An Ancient Bond of Geography and Fate: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Relationship Between the Jewish and Yazidi Peoples

Introduction: Defining the "Special Relationship"

The question of whether a "special relationship" exists between the Jewish and Yazidi peoples invites an inquiry that transcends simple comparisons of doctrine or historical anecdotes. It probes the depths of shared geography, parallel histories, and a profound, often tragic, resonance in their collective experiences as ancient minorities of the Middle East. The connection is not one of direct theological or ethnic descent, a fact that must be established at the outset. Rather, it is a complex and nuanced tapestry woven from the threads of millennia of coexistence in the same Mesopotamian cradle, the development of uniquely resilient ethno-religious identities in the face of immense external pressure, the syncretic echoes of shared religious concepts, a deeply resonant history of persecution, and a modern solidarity forged in the crucible of genocide. This report will argue that the "special relationship" between Jews and Yazidis is most accurately understood as a bond of *shared fate and parallel experience* rather than one of shared identity. It is a connection defined by their analogous development as endogamous, non-proselytizing peoples who have preserved ancient traditions against overwhelming odds.

To fully explore this relationship, this report will undertake a multi-disciplinary analysis, integrating history, theology, genetics, and political science. It will begin by establishing the foundational context of their coexistence in ancient Mesopotamia, the very ground from which any relationship grew. It will then proceed to a comparative analysis of their theological and mythological systems, carefully delineating parallels from divergences to understand the nature of the "Judaic elements" within Yazidism. The investigation will then turn to the most powerful and somber vector of their connection: a shared history of persecution, culminating in the genocides of the 20th and 21st centuries, which have created a modern bond of empathy and perceived moral responsibility. Following this, the report will examine the scientific evidence for a deep ancestral connection, drawing inferences from genetic studies of both populations. Finally, it will analyze the contemporary political and humanitarian dimensions of the relationship, particularly in the aftermath of the 2014 ISIS genocide against the Yazidis, which has activated and redefined their bond in the modern era. Through this

comprehensive examination, a clear and multifaceted picture of this unique and enduring relationship will emerge.

Part I: Foundations in a Shared Mesopotamian Cradle

The relationship between the Jewish and Yazidi peoples is rooted in the soil of Mesopotamia. For millennia, before the rise of modern states and the drawing of rigid borders, their ancestors inhabited the same geographical and cultural space. This shared cradle is the essential precondition for all subsequent interactions, parallels, and the development of their analogous survival strategies. The syncretic nature of Yazidism is, in itself, a testament to its birth within a religiously pluralistic environment where Jewish communities were a long-established and integral feature.

Ancient Peoples of Kurdistan and Mesopotamia

The historical presence of both Jews and the proto-Yazidi peoples in the region of Kurdistan—a geographical area spanning parts of modern Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran—is ancient and well-documented.[1] The Kurdistani Jewish communities, a branch of Mizrahi Jewry, trace their lineage in the region back more than 2,500 years, to the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles in the 6th century BCE.[2] Biblical accounts reference the settlement of exiled Israelites in "Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes," locations situated within the Kurdish regions.[4] This ancient presence is corroborated by later historical accounts. The 12th-century Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela reported finding over 100 Jewish settlements in Kurdistan, including a community of 25,000 in Amadiya alone, who spoke Aramaic and included many distinguished Torah scholars.[4] For centuries, these communities thrived, maintaining a distinct identity as Mizrahi Jews while living in close proximity to their Kurdish neighbors and often adopting their language.[2] They were an indelible part of the Mesopotamian landscape.

Concurrently, the mountainous regions of Kurdistan were home to a variety of indigenous, pre-Islamic faiths. Yazidism is understood by scholars to have its deepest roots in a pre-Zoroastrian Iranic religious tradition that was dominant among western Iranic peoples.[1] This means that the cultural and religious ancestors of the Yazidis were neighbors to the Jewish communities of Kurdistan for centuries, if not millennia, before Yazidism crystallized into its currently recognized form in the 12th century CE.[1] The two groups did not merely interact; they developed side-by-side within the same cultural ecosystem. This long-term cohabitation created a shared pool of regional narratives, symbols, and concepts. Therefore, any parallels found between the two faiths are not necessarily evidence of one borrowing from the other, but may reflect both drawing from a common, more ancient Mesopotamian source. Early Judaism itself was profoundly influenced by the cultures of Mesopotamia, absorbing and reinterpreting elements of Babylonian creation myths, flood narratives, and

legal codes.[10] Consequently, a shared feature between Yazidism and Judaism might not be a linear case of influence, but of two distinct groups independently or interdependently adapting elements from a common cultural heritage. This reframes their connection from one of direct lineage to one of a shared, ancient patrimony.

