed and among whom were none who were blessed, such as the idol-worshippers and the Magians; and others who were divided into those who were blessed and those who were doomed, namely the Jews, Christians and Sabians."^[citation needed]

According to Islamic scholars, they did not reject the Prophets of Islam but neither did they regard it as obligatory to follow them. In their view Whoever followed (the Prophets) may be blessed and saved, but whoever follows a path similar to that of the Prophets *by virtue of one's own reasoning* is also blessed and saved, even if one did not follow the Prophets in specific terms. In their view the call of the Prophets was true but there was *no one specific route* to salvation. They believed that the universe had a Creator and Sustainer, Who is Wise and above any resemblance to created beings, but many of them, or most of them, (i.e. the Sabians of Harran) said: we are unable to reach Him without intermediaries, so we have to approach Him through the mediation of spiritual and holy Bud Asaf who are pure and free of any physical elements and who are above place and time, rather they are created pure and holy.

Abd al-Rahman Ibn Zayd (d. 798 CE) wrote: "The Sābi'ūn say that their religion is a religion to itself and they live near Mosul (jazirat al-mawsil) and believe in only one God." He also wrote that they have: "no cult though their main belief is 'La ilaha il Allāh'." He also remarked that: "the Sābi'ūn did not believe in the Prophet Muhammad (in the same way as his followers did), yet the polytheists were known to say of the Prophet and his companions 'these are the Sabians' comparing them to them."^{[13][14]} following the Din of Noah as a sect who read the *Zabur*^{[15][16]} akin to Christianity.^[17] They appear to be between Judaism and Magianism^{[18][19]} but are in fact closer to Judaism.^{[20][21][22]} Sābi'ūn recognise the practice of Muhammad in going to the caves prior to his inspiration, as in accordance with the Sabi quest for Tawheed Hunafa' and, in general, many similarities with the Sabians meant Muhammad and his companions were often considered to have been Sabians.^{[23][24]} Most specifically this was because of the Sabian shahada "La ilaha ila Allāh"^{[25][26][27]}.

The root-meaning of the word "Sabian" (from which they derive Seboghatullah) means proselyte, and is identical in usage with the Greek words for Godfearers *sebomenoi*, *theosebēs*, *phobeomenoi*.^[28]

Characteristics of the Sabi religion

Sābi'ūn knew God as the *Rabb al-'alihak* (lord of gods) and *'ilah al-'alihak* (*god of gods*) and speak to angels in their meditations,^[29] each of whom they believe dwell in different stars, which has led to the erroneous beliefs among some that Sābi'ūn worship angels while others derogatorily call them star-worshipers (and so it is said in Arabic *saba'at al-nujūm*, meaning "the stars appeared"). Sābi'ūn read from the *Zaboor* (as with the Slavonic Subbotniki or Psaltirschiki) and use the sun for a qiblah, facing the equator at mid day.^{[15][30][31]} Their fundamental teaching is *La ilahah il Allah* (there is no god but Allah),^[1] but besides this ardent unitarianism, Sābi'ūn are quite akin to Christians.^[32] Hanif Sabians are more universal, looking to Noah as their prophet of the Dīn. Sābi'ūn have five daily prayers^[33] (though Zohar can join Asr while Maghrib can join Isha giving the appearance of three). They believe in all prophets, reiterating the Din of Noah and, not in the same way as the Muslims, believe in the Seal of the prophets.^[34] They also fast for 30 days.^[35]

Non Islamic sources

Maimonides

Although too late to be of relevance in identifying the sect mentioned in the Qur'an, Maimonides wrote about the Sabians, Hebrew: סַבְאִיִּים^[citation needed]. Based upon a book called *The Nabataean Agriculture* which Maimonides translated, Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* describes the Sabians in quite some detail. They were questioned by Caliph al-Ma'mun of Baghdad in 830 CE, according to Abu Yusuf Absha al-Qadi, about what protected religion they belonged to. Not being Muslim, Christian, Jewish or Magian, the caliph told them they were nonbelievers and would have to become Muslims or adherents of one of the other religions recognized by the Qur'an by the time he returned from his campaign against the Byzantines or he would kill them.^[36] The Harranians consulted with a lawyer who suggested that they find their answer in the Qur'an II.59 which made it clear that Sabians were tolerated. It was unknown what was intended by Sabian and so they took the name.^[37]

These newly-dubbed Harranian Sabians acknowledged Hermes Trismegistus as their prophet and the *Corpus Hermeticum* as their sacred text, being a group of Hermeticists. Validation of Hermes as a prophet comes from his identification as Idris (i.e. Enoch) in the Qur'an (19.57 and 21.85).^[38]

The Harranian Sabians played a vital role in Baghdad and the rest of the Arab world from 856 until about 1050; playing the role of the main source of Greek philosophy and science as well as shaping the intellectual life. The most prominent of the Harranian Sabians was Thabit ibn Qurra.

A Yezidi writer

The Yezidi, and later French citizen and Vice-Consul at Mosul, Nicolas Siouffi in his *Études sur la religion des Soubbas ou Sabéens, leurs dogmes, leurs mœurs* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1880) claimed to have identified 4,000 Sabians in the Soubbas. This was well received by the Theosophist G. R. S. Mead,^[39] but received critical reviews from scholars.^[40]

In the Bahá'í writings

The Sabians are also mentioned in the literature of the Bahá'í Faith. These references are brief for the most part, once describing a group who believe in Jesus.^[41] Abdu'l-Bahá has one brief reference where he describes Seth as one of the "sons of Adam". Bahá'u'lláh in a Tablet identifies Idris with Hermes. He does not, however, specifically name Idris as the prophet of the Sabians.

