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# “God First and Last”

Religious Traditions and Music  
of the Yaresan of Guran

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by Philip G. Kreyenbroek

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# Contents

Abbreviations .....	VII
Preface .....	IX
Acknowledgements .....	XI
Terminology and Transcription .....	XIII
Introduction .....	1
General.....	1
History of the Study .....	2
The Gurani Tradition .....	5
Aspects of the Yāri World-view .....	6
Aims and methods .....	7
The hymns in book form: collections of texts.....	7
Chapter One: the Religious Background .....	9
The Indo-Iranian Religion: some relevant aspects.....	9
Zoroastrianism in Western Iran .....	13
Roman Mithraism and the ancient Western Iranian religion .....	16
Hellenistic cults .....	17
Gnostic Movements of late Antiquity, Manichaeism.....	18
Christianity .....	18
Islam .....	19
Yezidism .....	25
Alevism.....	29
Chapter Two: The Yāresān Community and its Social Organisation.....	31
Languages .....	31
Geography.....	33
‘Caste’, ritual functions, social institutions.....	36
Chapter Three: Mythical and Factual History .....	43
Mythical History .....	43
Factual History.....	58
Chapter Four: The Religious Universe .....	73
Aspects of the Yāri Worldview.....	73
Divine and Great Beings .....	85
The Dowres.....	92
Eschatology.....	96

Chapter Five: Ritual and Observance .....	97
Music .....	97
The Jam.....	97
The Nazr .....	101
The Niyāz or Shokrāne .....	103
Sar Sepordan .....	103
Feasts and Fasts.....	109
Funerary observances.....	113
Other observances .....	114
Yāri Observances and Twelver Shi'ite influences .....	115
Chapter Six: Religious Narratives and Sacred Texts .....	117
Texts and storylines .....	117
The Form of the Kalāms .....	118
Texts and Performance .....	119
Texts and Religious Knowledge .....	121
Collections of Kalāms.....	123
The Perdiwari Kalāms.....	125
The role of the kalāms in religious life .....	130
APPENDIX 1: Extracts from the 'Exegesis' of Sayyed Wali .....	133
[On Creation] .....	133
[The History of Religions] .....	135
[The Dowres] .....	136
APPENDIX 2: Views from Iraqi communities .....	141
Interview with Sayyed Khalil Āghābāb Kāka'i, Iraqi Kurdistan .....	141
Beliefs of the Perdiwari Community, near Halabja .....	145
APPENDIX 3: Another View of Yāri. Sayyed Khalil Ālinezhād from Sahne .....	149
APPENDIX 4: Authoritative Muslim Comments on Yāri.....	168
APPENDIX 5: <i>Kalāms</i> in recent compilations .....	170
Bibliography .....	173
Index.....	181

# Abbreviations

## Journals

<i>AION</i>	<i>Annali dell' Istituto Orientale di Napoli</i>
<i>AIr</i>	<i>Acta Iranica</i>
<i>AJSL</i>	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>RANL</i>	<i>Rendiconti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche</i>
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Revue de l'Histoire des Religions</i>
<i>RMM</i>	<i>Revue du Monde Musulman</i>
<i>ROC</i>	<i>Revue de l'Orient Chrétien</i>
<i>RSO</i>	<i>Rivista degli Studi Orientali</i>
<i>StIr</i>	<i>Studia Iranica</i>
<i>WZKM</i>	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

## Other

A.	Answer
AH	Ahl-e Haqq
A.H.	<i>Anno Hegirae</i>
Al	Alevis
AAM	Ali Akbar Moradi
App.	Appendix
Ar.	Arabic
b.	ibn, ebn (son of)
BCE	Before Common Era
c.	century
CE	Common Era
Ch.	Chapter
d.	died
et al.	and others

fem.	feminine
fl.	<i>floruit</i>
fn.	footnote
Fr.	French
Gur.	Gurani
H.Q.	<i>Hejri Qamari</i>
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i>
i.e.	that is
Ism.	Isma'ili
Ir.	Iranian
lit.	literally
Kurd.	Kurdish
loc. cit.	<i>loco citato</i>
m.	masculine
NP.	New Persian
n.pl.	no place
n.v.	<i>non vidimus</i>
op. cit.	<i>opere citato</i>
part.	particle
Pers.	Persian
PK	Philip Kreyenbroek
PM	Parwin Mahmoudveyssi
Q.	Question
q.v.	<i>quo vide</i>
r.	ruled
SF	Sayyed Fereidoun Hosseini
s.o.	someone
Sor.	Sorani Kurdish
s.th.	something
s.v.	<i>sub voce</i>
SW	Sayyed Wali
Turk.	Turkish
viz.	Namely
Y.	<i>Yasna</i>
Yar.	Yāresān(i)
Yez.	Yezidi
YK	Yiannis Kanakis
Yt.	<i>Yasht.</i>



## Preface

This is the first of a two-volume work aiming to describe and analyse significant aspects of the religious culture of the Yāresān (Ahl-e Haqq) of the Guran area in the Kurdish-speaking region of Iran. The Guran tradition differs in many ways from other Yāresān traditions, such as those of Sahne and the Kāka'i communities in Iraq. Although some valuable articles on the Gurani community are available and the few existing monographs on the Yāri religion make a definite contribution, it was felt that a detailed analysis of key aspects of this particular religious tradition, based on recent research, was a desideratum for the study of the Yāresān, and of minority religions in the Middle East generally.