The Matrix of Syncretism: Yazidi Origins and Regional Influences

Yazidism is a quintessentially syncretic faith, a fact that speaks directly to its origins in the religious melting pot of northern Mesopotamia.[8] Scholarly analysis consistently identifies within Yazidism a complex blend of elements from ancient Iranian religions, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity, and Sufi Islam.[8] The formal emergence of the Yazidi community as a distinct entity is traced to the 12th century with the arrival of Sheikh ʿAdī ibn Musāfir in the valley of Lālish, north of Mosul.[9] Sheikh ʿAdī, a Sufi mystic of Umayyad descent, established a religious order whose teachings, though orthodox in his time, were soon blended by his followers with the pre-existing local traditions of the Kurdish peoples he encountered.[1] The result was a unique religious system that employs the terminology and symbols of Islamic Sufism while preserving a core of non-Islamic mythology, cosmology, and ritual.[1]

Crucially, numerous sources explicitly identify Judaism as one of the contributing streams to this syncretic blend.[8] The presence of these "elements of Judaism" constitutes a primary and undeniable vector of connection between the two peoples. This historical reality sets the stage for a more detailed theological comparison, but its significance is foundational. The very structure of Yazidism is a product of its interaction with neighboring faiths, among which Judaism was a long-standing and significant presence.

This shared geography imposed similar existential challenges on both groups, leading to the development of remarkably parallel social strategies for survival. Both Yazidism and Judaism evolved as highly endogamous, non-proselytizing ethno-religions. Yazidi mythology posits a separate creation for their people, descending from Adam but not Eve, a belief that theologically grounds their strict prohibition on marriage outside the community.[9] This practice of seeking segregation from surrounding peoples is a core tenet of their identity.[9] Similarly, the Kurdistani Jews lived as closed ethnic communities, maintaining a firm sense of separate identity from their Kurdish neighbors even while adopting aspects of their culture, such as language.[2] This development of insular, endogamous communities was not a coincidence but a convergent evolutionary response to the pressures of being a small, distinct minority in the complex and often hostile environment of the Middle East. Their shared geography necessitated the development of parallel social structures to preserve their unique religious and cultural identities against the constant threat of assimilation or annihilation.

Part II: A Comparative Theology and Mythology

While the historical and geographical proximity of Jews and Yazidis establishes the context for their relationship, a deeper understanding requires a comparative analysis of their respective theologies and mythologies. Yazidism is frequently described as containing "elements of Judaism," but the nature of these elements is complex, often manifesting as structural analogies and reinterpretations of shared figures rather than direct borrowing. The comparison reveals a fascinating dynamic of shared concepts and profound divergences, with the most significant theological difference ironically becoming the source of a shared sociological fate.

Monotheism, Angels, and the Divine Heptad

At its core, Yazidism is a monotheistic religion, a fundamental point of convergence with Judaism.[16] Yazidis believe in one supreme God, whom they refer to by names such as *Xwedê*, *Êzdan*, or *Pedsha* ('King').[8] However, a key theological distinction emerges immediately. The Yazidi God is largely understood as a *deus otiosus*, a remote creator who, after bringing the world into being, ceased direct involvement and entrusted its governance to a council of seven holy beings, or angels.[9] This contrasts sharply with the God of the Hebrew Bible, who remains actively and intimately involved in the history and destiny of the world and its peoples.

The administration of the world in Yazidi cosmology is carried out by the *Heft Sirr* ("the Seven Mysteries"), a heptad of angels created by God from his own light.[8] The preeminent figure among these is Tawûsî Melek, the Peacock Angel, who acts as the leader of the angels and the active ruler of the world.[9] While Jewish angelology also features a hierarchy of angels, including prominent archangels like Michael and Gabriel, their role is strictly that of divine messengers and servants. They execute God's will but possess no autonomous authority over creation. Some of the names for the Yazidi angels, such as Cibrayîl (Gabriel), Mîkayîl (Michael), and Ezrayîl (Azrael), clearly echo their Semitic and Abrahamic counterparts, indicating a shared cultural vocabulary.[8] However, their function within the Yazidi divine structure is unique. Yazidi belief incorporates a divine triad, consisting of the remote God, his primary emanation Tawûsî Melek, and the deified saint Sheikh 'Adî.[8] This structure, with its blurring of identities between the three hypostases, represents a significant departure from the strict, unitarian monotheism of Judaism.