Modern critical scholarship

Possible identifications for the Sabians include Mandaean and Harranians. Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila (2002, 2006) notes that in the marsh areas of Southern Iraq there was a continuous tradition of Mandaean religion, but also another pagan, or "Sabian," centre in the tenth-century Islamic world centred on Harran.^[42] These pagan "Sabians" are mentioned in the Nabataean corpus of Ibn Wahshiyya.^[43]

"The Sabians, who were pagans in the Middle East, were identified with two groups, the Mandaeans and the Harranians. The Mandaeans lived in Iraq during the 2nd century A.D. As they continue to do today, they worshipped multiple gods, or "light personalities." Their gods were classified under four categories: "first life," "second life," "third life" and "fourth life." Old gods belong to the "first life" category. They summoned deities who, in turn, created "second life" deities, and so forth.

Citations

- [1] Bernard Lewis *The Jews of Islam* 1987 page 13
- [2] e.g. Sahih Bukhari Book #7 Hadith #340, Book #59 Hadith #628, and Book #89 Hadith #299 etc.
- [3] <http://www.usc.edu/org/cmje/religious-texts/quran/verses/002-qmt.php#002.062>
- [4] <http://www.usc.edu/org/cmje/religious-texts/quran/verses/005-qmt.php#005.069>
- [5] <http://www.usc.edu/org/cmje/religious-texts/quran/verses/022-qmt.php#022.017>
- [6] Daniel Chwolsohn, *Die Sabier*, 1856, I, 112; II, 543, cited by Salmon.
- [7] Khalil Ibn Ahmad (d. 786-787 CE), who was in Basra before his death, wrote: "The Sabians believe they belong to the prophet Noah, they read Zaboor, and their religion looks like Christianity." He also states that "they worship the angels."
- [8] Judah Benzion Segal, *The Sabian Mysteries. The planet cult of ancient Harran, Vanished Civilizations*, ed. by E. Bacon, London 1963
- [9] *The city of the Moon god: religious traditions of Harran* p112 Tamara M. Green - 1992 "Segal was inclined to believe that the root of the word Sabian was Syriac. Rejecting the notion that it means baptizer ... Even if the etymology proposed by Segal is correct, nevertheless the question of how Muhammad learned about these ..."
- [10] He is asking about the Sabians: who were they and what were their beliefs? (<http://www.islam-qa.com/index.php?ref=49048&In=eng&txt=Sabians>), *Islam Q&A*, retrieved April 23, 2006
- [11] http://toolserver.org/%7Edispenser/cgi-bin/dab_solver.py?page=Sabians&editintro=Template:Disambiguation_needed/editintro&client=Template:Dn
- [12] Extracts from Ethel Stefana Drower - 1937, *Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, (<http://www.farvardyn.com/mandaeen.php>)
- [13] Wahb Ibn Munabbih (d 728-732 CE), who was originally from Iran, wrote: "The Sabians believe 'La ilaha il Allāh' but they do not have canonical law."
- [14] Mujahid 'ibn Jarir (d 722 CE) wrote: "The Sabians have no distinctive religion but is somewhere between Judaism and Magianism."
- [15] Abul 'Ailya said: "The Sabians are a sect of people of the Scripture who recite the Zaboor."
- [16] Abu Hanifah (d.767 CE) who is the founder of the Hanafite school of Islamic Law wrote: "The Sabians read Zaboor and are between Judaism and Christianity."
- [17] 'Abd 'Allah 'ibn al-'Abbas (lived about 650 CE) wrote: "The religion of the Sabians is a sect of Christianity."
- [18] 'Ibn Abi Nujayh (d749) wrote: "The Sabians were between Judaism and Magianism."
- [19] Suddi (d745 CE) also wrote: "The Sabian religion is between Judaism and Magianism."
- [20] 'Awza' (d.773 CE) a representative of the ancient Syrian school of religious studies wrote: "The Sabians are between Judaism and Christianity."
- [21] Malik 'ibn 'Anas (d795) wrote: "The Sabians are between Judaism and Christianity..."
- [22] Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855 CE) the Iman of Baghdad wrote: "The Sabians are a sect of Christianity or Judaism."
- [23] Ibn Jurayi (who lived in the 8th century) also wrote: The Sabians are in Sawad and are between the Magians, Christians, or Jews. He also wrote that the polytheists said of Mohammed: "He is a Sabian".
- [24] Abd al-Rahman Ibn Zayd (d798 CE) wrote: "The prophet and his companions are referred to as 'these are the Sabians' comparing Mohammed to the Sabians."
- [25] 'Abd al-Rahman 'ibn 'Zayd (d.798 CE) wrote: "The polytheists used to say of the prophet and his companions 'these are the Sabians' comparing them to them, because the Sabians who live Jaziartat-Mawsil (today known as Iraq) would say 'La ilaha ila Allah'."
- [26] Rabiah Ibn Ubbad (who lived at the same time as Mohammed) wrote: "I saw the prophet when I was a pagan. He was saying to the people, 'if you want to save yourselves, accept that there is no God but Allāh' At this moment I noticed a man behind him saying 'he is a sabi.' When I asked somebody who he was he told me he was 'Abu Lahab, his uncle.'"
- [27] Both Ibn Jurayi (d. 767) and Ata Ibn Abi Rabah (d.732) wrote: "I saw the prophet when I was a pagan. He was saying to the people, 'If you want to save yourselves, accept that there is no God but Allāh.' At this moment I noticed a man behind him saying 'He is a sabi.' When I asked somebody who he was he told me he was 'Abu Lahab, his uncle' Of the relationship between the Sabians who lived in Sawad (in Iraq) and Muhammad it is mentioned that the polytheists of Mecca were heard to say of Muhammad "he has become a Sabian."

