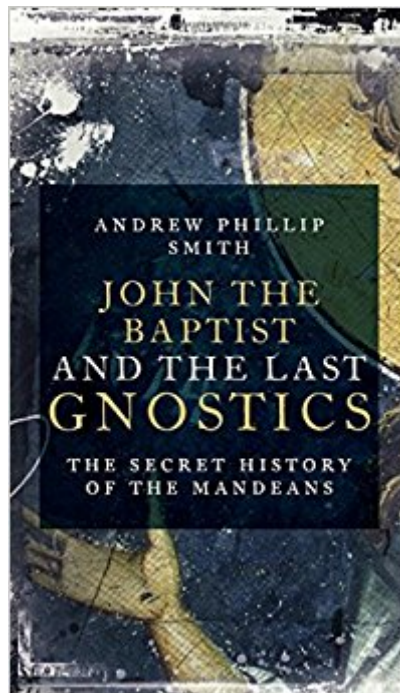




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John The Baptist And The Last Gnostics: The Secret History Of The Mandeans



Synopsis

Are there still Gnostics and can their roots be chased back to John the Baptist? Among the casualties of the western intervention in Iraq and the recent activities of ISIS are the Mandeans of Southern Iraq. These peace-loving people are now fleeing to the west. They are the last Gnostics, the only surviving remnant of the ancient sects who taught the direct knowledge of God, created their own gospels and myths and were persecuted as heretical by the church in the second and third centuries. The Mandeans place weekly river baptisms at the centre of their religious life and the primary exemplar of their religion is none other than John the Baptist. What is the real history of this mysterious and long lived sect? Can the Mandaean peoples really be traced back to the first century? And who was John the Baptist? This book follows the history of the Mandeans from their present plight back through their earliest encounters with the West, their place in Islamic countries, their possible influence on the Templars, back to their origins as a first century baptismal sect connected to John the Baptist and beyond.

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Customer Reviews

Andrew Philip Smith is the editor of *The Gnostic* and the author of *Lost History of the Cathars* and *Secret History of the Gnostics*. He has also written for *Fortean Times*, *New Dawn* and *The Guardian*.

This is a stunning book about the present-day followers of John the Baptist. There were about

70,000 of them who lived in the marshes of Iraq for centuries, following their creed (which required the priests to immerse themselves in running water 3 times a day) and getting along with their Arab Sunni marsh neighbors, until first, Saddam drained the marshes to destroy their habitat, and then, the US invaded Iraq. Several thousand Mandeans immigrated to the US, while others went to Canada, Australia and other countries. There are only a few thousand left in Iraq now. It boggles my mind that we have a direct link to the times of Jesus, preserved by a tiny sect of people who believe that John the Baptist was the real Messiah (that is overstating it a bit, but not by much.) I recommend it highly for those who are interested in religions other than your own, especially truly minority ones. The book discusses Manicheans, Sabians, the Knights Templar, Essenes, Nazarenes, Elchasites, Qumranites, Samaritans, Simon Magus ("Simon the sorcerer"), the Magarites, as well as Sethians and Valentinians (both gnostic sects). Essentially, the Mandeans (followers of John) are the only surviving sect from the days of Jesus, except of course for the Christians. As anyone who has studied the Middle East knows, there are numerous sects there, almost all of them Islamic, but most people do not realize how many versions of Islam there are. Most people know by now about the difference between Sunnis and Shi'ites, and even Sufis, but few know that all of them are fractured into (Sunnis) 4 different schools of theology/law as well as various ethnic backgrounds such as Arabs, Turks, Kurds, and (Shi'ites) into "Twelvers" and "Sevens" depending on whether they believe there were 12 Imams after Muhammad or only 7. It is a pleasure to read something well-written by someone who really understands the twisty descent of lines of the Abrahamic religions, of which the Mandeans are one.

Too much information without any hypothesis give the impression that the author swims. The book, however, contains precious information. Thanks to him.

Not only is this book a great introduction and overview of a fascinating group of people, but it serves to clarify/illuminate several Mandaean concepts that are often shrouded in mystery and, at times, contradiction. I've read the works of several Mandaean scholars (e.g., Drower, Buckley, and Lupieri) for a novel I'm writing, in which the Mandeans play a large role, but I still learned a great deal from Smith's book and found it extremely readable and engaging. I'm currently reading his book on the Cathars and finding it equally beneficial. I hope to read more of his work in the future.

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