Creation, Adam, and the Nature of Humanity

Both Yazidism and Judaism share the figure of Adam as the primordial man, but their creation narratives diverge in ways that are fundamental to their respective self-conceptions. The Yazidi origin myth provides a powerful theological foundation for their identity as a people apart. According to this tradition, Yazidis were created separately from the rest of humankind.

In one prominent version of the myth, Adam and Eve disputed over who was the true progenitor of humanity. They each placed their seed in a sealed jar; after nine months, Eve's jar contained only insects, while Adam's jar produced a beautiful male and female child, from whom the Yazidis descend.[21] Other versions state that the Yazidis descend from a son born of Adam's essence or spittle alone.[21] This belief that Yazidis are descended solely from Adam, and not from Eve, underpins their practice of strict endogamy and their self-perception as a distinct and noble people, a unique race combining the terrestrial and the heavenly.[9]

This narrative stands in stark contrast to the account in Genesis, where all of humanity descends from the union of Adam and Eve. Yet, the Yazidi myth serves a function that is structurally analogous to Jewish concepts of chosenness. Both traditions use a unique origin story to theologically ground their practice of endogamy and preserve their identity as a people with a special status. They are theological frameworks designed to maintain group cohesion and ensure survival as a minority.

The Yazidi reinterpretation of the story of the Garden of Eden is also telling. In this version, it is Tawûsî Melek who, seeing that Adam was created to be flawed and mortal, encourages him to eat the forbidden wheat, leading to his expulsion from paradise but also enabling human reproduction.[13] This act is not one of rebellion against God, but of fulfilling a necessary step in the divine plan for humanity. This reframing of a core Abrahamic narrative demonstrates Yazidism's tendency to absorb and creatively transform, rather than simply borrow, elements from the surrounding religious landscape.

Shared Rituals, Prohibitions, and Practices

Several Yazidi practices bear a resemblance to Jewish rituals, though it is often difficult to determine whether this represents direct influence or convergent development within a shared Middle Eastern religious grammar.

- **Dietary Laws:** Both traditions maintain food taboos. While Judaism has the complex laws of *kashrut*, Yazidis have their own specific prohibitions, most famously against eating lettuce, but also other foods like pumpkin and certain fish.[9]
- **Fasting:** Yazidis are obligated to fast for three days in December, culminating in a feast.[18] This practice is analogous to Jewish fast days, such as the 25-hour fast of Yom Kippur, which also concludes a period of repentance.
- **Pilgrimage:** The Yazidi tradition holds that every believer should, if possible, make a pilgrimage to the holy shrine of Sheikh 'Adī in Lālish, Iraq, at least once in their lifetime.[18] This is functionally parallel to the historical Jewish obligation of pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem during major festivals.
- **Circumcision:** The practice of circumcising male children is widespread among Yazidis, though it is not considered compulsory or a covenantal requirement as it is in Judaism.[20] This likely reflects a broader regional custom adopted from their Muslim and Jewish neighbors.

Prophets, Saints, and Sacred Texts

Yazidism displays a remarkable openness to the holy figures of other faiths, recognizing the sanctity of the Bible and the Qur'an.[27] One tradition even claims that Yazidis acknowledge 124,000 prophets, a number that includes figures like Adam and Jesus.[20] This syncretic reverence extended to shared holy sites. The tomb of the prophet Jonah (known as Yunus to Muslims) near Mosul, a site of pilgrimage for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, was also venerated by Yazidis before its destruction by ISIS in 2014.[28]

However, this reverence for external figures is secondary to the central importance of their own saints, particularly Sheikh 'Adī, who is not merely a prophet but is considered a divine hypostasis, an earthly manifestation of Tawûsî Melek.[8] This deification of a historical figure is a significant departure from Jewish tradition.

Perhaps the most critical distinction lies in the role of scripture. Judaism is quintessentially a "People of the Book," with its identity and law centered on the written Torah, even as it is complemented by a vast oral tradition codified in the Talmud. Yazidism, in contrast, is primarily a religion of oral tradition.[29] Its sacred lore, myths, and history are preserved and transmitted through a corpus of sacred hymns, known as
Qewls, by a special hereditary caste of reciters, the *Qewals*.[1] The two books often cited as Yazidi scripture, the
Kitāb al-jilwah ("Book of Revelation") and the *Maṣḥafrash* ("Black Book"), are widely believed by scholars to be 19th-century forgeries passed off as ancient texts, although their content may indeed reflect authentic oral traditions.[9] This fundamental difference in the mode of transmission shapes every aspect of religious life, authority, and continuity.