- [28] Abu Abdultah said: "The word saba'a means "The one who is a Proselyte.""
- [29] Hasan al-Basri (d.728 CE) wrote: "the Sabian religion resembles the Magians and they worship angels."
- [30] Hasan al-Basri (d728 CE) wrote: "They read the Zaboor and pray facing a qiblah."
- [31] Qatadah 'ibn Di'amah (d736 CE) wrote:"they pray towards the sun."
- [32] Al-Shaafai said: "Their case is to be examined further; if they resemble the Christians in basic matters but they differ from them in some minor issues, then the jizya is to be taken from them. But if they differ from them in basic issues of religion then their religion cannot be approved of by taking the jizya from them." And he elaborated elsewhere: "They are a kind of Christian."
- [33] Qatadah 'ibn Di'amah (d736 CE) wrote: "The Sabians worship angels, read Zaboor, pray five ritual prayers."
- [34] Ziyad 'ibn 'Abihi (d. 672 CE) who was the governor of Iraq during the first Umayyad caliph Mu'awiyah wrote: "The Sabians believe in the prophets and pray five times daily."
- [35] 'Abdul al-Zanad (d.747 CE) wrote: "The Sabians are from "Kutha" in Iraq, they believe in prophets, fast 30 days in a year, and pray 5 times daily towards the Yemen." (NB "towards the Yemen" is equivalent to facing south)
- [36] (Churton p. 26)
- [37] Tobias Churton pp. 26-7
- [38] (Churton p. 27)
- [39] G. R. S. Mead *Gnostic John the Baptizer: Selections from the Mandaean John-Book* p137 "... the French Vice-Consul at Mosul, estimated them at some 4000 souls in all (*Etudes sur la Religion des Soubbas ou Sabéens*, Paris, 1880). These were then to be found chiefly in the neighbourhood of Bašra aud Kút. Siouffi's estimate, "
- [40] The Edinburgh review 1880 Sydney Smith "Admitting M. Siouffi's ignorance and his teacher's possible dishonesty, these are scarcely sufficient to account for the origin of all the traditions and beliefs described in the * *Etudes sur la religion ' des Soubbas*. ..."
- [41] "they do expect the manifestation of Jesus" (á'ín-i Sábi'ín by Ruhu'llah Mihrabkhani)
- [42] Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila in *Ideologies as intercultural phenomena* p90 ed. Antonio Panaino, Giovanni Pettinato, International Association for Intercultural Studies of the MELAMMU Project - 2002 "... that in the marsh areas of Southern Iraq there was a continuous tradition of Mandaean religion, but it seems to have been totally neglected in scholarship that there was another pagan, or Sabian, centre in the tenth-century Islamic world, in the countryside of Iraq (sawad) around Baghdad"
- [43] Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila 2002 First, the books of the Nabatean corpus themselves claim to be translations from "ancient Syriac" (e.g. Filaha 1:5) made by Ibn Wahshiyya and transmitted to a student of his, Ibn az-Zayyat. The real authors of, e.g., Filaha, according to...

References

Churton, Tobias. *The Golden Builders: Alchemists, Rosicrucians, and the First Freemasons*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 2002.

External links

About Sabians Mandaean:

- Ginza Rabba-English Translation: <http://www.amazon.de/dp/B00A3GO458>
- Dictionary: English-Mandaic-English: <http://www.amazon.de/dp/B00A5SCY8I>
- Dictionary: Arabic-Mandaic-Arabic: <http://www.amazon.de/dp/B00A9VGHCK>
- I learn Mandaic (instructional book): <http://www.amazon.de/dp/B00A9VS9LW>

For various theories on the Sabians please see the following:

- 1911 article (http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/RON_SAC/SABIANS.html)
- Articles on Sebomenoi & Sabians (<http://www.ricerchefilosofiche.it>)
- Inner Haran (<http://leocaesius.blogspot.com/2004/05/as-i-noted-below-there-are-at-least.html>)
- Problems on Understanding The Muslim Sabians as Mandaean* Sinasi Gündüz ([http://www.dinlertarihi.com/dosyalar/makaleler/sinasigunduz/problems on the muslim.htm](http://www.dinlertarihi.com/dosyalar/makaleler/sinasigunduz/problems%20on%20the%20muslim.htm))
- Religious context for the Sabians of Harran (<http://essenes.net/yazdanism.html>)
- The Sabian Assembly (<http://www.sabianassembly.org>)

Mandaeans

Mandaeans *Mandeyānāye*

Total population	
60,000 ^[1] to 70,000 ^[2]	
Regions with significant populations	
 Iraq	3,000 to 7,000 (as of 2010 ^[3])
 Iran	5,000 to 10,000 (2009)
 Jordan	49 families
 Syria	1,250 families
 Sweden	8,500 ^[4]
 Australia	3,500 to 5,000 ^[5] ^[6]
 United States	1,500 to 2,000
 United Kingdom	1,000 ^[7]
 Canada	1,500
 Germany	1,200 ^[8]
 Denmark	650 ^[9]
 Indonesia	23
Religions	
Mandaism	
Scriptures	
Ginza Rba, Qolusta	
Languages	
Mandaic as liturgical language Arabic and Persian	

Mandaeans (Modern Mandaic: מנדעניא *Manda'nāye*, Arabic: الصابئة المندائيون *aṣ-Ṣabi'a al-Mandā'iyūn*) are an ethnoreligious group indigenous to the alluvial plain of southern Mesopotamia and are followers of Mandaism, a Gnostic religion. The Mandaeans were originally native speakers of Mandaic, a Semitic language that evolved from Eastern Middle Aramaic, before switching to colloquial Iraqi Arabic and Modern Persian. Mandaic is mainly preserved as a liturgical language. During the century's first decade the indigenous Mandaic community of Iraq, which used to number 60–70,000 persons, collapsed in the aftermath of the Iraq War of 2003; most of the community relocated to nearby Iran, Syria and Jordan, or formed diaspora communities beyond the Middle East. The other indigenous community of Iranian Mandaeans has also been dwindling as a result of religious persecution over that decade.

History

Origin

There are several indications of the ultimate origin of the Mandaeans. Early religious concepts and terminologies recur in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and "Jordan" has been the name of every baptismal water in Mandaism. This connection with early baptismal sects in the eastern Jordan region and the elements of Western Syrian in the Mandaean language attests to their levantine origin. The ultimate Jewish origin of the Mandaeans can still be found despite the vehement polemics against the Jews in Mandaean literature, in which Moses is a false prophet and Adonai (one of the names of God) is an evil God. There are fewer indications of a relation between early Christians and Mandaeans, which make the connection more problematic. Some scholars, including Kurt Rudolph connect the early Mandaeans with the Jewish Christian sect of the Nasoraeans.

The emigration of early Mandaeans from the Jordan Valley took place the latest at the second century CE due to pressure from orthodox Jews. The migrants first went to Harran in upper Mesopotamia and entered the southern provinces of Mesopotamia during the third century CE. It appears that Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, was partly influenced by the newcomers. The Mandaeans had also hostile relations with the Byzantine Church and the Babylonian Jews.

Early Persian periods

A number of ancient Aramaic inscriptions dating back to the 2nd century CE were uncovered in Elymais. Although the letters appear quite similar to the Mandaean ones, it is doubtful whether the inhabitants of Elymais were Mandaeans. Under Parthian and early Sasanian rule, foreign religions were tolerated. The situation changed by the ascension of Bahram I in 273, who under the influence of the zealous Zoroastrian high priest Kartir persecuted all non-Zoroastrian religions. It is thought that this persecution encouraged the consolidation of Mandaean religious literature. The persecutions instigated by Kartir seems to temporarily erase Mandaeans from recorded history. Traces of their presence can still however be found in the so-called Mandaean magical bowls and lead strips which were produced from the 3rd to the 7th centuries.

Islamic Caliphates

The Mandaeans re-appear at the beginning of the Muslim conquest of Mesopotamia, when their "head of the people" Anush son of Danqa appears before Muslim authorities showing them a copy of the Ginza Rabba, the Mandaean holy book, and proclaiming the chief Mandaean prophet to be John the Baptist, who is also mentioned in the Quran. The connection with the Quranic Sabians provided them acknowledgement as People of the Book, a legal minority religion within the Muslim Empire. They appear to have flourished during the early Islamic period, as attested by the voluminous expansion of Mandaic literature and canons. Tib near Wasit is particularly noted as an important scribal centre. Yaqut al-Hamawi describes Tib as a town inhabited by Nabatean (i.e. Aramaic speaking) Sabians who consider themselves to be descendants of Seth son of Adam.

The status of the Mandaeans became an issue for the Abbasid al-Qahir Billah. To avoid further investigation by the authorities, the Mandaeans paid a bribe of 50,000 dinars and were left alone. It appears that the Mandaeans were even exempt from paying the Jizya, otherwise imposed upon protected non-Muslims.

Late Persian and Ottoman periods

Early contact with Europeans came about in the mid-16th century, when Portuguese missionaries encountered Mandaeans in Southern Iraq and controversially designated them "Christians of St. John". In the next centuries Europeans became more acquainted with the Mandaeans and their religion.

The Mandaeans suffered persecution under the Qajar rule in the 1780s. The dwindling community was threatened with complete annihilation, when a Cholera epidemic broke out in Shushtar and half of its inhabitants died. The entire Mandaean priesthood perished and Mandeism was restored due only to the efforts of few learned men such as Yahia Bihram. Another danger threatened the community in 1870, when the local governor of Shushtar massacred the Mandaeans against the will of the Shah. As a result of these events the Mandaeans retired to the more inaccessible Central Marshes of Iraq.

Modern Iraq and Iran

Following the First World War, the Mandaeans were still largely living in rural areas in the lower parts of British protected Iraq and Iran. Owing to the rise of Arab nationalism Mandaeans were arabised at an accelerated rate, especially during the 1950s and '60s. The Mandaeans were also forced to abandon their stands on the cutting of hair and forced military service, which are strictly prohibited in Mandaenism.

The 2003 Iraq War brought more troubles to the Mandaeans, as the security situation deteriorated. Many members of the Mandaean community, who were known as goldsmiths, were targeted by criminal gangs for ransoms. The rise of Islamic Extremism forced thousands to flee the country, after they were given the choice of conversion or death. It is estimated that around 90% of Iraqi Mandaeans were either killed or have fled after the American-led invasion.

The Mandaeans of Iran lived chiefly in Ahvaz, Iranian Khuzestan, but have moved as a result of the Iraq-Iran War to other cities such as Tehran, Karaj and Shiraz. The Mandaeans, who were traditionally considered as People of the Book (members of a protected religion under Islamic rule) lost this status after the Islamic Revolution. Local authorities in Iranian Islamic Republic are known to encourage harassment and persecution of the Mandaeans.

Population

Mandaeans in Iraq

The pre-Iraq War Iraqi Mandaean community was centered around Baghdad. Mandaean emigration from Iraq began during Saddam Hussein's rule, but accelerated greatly after the American-led invasion and subsequent occupation. Since the invasion Mandaeans, like other Iraqi ethno-religious minorities (such as Assyrians, Armenians, Yazidi, Roma and Shabaks), have been subjected to violence, including murders, kidnappings, rapes, evictions, and forced conversions. Mandaeans, like many other Iraqis, have also been targeted for kidnapping since many worked as goldsmiths. Mandaenism is pacifistic and forbids its adherents from carrying weapons.^[10]

Many Iraqi Mandaeans have fled the country in the face of this violence, and the Mandaean community in Iraq faces extinction.^{[11][12]} Out of the over 60,000 Mandaeans in Iraq in the early 1990s, only about 5,000 to 7,000 remain there; as of early 2007, more than 80% of Iraqi Mandaeans were refugees in Syria and Jordan as a result of the Iraq War.^[citation needed]

Iranian Mandaeans

The number of Iranian Mandaeans is a matter of dispute. In 2009, there were an estimated 5,000 and 10,000 Mandaeans in Iran, according to the Associated Press. Whereas Alarabiya has put the number of Iranian Mandaeans as high as 60,000 in 2011.