The most profound connection that emerges from this theological comparison is deeply paradoxical. The unique Yazidi narrative of Tawûsî Melek—his refusal to bow to Adam out of supreme loyalty to God alone, his subsequent repentance, and his redemption to become the ruler of the world—is a story of unwavering devotion and divine mercy.[17] Yet it is this very doctrine, theologically opposite to the Judeo-Christian concept of an eternally damned Satan, that has led outsiders to misinterpret their faith. By mapping the Yazidi narrative onto their own story of a fallen angel, Christians and Muslims have for centuries branded the Yazidis with the libel of "devil worship".[9] This specific theological accusation has been the primary justification for a history of brutal persecution and genocidal massacres, culminating in the ISIS campaign of 2014.[1] Thus, a key theological
difference from Judaism has placed the Yazidis in a position of extreme vulnerability that resonates deeply with the history of Jewish persecution, which was also frequently fueled by theological libels such as deicide. The connection is forged not in the content of the belief itself, but in the devastating consequence of holding it in a hostile world.

Concept	Yazidism	Judaism	Analysis of Connection
Supreme Being	One transcendent,	One transcendent,	Shared monotheistic

	remote Creator (Xwedê/Ezid).[8]	involved Creator (YHWH).	foundation, but differing concepts of divine immanence and involvement post-creation.
Intermediaries	Seven Holy Angels (Heft Sirr), led by Tawûsî Melek, who rules the world as God's emanation.[8]	Angels as divine messengers without autonomous power; direct relationship between God and humanity is central.	Structural parallel in angelology, but a fundamental theological divergence in the power and status of the chief angel, bordering on a Binitarian/Trinitarian concept in Yazidism.[8]
Creation Myth	God creates from a primordial pearl; Yazidis descend from Adam's seed alone, not Eve's.[9]	God creates by divine fiat ("Let there be light"); all humanity descends from Adam and Eve.	Both share the figure of Adam as progenitor, but the Yazidi myth creates a separate, exclusive lineage, a unique form of "chosenness" that underpins their endogamy.
Theodicy/Evil	No concept of a primordial, independent evil force or Devil. Tawûsî Melek's "fall" was an act of supreme loyalty to God, and he was redeemed.[17]	Concept of temptation (*Yetzer HaRa*) and a tempter figure (Satan), but ultimate responsibility lies with humanity. No dualism.	Profound theological divergence. The Yazidi narrative of a redeemed angel is the primary source of external misinterpretation and persecution, creating a paradoxical link through shared suffering.
Key Figures	Sheikh 'Adī, Sultan Ezid, and Tawûsî Melek form a divine triad.[8]	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses are foundational patriarchs and prophets.	Yazidism recognizes some Abrahamic prophets like Jesus [20] and reveres sites like Jonah's tomb [28], but its central divine figures are entirely distinct.
Sacred Texts	Primarily an oral	Fundamentally a	Both have rich oral

	tradition of sacred hymns (Qewls).[1] Written texts (Black Book, Book of Revelation) are likely 19th-century compilations of oral lore.[9]	religion of a revealed written text (Torah) complemented by a vast, codified Oral Law (Talmud).	traditions, but their relationship to written scripture is fundamentally different, impacting religious authority and transmission.
Core Practices	Pilgrimage to Lalish, three-day fast, dietary taboos (e.g., lettuce), optional circumcision.[18]	Covenantal circumcision, dietary laws (Kashrut), multiple fast days, historical pilgrimage to Jerusalem.	Analogous categories of practice (pilgrimage, fasting, diet) exist, likely due to the shared religious grammar of the Middle East, but the specific forms and theological justifications differ significantly.

Part III: A Shared Fate of Persecution and Resilience

The most visceral and potent connection between the Jewish and Yazidi peoples is not found in theology or myth, but is etched into their histories by centuries of violence and persecution. Both groups have navigated the treacherous landscape of the Middle East as vulnerable minorities, developing a profound "consciousness of persecution" that is central to their respective identities.[36] While their legal statuses and specific experiences have differed, their parallel trajectories of suffering, demonization, and survival—culminating in the genocides of the modern era—have forged a bond of shared fate that is arguably the strongest element of their "special relationship."