Until the Iranian Revolution, Mandaeans had mainly been concentrated in the Khuzestan province, where the community used to exist by side with the local Arab population. They had mainly been practising the profession of goldsmith, passing it from generation to generation. After the fall of the shah, its members faced increased religious discrimination, and many sought a new home in Europe and the Americas.

In Iran, the *Gozinesh* Law (passed in 1985) has the effect of prohibiting Mandaeans from fully participating in civil life. This law and other *gozinesh* provisions make access to employment, education, and a range of other areas conditional upon a rigorous ideological screening, the principal prerequisite for which is devotion to the tenets of Islam.^[13] These laws are regularly applied to discriminate against religious and ethnic groups that are not officially recognized, such as the Mandaeans, Ahl-e Haq, and Baha'i.^[14]

In 2002 the US State Department granted Iranian Mandaeans protective refugee status; since then roughly 1,000 have emigrated to the US, now residing in cities such as San Antonio, Texas. On the other hand, the Mandaean community in Iran has increased over the last decade, because of the exodus from Iraq of the main Mandaean community, which used to be 60,000–70,000 strong.

Other countries in the Middle East

Following the Iraq War, the Mandaean community dispersed throughout the Middle East. Living as refugees the Mandaeans in Jordan number 49 families, while in Syria the are as many as 1,250 families. Some Mandaeans might also have reached the Gulf countries.

Diaspora

There are small Mandaean diaspora populations in Sweden (c. 7,000), Australia (c. 3,500 as of 2006), the USA (c. 1,500), the UK (c. 1,000), and Canada.^{[15][16][17][18][19]} Sweden became a popular destination because a Mandaean community existed there before the war and the Swedish government has a liberal asylum policy toward Iraqis. Of the 7000 Mandaeans in Sweden, 1,500 live in Södertälje.^[20] The scattered nature of the Mandaean diaspora has raised fears among Mandaeans for the religion's survival. Madaeism has no provision for conversion, and the religious status of Mandaeans who marry outside the faith and their children is disputed.

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

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

of an extinction inadvertently set into motion by our nation's negligence in Iraq.

—Nathaniel Deutsch, professor of religion, Swarthmore College, October 7, 2007^[21]

Iraqi Mandaeans were given refugee status by the US State Department in 2007. Since then around 1200 have entered the US. Many Mandaeans have begun returning to Iraq during the past two years, as the circumstances in Iraq have improved.^[citation needed]

Language

The Mandaic language is an eastern dialect of Aramaic, although its alphabet is unique. It has mainly survived as a liturgical language.^[citation needed]

References

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External links

- [Mandaeunion.org](http://www.mandaeunion.org/) (<http://www.mandaeunion.org/>) – Mandaean Associations Union
- [Mandaic.org](http://www.mandaic.org/) (<http://www.mandaic.org/>) – resources of the language of the Mandaeans.
- [Mandaean Scriptures and Fragments](http://www.gnosis.org/library/mand.htm) (<http://www.gnosis.org/library/mand.htm>)

Harran

Harran	
	
 <p style="text-align: center;">Location of Harran in Turkey</p>	
Coordinates: 36°52′39″N 39°02′02″E ^[1] Coordinates: 36°52′39″N 39°02′02″E ^[1]	
Country	 Turkey
Region	Southeastern Anatolia
Province	Şanlıurfa
Area ^[2]	
• District	1,053.78 km ² (406.87 sq mi)
Population (2012) ^[3]	
• Urban	7,375
• District	72,939
• District Density	69/km ² (180/sq mi)
Time zone	EET (UTC+2)
• Summer (DST)	EEST (UTC+3)
Postal code	63xxx
Area code(s)	+ (90)414
Website	Şanlıurfa Province Administrative District of Akçakale ^[4]

Harran (Turkish: *Harran*, Ottoman Turkish: حران,^[5] Kurdish: *Herran*)^[citation needed] was a major ancient city in Upper Mesopotamia whose site is near the modern village of Altınbaşak, Turkey, 24 miles (44 kilometers) southeast of Şanlıurfa. The location is in a district of Şanlıurfa Province that is also named "Harran".

A few kilometers from the village of Altınbaşak are the archaeological remains of ancient Harran, a major commercial, cultural, and religious center first inhabited in the Early Bronze Age III (3rd millennium BCE) period. It was known as **Ḫarrānu** in the Assyrian period; possibly *Ḫaran* (𐤆𐤓𐤏) in the Hebrew Bible; **Carrhae** (*Κάρραι* in Greek) under the Roman and Byzantine empires; **Hellenopolis** (Ἑλληνόπολις 'Greek city') in the Early Christian period; and **Ḫarrān** (حران) in the Islamic period.^{[6][7]}

History

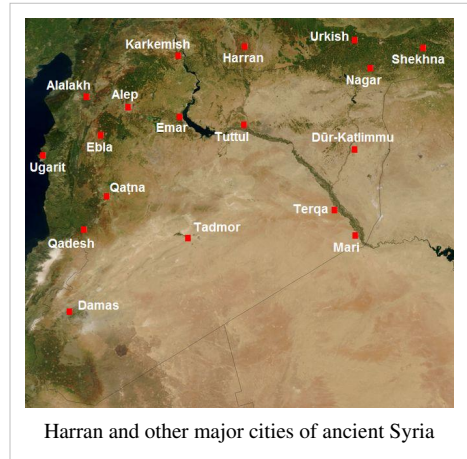
The earliest records of Harran come from the Ebla tablets (c. 2300 BCE). From these, it is known that an early king or mayor of Harran had married an Eblaite princess, Zugalum, who then became "queen of Harran", and whose name appears in a number of documents. It appears that Harran remained a part of the regional Eblaite kingdom for some time thereafter.