Unequal Status, Shared Vulnerability: Minorities in the Ottoman Milieu

The Ottoman Empire, which ruled over the heartlands of both Jewish and Yazidi communities for centuries, governed its diverse non-Muslim subjects through the *millet* system. This system granted a degree of legal autonomy and protection to recognized religious communities, designated as *Ahl al-Kitab*, or "People of the Book".[37] Jewish communities, along with various Christian denominations, were granted this status. As *dhimmi*, they were afforded protection of life, property, and religious practice in exchange for paying a special tax (*jizya*) and accepting a socially and legally subordinate position to Muslims.[39]

The Yazidis, however, were catastrophically excluded from this framework. Their faith, with its pre-Islamic roots and unique cosmology, was not recognized as belonging to the "People of the Book".[37] Instead, Ottoman authorities and surrounding Muslim populations often viewed them as pagans or, more dangerously, as apostates (*mürted*) from Islam.[12] This lack of legal status left them utterly exposed. As the 20th-century British administrator C.J. Edmonds observed, Yazidis "tended to be regarded... as apostates and were thus exposed to the danger that persons in authority, high and low... might think it not only legitimate but even meritorious to maltreat them".[12] This critical legal distinction created divergent historical paths. While Jewish communities certainly faced discrimination, restrictions, and periodic outbursts of violence, the Yazidis endured a more constant and legally sanctioned existential threat. For them, campaigns of forced conversion and massacre were not just tolerated by the system but were at times official policy.[18] Their shared suffering as minorities was real, but their legal relationship with the dominant power structure was not parallel, rendering the Yazidis uniquely and perpetually vulnerable.

A History of Massacres: The "74 Genocides"

The collective memory of the Yazidi people is scarred by a long and brutal history of violence, which they traditionally recount as 73 *fermans*—a term they use for decrees of annihilation or genocidal massacres—that occurred prior to the 74th genocide perpetrated by ISIS in 2014.[18] This history of repeated attempts to exterminate them is a foundational element of their identity. Historical records corroborate this narrative of relentless persecution. Major expeditions against the Yazidis are recorded as early as 1246, when their leader Sheikh Hassan ibn Adi was executed, and 1414, when a coalition of Sunni Kurdish tribes sacked their holy site of Lalish.[1] The 18th and 19th centuries were particularly devastating, as a series of Ottoman military campaigns and attacks by local Kurdish chieftains dramatically reduced Yazidi numbers and influence.[12] The 1832 massacre by the Soran Emir, Muhammad Pasha of Rawanduz, and the brutal 1892 campaign of forced conversion and conscription under Ottoman General 'Umar Wehbi Pasha are seared into Yazidi oral tradition.[12] This unbroken chain of violence fostered the deep "consciousness of persecution" that so closely mirrors the role of pogroms, expulsions, and massacres in shaping Jewish historical identity.[36]

Echoes of the Unspeakable: The Genocides of the 20th and 21st Centuries

The era of modern genocide further solidified this bond of shared fate. During the final years of the Ottoman Empire, the genocidal campaigns of 1915-1918, which primarily targeted the Armenian population, also engulfed other non-Muslim groups. Assyrians and Yazidis were systematically massacred alongside the Armenians. While figures are difficult to verify, some

estimates claim that as many as 500,000 Yazidis were slaughtered by Ottoman troops and allied irregular forces during this period.[41] In this dark chapter, a bond of solidarity was forged in resistance. Yazidi tribes are frequently remembered in Armenian accounts for making common cause with them, sheltering Armenian refugees in their mountain strongholds like Sinjar and fighting defensive campaigns against their common enemy.[12]

This history provides the grim backdrop to the 21st-century genocide. In August 2014, the Islamic State (ISIS) launched a premeditated and systematic campaign to exterminate the Yazidis of Sinjar. Their justification was explicitly theological: they deemed the Yazidis to be "devil-worshippers" and infidels who had to be either converted or killed.[32] The ensuing atrocities were horrific and well-documented: thousands of men and older boys were summarily executed and buried in mass graves; thousands of women and girls, some as young as nine, were abducted into a systematically organized system of sexual slavery and institutionalized rape; and young boys were torn from their families to be brainwashed and trained as child soldiers.[32] Hundreds of thousands were displaced, fleeing to Mount Sinjar where they were besieged without food or water.[32]

The nature of the ISIS genocide—its ideological justification, its systematic methodology, and its clear intent to destroy a people in whole or in part—created powerful and disturbing echoes of the Holocaust. This resonance has profoundly informed the Jewish and Israeli response, creating a modern bond built on empathy and a sense of moral imperative. For many in the Jewish world, the phrase "Never Again" was seen not as an exclusively Jewish principle, but as a universal one being tested in real time. As one Israeli aid worker involved in helping Yazidi survivors stated, "They are very similar to us in their genocide and what happened to their people... It's our duty as Jews... to help people who are going through the same thing".[45] This sentiment was reciprocated; Yazidi survivor and Nobel laureate Nadia Murad, appealing directly to the Israeli Knesset, explicitly invoked their "common history of genocide" as the basis for her plea for recognition and help.[46] This modern relationship is therefore not merely an abstract historical parallel but an active, emotional, and political bond animated by the memory of the 20th century's defining genocide and the horror of its 21st-century echo.