Royal letters from the city of Mari on the middle of the Euphrates, have confirmed that the area around the Balikh river remained occupied in c. the 19th century BCE. A confederation of semi-nomadic tribes was especially active around the region near Harran at that time.^[8]

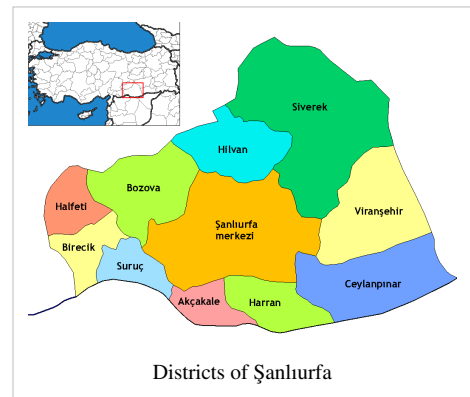
Merchant outpost

By the 19th century BCE, Harran was established as a merchant outpost due to its ideal location. The community, well established before then, was situated along a trade route between the Mediterranean and the plains of the middle Tigris.^[9] It lay directly on the road from Antioch eastward to Nisibis and Ninevah. The Tigris could be followed down to the delta to Babylon. The 4th-century Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (325/330–after 391) said, "From there (Harran) two different royal highways lead to Persia: the one on the left through Adiabene and over the Tigris; the one on the right, through Assyria and across the Euphrates."^[10] Not only did Harran have easy access to both the Assyrian and Babylonian roads, but also to north road to the Euphrates that provided easy access to Malatyah and Asia Minor.

According to Roman authors such as Pliny the Elder, even through the classical period, Harran maintained an important position in the economic life of Northern Mesopotamia.^[11]



Harran and other major cities of ancient Syria



Districts of Şanlıurfa

Assyrian period

In its prime Harran was a major Assyrian city which controlled the point where the road from Damascus joins the highway between Nineveh and Carchemish. This location gave Harran strategic value from an early date. Because Harran had an abundance of goods that passed through its region, it became a target for raids. In the 18th century, Assyrian king Shamshi-Adad I (1813 – 1781 BCE) launched an expedition to secure the Harranian trade route.

Hittite period

After the Suppiluliuma I–Shattiwaza treaty (14th century BCE) between the Hittite Empire and Mitanni, Harran was burned by a Hittite army under Piyashshili in the course of the conquest of Mitanni.

Assyrian period

In the 13th century BCE, Assyrian king Adad-Nirari I reported that he conquered the "fortress of Kharani" and annexed it as a province.^[12] It is frequently mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions as early as the time of Tiglath-Pileser I, about 1100 BCE, under the name Harranu (Akkadian *harrānu*, "road, path; campaign, journey"). Tiglath-Pileser had a fortress there, and mentioned that he was pleased with the abundance of elephants in the region.

10th-century BCE inscriptions reveal that Harran had some privileges of fiscal exemption and freedom from certain forms of military obligations. It had even been termed as the "free city of Harran". However, in 763 BCE, it was sacked by a Harranian rebellion against Assyrian control that resulted in the loss of those privileges. Not until Sargon II restored order, in the late 8th century BCE, were those privileges restored.^[13]

Median period

During the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Harran became the stronghold of its last king, Ashur-uballit II, who had retreated from Nineveh when it was sacked by Nabopolassar of Babylon and his Median allies in 612 BC. Harran was besieged and conquered by Nabopolassar and Cyaxares in 610 BC. It was briefly retaken by Ashur-uballit II and his Egyptian allies in 609 BC before it definitely fell to the Medes and Babylonians.^[14] The last king of the Neo-Babylonian period, Nabonidus, also originated from Harran as substantiated by evidence from the temple of stele of his mother Adad-Guppi, who is suspected by some to be of Assyrian origin. The city became a bastion for the worship of the moon god during the rule of Nabonidus from 555-536 BC, much to the consternation of the city of Babylon in the south where Marduk remained the primary deity.

Persian period

Harran became part of the Median Empire after the fall of Assyria, and subsequently passed to the Persian Achaemenid dynasty in the 6th century BCE. It became part of the Persian province of **Athura**, the Persian word for Assyria. The city remained in Persian hands until 331 BCE, when the soldiers of the Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great entered the city.

Seleucid period

After the death of Alexander on June 11, 323 BCE, the city was contested by his successors: Perdikkas, Antigonus Monophthalmus, and Eumenes visited the city, but eventually it became part of the realm of Seleucus I Nicator, of the Seleucid Empire, and capital of a province called Osrhoene (the Greek rendering of the old name Urhai). For one and a half centuries the town flourished, and became independent when the Parthian dynasty of Persia occupied Babylonia. The Parthian and Seleucid kings were both happy with a buffer state, and the dynasty of the Arabian Abgarides, technically a vassal of the Parthian "king of kings", was to rule Osrhoene for centuries. The main language spoken in Osrhoene was Aramaic, and the majority of people were Christian Assyrians.

Classical period

In Roman times, Harran was known as Carrhae, and was the location of the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE, in which the Parthians, commanded by general Surena, defeated a large Roman army under the command of Crassus, who was killed.