Part IV: The Genetic Evidence for a Common Ancestry

While historical and theological parallels provide compelling evidence of a deep connection, the field of population genetics offers a scientific lens through which to examine the possibility of a shared biological heritage between Jews and Yazidis. Although there is a notable absence of academic studies that directly compare the two populations, a process of triangulation—examining studies of each group's relationship to common regional populations—allows for reasoned inferences. The data strongly suggests that both peoples descend from the same broad ancestral population pool of ancient Mesopotamia, and that their parallel social histories of strict endogamy have preserved the genetic signatures of this shared origin.

The Genetic Landscape of the Middle East and the Jewish People

Decades of genetic research have painted a clear picture of the origins of Jewish diaspora populations. Autosomal DNA studies, which analyze an individual's entire genetic makeup, consistently demonstrate that most Jewish groups—including Ashkenazi (European), Sephardi (Iberian/North African), and Mizrahi (Middle Eastern) Jews—cluster together and share a significant ancestral component originating in the Middle East, specifically the Levant.[47] This shared ancestry distinguishes them from their non-Jewish host populations and supports the historical narrative of a common origin followed by millennia of dispersal.

Particularly relevant to this inquiry are studies of paternal lineages (Y-DNA) in Mizrahi Jewish communities. A landmark 2001 study, "The Y Chromosome Pool of Jews as Part of the Genetic Landscape of the Middle East," found that Jewish populations exhibit a high degree of genetic affinity with non-Arab populations of the northern Fertile Crescent.[51] The Y-chromosomes of Kurdish and Sephardic Jews were found to be "indistinguishable from one another," and both clustered more closely with Kurds, Turks, and Armenians than with their Arab neighbors.[51] This research places the paternal ancestry of the very Jewish communities who were the Yazidis' neighbors squarely in the same geographic and genetic landscape. The study concluded that admixture between Kurdish Jews and their Muslim Kurd host population was negligible, indicating that both groups had preserved distinct, ancient lineages while living side-by-side.[51]

The Yazidi Genetic Profile: Isolation and Origins

Genetic studies of the Yazidi population reveal two defining and interrelated characteristics. First is their remarkable degree of genetic isolation, a direct result of the strict, religiously mandated practice of endogamy.[52] For centuries, Yazidis have married exclusively within their own community and its three-caste system, a practice that has left a clear signature on their genome.[18] This long-term isolation has resulted in a notable reduction in genetic diversity compared to neighboring groups like Muslim Kurds and has made them a distinct genetic cluster.[53]

Second, despite this isolation, their genetic profile confirms their status as an ancient, indigenous population of northern Mesopotamia.[1] Their DNA shows strong continuity with the original inhabitants of the region and clear relationships with other local groups, particularly Kurds and Assyrians/Syriacs.[52] The ongoing academic and communal debate about whether Yazidis constitute a distinct ethnicity or a religious subgroup of the Kurds is mirrored in the genetic data; autosomal DNA often shows them to be nearly indistinguishable from Kurds, while their unique history of isolation has also carved out a distinct genetic profile.[1] This reflects a shared, complex identity that defies simple ethnic or religious categorization, a

pattern also seen in Jewish populations who are genetically distinct yet share deep ancestry with other Middle Eastern peoples.

Synthesizing the Data: A Deep Ancestral Connection

In the absence of a study that directly compares a large cohort of Yazidi genomes with Jewish genomes, the connection must be inferred through triangulation of existing data. The evidence points strongly toward a shared origin in a common ancestral pool. The logic proceeds as follows: genetic studies place the origins of Mizrahi and Kurdish Jews in the northern Fertile Crescent, showing a close relationship to modern Kurds and Armenians.[51] Parallel studies identify the Yazidis as an ancient, indigenous people from the very same region, who are also genetically related to Kurds and other local populations.[52] Therefore, it is highly probable that both Jews and Yazidis represent distinct branches that emerged from the same ancient Mesopotamian population trunk.

Their parallel social strategies have had direct and measurable genetic consequences. The strict endogamy practiced by both groups for millennia has acted as a form of "genetic time capsule," preserving ancient ancestral signals that might otherwise have been diluted by admixture with surrounding populations.[47] This shared social strategy for survival is the very mechanism that has preserved the evidence of their deep, shared geographic origins, creating an inextricable link between their social history and their biological heritage.

While large-scale comparative studies are lacking, some tantalizing clues exist. One analysis of a specific Y-DNA haplotype (a group of genes inherited from a single male ancestor) found its highest frequency in the world among Yazidis in Armenia (11.9%). This same haplotype was also present, albeit at lower frequencies, in Muslim Kurds (9.5%), Sephardic Jews (2.6%), and Kurdish Jews (2.0%).[1] While this single data point is not conclusive proof, it provides a direct piece of evidence for shared paternal lineages tracing back to a common ancestral source in the ancient Middle East. It reinforces the conclusion that the Jewish and Yazidi peoples, while distinct, are indeed ancient relatives, their kinship written not only in the scrolls of history but in the very code of their DNA.

Part V: The Modern Relationship: Solidarity in the Shadow of Genocide

The contemporary relationship between the Jewish and Yazidi peoples has been dramatically activated and powerfully defined by the 2014 ISIS genocide. This cataclysmic event transformed a latent historical connection into an active bond of solidarity, driven by a sense of shared trauma and moral obligation from the Jewish world, and a sense of admiration and aspiration from the Yazidi community. This modern relationship is complex, revealing a striking divergence between the impassioned response of global Jewish civil society and the more

cautious, politically calculated approach of the State of Israel.

A Moral Imperative: The Humanitarian and Civil Society Response

In the immediate aftermath of the August 2014 attack on Sinjar, Israeli and international Jewish organizations responded with a sense of urgency rooted in historical memory. IsraAID, a prominent Israeli non-governmental humanitarian aid agency, was among the first to act, sending missions to Iraqi Kurdistan to deliver emergency supplies and provide long-term medical and psychosocial support.[45] Their work focused heavily on the thousands of Yazidi women and girls who had escaped ISIS captivity, helping them process the profound trauma of torture and sexual violence. The motivation was explicit; one Israeli aid worker told The Times of Israel, "They are very similar to us in their genocide and what happened to their people. It's our duty as Jews... to help people who are going through the same thing".[45] Major American Jewish advocacy organizations, such as the American Jewish Committee (AJC), also mobilized, providing significant funding to IsraAID and other partners on the ground to purchase and distribute essential winter supplies for displaced Yazidi refugees.[56]
This grassroots solidarity was powerfully symbolized by "Operation Ezra," an initiative launched in March 2015 by the Jewish community of Winnipeg, Canada.[30] The project's goals were to raise awareness about the Yazidi plight and to privately sponsor the resettlement of Yazidi refugee families in Canada. The name was deliberately chosen to evoke "Operation Ezra and Nehemiah," the historic airlift that brought over 120,000 Iraqi Jews to Israel in the early 1950s. As the operation's chair, Michel Aziza, explained, "Jews and Yazidis were once neighbors in Iraq, and 60 years after Jews left, the Yazidis also had to flee due to persecution".[30] This direct linking of the two communities' experiences of flight and persecution resonated widely, and Operation Ezra quickly grew into a broad coalition of synagogues, churches, and community groups that successfully resettled dozens of Yazidi families.[58] The response from Jewish civil society was not one of charity for a distant people, but of kinship with a community whose suffering was seen as a tragic echo of their own.

The Politics of Recognition: The Israeli Knesset Debates

This powerful "people-to-people" connection stands in stark contrast to the official response of the State of Israel. Despite several attempts, the Israeli Knesset has thus far failed to formally recognize the atrocities against the Yazidis as genocide.[46] An analysis of the Knesset debates on the issue reveals a deep conflict between a perceived moral duty and the pragmatic calculations of
realpolitik.
The bills for recognition, typically introduced by opposition members like MK Ksenia Svetlova, were argued from a position of moral imperative. Proponents invoked Israel's identity as a state built from the ashes of the Holocaust, arguing it had a special obligation to be the first

to recognize and condemn such atrocities against other minorities.[46] Yazidi survivor Nadia Murad addressed the Knesset directly, appealing to their "common history of genocide" as the basis for her plea.[46]

However, the governing coalitions have consistently voted against these measures. The official justification, articulated by figures like then-Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely, was procedural and diplomatic. She argued that Israel should wait for an official determination by the United Nations and alluded to vague "diplomatic implications" that required further study.[59] This official reasoning, however, masks deeper and more complex considerations. Many analysts believe the primary obstacle is a long-standing foreign policy concern regarding Turkey. Formally recognizing the Yazidi genocide would create an undeniable precedent that would make it almost impossible for Israel to continue its policy of not recognizing the Armenian genocide of 1915, a cornerstone of its strategic relationship with Turkey.[59] Furthermore, some commentators suggest an undercurrent of "Jewish exceptionalism" within parts of the Israeli political right, a fear that recognizing other genocides might in some way dilute the unique historical status of the Holocaust.[59] This divergence between the swift, empathetic action of Jewish civil society and the hesitant, calculated inaction of the Israeli state reveals a multifaceted relationship that cannot be described monolithically.