Centuries later, the emperor Caracalla was murdered here at the instigation of Macrinus (217). The emperor Galerius was defeated nearby by the Parthians' successors, the Sassanid dynasty of Persia, in 296 CE. The city remained under Persian control until the fall of the Sassanids to the Arabs in 651 CE.

Early Islamic Harran

At the beginning of the Islamic period Harran was located in the land of the Mudar tribe (Diyar Mudar), the western part of northern Mesopotamia (Jazira). Along with ar-Ruha' (Şanlıurfa) and Ar-Raqqah it was one of the main cities in the region. During the reign of the Umayyad caliph Marwan II Harran became the seat of the caliphal government of the Islamic empire stretching from Spain to Central Asia.

It was allegedly the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun who, while passing through Harran on his way to a campaign against the Byzantine Empire, forced the Harranians to convert to one of the "religions of the book", meaning Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. The pagan people of Harran identified themselves with the Sabians in order to fall under the protection of Islam. Aramaean and Assyrian Christians remained Christian. Sabians were mentioned in the Qur'an, but those were a group of Mandeans (a Gnostic sect) living in southern Mesopotamia. The relationship of the Harranian Sabians to the ones mentioned in the Qur'an is a matter of dispute. The Harranians may have identified themselves as Sabians in order to retain their religious beliefs.

During the late 8th and 9th centuries Harran was a centre for translating works of astronomy, philosophy, natural sciences, and medicine from Greek to Syriac by Assyrians, and thence to Arabic, bringing the knowledge of the classical world to the emerging Arabic-speaking civilization in the south. Baghdad came to this work later than Harran. Many important scholars of natural science, astronomy, and medicine originate from Harran; they were non-Arab and non-Islamic ethnic Assyrians, including possibly the alchemist Jābir ibn Hayyān.



Ruins of the University at Harran. It was one of the main Ayyubid buildings of the city, built in the classical revival style.

The end of the Mandeans

In 1032 or 1033 the temple of the Sabians was destroyed and the urban community extinguished by an uprising of the rural 'Alid-Shiite population and impoverished Muslim militias. In 1059–60 the temple was rebuilt into a fortified residence of the Numayrids, an Arab tribe assuming power in the Diyar Mudar (western Jazira) during the 11th century. The Zangid ruler Nur al-Din Mahmud transformed the residence into a strong fortress.

The Crusades

During the Crusades, on May 7, 1104, a decisive battle was fought in the Balikh River valley, commonly known as the Battle of Harran. However, according to Matthew of Edessa the actual location of the battle lies two days away from Harran. Albert of Aachen and Fulcher of Chartres locate the battleground in the plain opposite to the city of ar-Raqqah. During the battle, Baldwin of Bourcq, Count of Edessa, was captured by troops of the Great Seljuq Empire. After his release Baldwin became King of Jerusalem.

At the end of 12th century Harran served together with ar-Raqqah as a residence of Kurdish Ayyubid princes. The Ayyubid ruler of the Jazira, Al-Adil I, again strengthened the fortifications of the castle. In the 1260s the city was completely destroyed and abandoned during the Mongol invasions of Syria. The father of the famous Hanbalite scholar Ibn Taymiyyah was a refugee from Harran, settling in Damascus. The 13th-century Arab historian Abu al-Fida describes the city as being in ruins.

Modern Harran

Harran is famous for its traditional 'beehive' adobe houses, constructed entirely without wood. The design of these makes them cool inside (essential in this part of the world) and is thought to have been unchanged for at least 3,000 years. Some were still in use as dwellings until the 1980s. However, those remaining today are strictly tourist exhibits, while most of Harran's population lives in a newly built small village about 2 kilometres away from the main site.

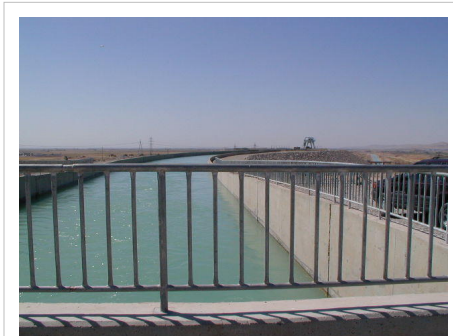
At the historical site the ruins of the city walls and fortifications are still in place, with one city gate standing, along with some other structures. Excavations of a nearby 4th-century BC burial mound continue under archaeologist Dr Nurettin Yardımcı.

The new village is poor and life is hard in the hot weather on this plain. The people here are now ethnic Arabs and live by long-established traditions. It is believed that these Arabs were settled here during the 18th century by the Ottoman Empire. The women of the village are tattooed and dressed in traditional Bedouin clothes. The Assyrians who once occupied the area for thousands of years have moved to other areas, although there are some Assyrian villages in the general area.

By the late 1980s the large plain of Harran had fallen into disuse as the streams of Cüllab and Deysan, its original water-supply had dried up. But the plain is irrigated by the recent Southeastern Anatolia Project and is becoming green again. Cotton and rice can now be grown.



Traditional mud brick "beehive" houses in the village of Harran, Turkey



Harran main channel, built as a part of GAP Project

Religion

The city was the chief home of the Mesopotamian moon god Sin, under the Assyrians and Neo-Babylonians/Chaldeans and even into Roman times.

According to an early Arabic work known as *Kitab al-Magall* or the *Book of Rolls* (part of Clementine literature), Harran was one of the cities built by Nimrod, when Peleg was 50 years old. The Syriac *Cave of Treasures* (c. 350) contains a similar account of Nimrod's building Harran and the other cities, but places the event when Reu was 50 years old. The *Cave of Treasures* adds an ancient legend that not long thereafter, Tammuz was pursued to Harran by his wife's lover, B'elshemin, and that he (Tammuz) met his fate there when the city was then burnt.

The pagan residents of Harran also maintained the tradition well into the 10th century AD, of being the site of Tammuz' death, and would conduct elaborate mourning rituals for him each year, in the month bearing his name.

However, the Islamic historian Al-Masudi in his *Meadows of Gold* (c. 950), as well as the Christian historian Bar Hebraeus (13th century), both recounted a legend that Harran had been built by Cainan (the father of Abraham's ancestor Shelah in some accounts), and had been named for another son of Cainan called Harran.

Sin's temple was rebuilt by several kings, among them the Assyrian Assur-bani-pal (7th century BCE) and the Neo-Babylonian Nabonidus (6th century BCE).^{[15][16]} Herodian (iv. 13, 7) mentions the town as possessing in his day a temple of the moon.

Harran was a centre of Assyrian Christianity from early on, and was the first place where purpose-built churches were constructed openly. However, although a bishop resided in the city, many people of Harran retained their ancient pagan faith during the Christian period, and ancient Mesopotamian/Assyrian gods such as Sin and Ashur were still worshipped for a time. In addition the Mandaean religion, a form of Gnosticism, was born in Harran.

Harran in scriptures

Premedieval Harran has been closely associated with the biblical place Haran (Hebrew: חָרָן, transliterated: Charan). Very little is known about the premedieval levels of Harran^[17] and even less for the patriarchal times. (Lloyd and Brice)^[18] Scholars have yet to see what physical evidence will link this village of Harran to the biblical site where Abram and his family encamped as mentioned in Genesis 11:31,32; 12:4,5^[19]

Biblical Haran was where Terah, his son Abram (Abraham), his grandson Lot, and Abram's wife Sarai settled while in route to Canaan, coming from Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 11:26–32). The region of this Haran is referred to variously as *Paddan Aram* and *Aram Naharaim*. Genesis 27:43 makes Haran the home of Laban and connects it with Isaac and Jacob: it was the home of Isaac's wife Rebekah, and their son Jacob spent twenty years in Haran working for his uncle Laban (cf. Genesis 31:38&41). The place-name should not be confused with the name of Haran (Hebrew: חָרָן), Abraham's brother and Lot's father — the two names are spelled differently in the original Hebrew. Islamic tradition does link Harran to *Aran*, the brother of Abraham.

Prior to Sennacherib's reign (704–681 BCE), Harran rebelled from the Assyrians, who reconquered the city (see 2 Kings 19:12 and Isaiah 37:12) and deprived it of many privileges – which King Sargon II later restored.

Archaeology

T. E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia") surveyed the ancient Harran site. Decades later, in 1950, Seton Lloyd conducted a three-week archaeological survey there.^[20] An Anglo–Turkish excavation was begun in 1951, ending in 1956 with the death of D. S. Rice.^[21]

“The grand Mosque of Harran is the oldest mosque built in Anatolia as a part of the Islamic architecture. Also known as the Paradise Mosque, this monument was built by the last Ummayyad caliph Mervan II between the years 744 -750. The entire plan of the mosque which has dimensions of 104x107 m, along with its entrances, was unearthed during the excavations led by Dr Nurettin Yardimer since 1983. The excavations are currently being carried out also outside the northern and western gates. The grand Mosque, which has remained standing up until today, with its 33.30 m tall minaret, fountain, mihrab, and eastern wall, has gone through several restoration processes”.^[22]



Abraham departs out of Haran by Francesco Bassano

Notables

- Al-Battani, Sabian astronomer and mathematician
- Belshazzar, Nabonidus's son and regent
- Hammad al-Harrani, Islamic scholar
- Ibn Taymiyyah, Islamic scholar
- Nabonidus, the last Neo-Babylonian king

Notes

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External links

- Pictures of the city (<http://www.pbase.com/dosseman/harran>)
 - More pictures (<http://www.livius.org/ha-hd/harran/harran.html>)
 - Harran Guide and Photo Album (<http://www.anatolia.luwo.be/Harran.htm>)
 - Livius.org: Harran (Carrhae) (<http://www.livius.org/ha-hd/harran/harran.html>)
 - A look at the inside of a Harran beehive house (<http://turkishtravelblog.com/the-beehive-houses-of-harran-turkey/>)
-

Fall of Harran

Fall of Harran	
Date	608 BC
Location	Harran
Result	Medo-Babylonian victory
Belligerents	
Babylonians, Medians	Assyria
Commanders and leaders	
Nabopolassar, Cyaxares	Ashur-uballit II
Strength	
Unknown	Unknown
Casualties and losses	
Unknown	Unknown

The **Fall of Harran** refers to the Babylonian siege and capture of the Assyrian city of Harran in 608 BC.

Background

The Assyrians, from the year 639 BCE, had been suffering from a decline in their power, culminating in Neo-Babylonian and Median invasions of their lands. The city of Arrapha fell in 615 BCE, followed by Assur in 614 BCE, and finally the famed Nineveh, the newest capital of Assyria, in 612 BCE. Despite the brutal massacres that followed, the Assyrians survived as a political entity and escaped to Harran under their new king, Ashur-uballit II. Establishing Harran as a capital for the Assyrians caught the attention of the Babylonian King Nabopolassar and Median King Cyaxares, who were determined to destroy forever the threat of Assyrian resurgence.

Siege

Assyrian annals record no more after 610 BC - the presumed date of the siege. The siege lasted for another two years before the city finally fell in 608 BC. Not much is known of the siege - it is presumed that Nabopolassar killed Ashur-uballit II.

Aftermath

Despite yet another reverse, the Assyrians did not give up; remnants of the Assyrian army met up with the Egyptian forces that had won at Megiddo. In 605 BC, the Babylonians were again successful, as they defeated the Assyrians and Egyptians at Carchemish, ending Assyria's independence.

References

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