A Bond of Shared Trauma and Aspiration

Beyond humanitarian aid and political debates, the modern relationship is defined by a shared psychological space. Yazidi leaders and activists frequently look to the Jewish people and the State of Israel as a model for survival, resilience, and national restoration after genocide.[36] They see in the Jewish experience a path forward: how a traumatized, scattered people can preserve their identity, rebuild their lives, and achieve self-determination. As one Yazidi representative put it, they look at the Jews as "a model: the traumatic history of the Jews as a nation struggling for recognition in an environment that hates them and had a great trauma in the past".[36]

The ISIS genocide has also forced a process of adaptation within Yazidism that mirrors historical Jewish responses to catastrophe. The mass enslavement and rape of Yazidi women created a profound theological crisis, as tradition dictates that a Yazidi who marries or has a forced relationship with a non-Yazidi is expelled from the faith. In a momentous and necessary act of communal survival, the Yazidi spiritual leadership issued a new religious ruling to welcome these women and their children back into the community, preventing its further fragmentation.[36] This process of theological and legal adaptation in the face of an existential threat is deeply resonant with Jewish history, where events like the destruction of the Second Temple spurred the development of Rabbinic Judaism, a creative adaptation that allowed the Jewish people to survive. This parallel capacity for resilience and adaptation in the face of near-annihilation is a final, profound element of their shared fate.

Conclusion: The Nature of the Jewish-Yazidi Connection

A "special relationship" between the Jewish and Yazidi peoples unequivocally exists. It is not, however, a simple or straightforward bond. It is not a relationship of direct ethnic or theological lineage, but one of profound historical, sociological, and psychological resonance, a connection defined by parallel paths rather than a single, shared road. A comprehensive analysis reveals this relationship rests upon four primary pillars that, together, create a unique and enduring kinship.

First is a foundation of **deep ancestral and geographic roots**. Genetic evidence strongly suggests that both the Jewish people and the Yazidis descend from the same broad ancestral population pool of ancient Mesopotamia. For millennia, they developed within the same cultural and geographical milieu, a shared cradle that shaped their earliest identities and established the conditions for all subsequent parallels.

Second are the **theological echoes and analogies**. While their faiths are distinct, they developed within a common regional "religious grammar," leading to analogous concepts of monotheism, angelology, and primordial human figures like Adam, as well as similar categories of ritual practice such as fasting and pilgrimage. Paradoxically, the most powerful theological link is a fundamental difference: the Yazidi belief in a redeemed Peacock Angel, Tawûsî Melek, has been the source of the "devil-worshipper" libel, subjecting them to a history of persecution that is deeply resonant with the experience of the Jewish people, who have also been targeted based on theological misrepresentations.

Third is a **parallel sociological trajectory**. Both peoples evolved as remarkably resilient, endogamous, and non-proselytizing ethno-religious minorities. They employed analogous social and theological boundary-making strategies—rooted in unique origin myths and prohibitions on intermarriage—to preserve their distinct identities against the overwhelming assimilatory and persecutory pressures of the empires and nations that surrounded them.

Fourth, and most powerfully in the contemporary era, is a **modern bond forged in shared trauma**. The 2014 ISIS genocide against the Yazidis activated a deep sense of empathy and moral obligation within the global Jewish community, an impulse born directly from the memory of the Holocaust. This has been expressed through robust humanitarian action from Jewish civil society, even as it is complicated by the *realpolitik* considerations of the Israeli state. For the Yazidis, the Jewish people have become a source of inspiration—a model for survival, resilience, and the hope of national restoration after an attempt at total annihilation.

Ultimately, the relationship between Jews and Yazidis is that of two ancient peoples who, while walking separate paths, have found their journeys running parallel for millennia. They were shaped by the same mountains and valleys of Mesopotamia, threatened by the same historical storms, and now, in an age of profound tragedy, they look to one another with a unique and deeply felt sense of recognition and kinship.

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