The work is divided into two separate parts: Vol. 1, by Kreyenbroek, focuses on general aspects of the religion, whilst Vol. 2, by Kanakis, discusses Gurani and Yāresān music. The authors were trained in different disciplines (Iranian Philology and History of Religions, and Social Geography and Ethnomusicology respectively), and belong to different generations. This has the advantage that readers will be offered complementary approaches, rather than having their understanding of the subject informed by a single point of view.

It should be stressed that this work does not seek to reveal the deeper esoteric knowledge of Yāri, which is the province of learned Yāresān specialists. Since most believers appear to be aware of the existence of this knowledge without having direct access to it, it is sufficient for our purpose to recognise that such secret knowledge exists, without focusing on its contents.

The title refers to the phrase *Awwal o Ākher Yār*, which is heard frequently during Yāri rituals. It literally means 'The Friend first and last', and in the Guran tradition<sup>1</sup> clearly refers to God, as a Friend to mankind. When faced with the title 'God first and last', some Yāresān informants stated that, for them, the word *Yār*, with its associations of love and benevolence, evoked a different feeling than the neutral word 'God'. After some discussion, however, it was decided to keep the simple translation 'God' in the title because 'the Friend' would not be intelligible to many Western readers, while 'the Beloved' might suggest a stronger influence of Islamic mysticism than can in fact be found in Yāri.

Few academic books on religion can do justice to the faith and spirituality that are core parts of many people's religious experience. Although this work is partly based on oral testimonies and takes into account the role of music in Yāresān devotional life, it is probably no exception. Still, it is hoped that its appearance will be a

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1 For another view, which regards the word as referring to Ali, see App.3, Question 38.

step towards a better understanding of this particular group, and of the unity and variety that characterise the traditions of the Yāri religion.

Samos, June 2019

Philip G. Kreyenbroek

## Acknowledgements

We owe a debt of gratitude to the Volkswagen Foundation for funding the Research Programme ‘Documentation of Gorani, an endangered language of the Kermanshah province of Iran’, conducted by Prof. Ludwig Paul, Prof. Geoffrey Haig, and PK. This project, which formed part of a Volkswagen Project for Documenting Endangered Languages (DoBeS), focused on documenting linguistic material but also promoted research on the cultures that speak these languages. We thank all our colleagues on the Project, and in particular Dr Parwin Mahmoudweysi, who accompanied PK on a research trip to Iraqī Kurdistan, where her native knowledge of Gurani/Hawrami proved invaluable.

Very special thanks are due to Sayyed Fereidoun Hosseini, who gave freely of his time and his enormous knowledge of Gurani Yāri to help us throughout the research for this book, and to the well-known Yāresāni musician Ali-Akbar Moradi, who was always prepared to help and explain questions about his culture and its music. The late Sayyed Falakeddin Kaka’i and his daughter, Mrs Prshng Kaka’i, have done much to help us gain at least some understanding of the complexity of Kāka’i affairs in Iraqī Kurdistan. Dr Partow Hooshmandrad generously sent us a copy of her valuable thesis on Gurani Yāresāni music. Discussions with Dr Khanna Omarkhali on similarities between Yāri and Yezidism proved very fruitful, and we are very grateful to her for her help with Indexing the text. Dr Behrouz Geranpayeh introduced PK to the Turkic-speaking Yāri tradition, and thereby gave us a valuable point of comparison. Dr Shahrokh Raei advised PK in various matters concerning the Khāksār derwishes and their links with the Yāresān. Dr Behrooz Chaman-Ara’s doctoral work on the Kurdish *Shāhnāme* has greatly improved our understanding of this (for the Yāresān) semi-religious genre, and we are grateful to him for helping PK with recordings in certain Kurdish dialects. Dr des. Alireza Zahedi Moghadam’s research on the prophetic texts of the Yāresān throws new light on this subject. Prof. Albert de Jong provided us with documentation that could only be found in the University of Leiden. Furthermore, we would like to express our thanks to Mr Arif Biter for formatting the book, and to the House of Harrassowitz for its assistance during the production process. Last but not least, we are indebted to our wives, Mieke Kreyenbroek and Dr Sophie Richter-Devroe, for their patience, support and encouragement.



## Terminology and Transcription

A difficulty in writing this work was caused by the many inconsistencies in the use of relevant terms, not just in different communities but at times by the same person on different occasions. Moreover, terms that are widely used in the academic literature, both in the West and in Persian, to refer to certain Yāresān rituals or concepts,<sup>1</sup> may not be immediately understood by one's Yāresān interlocutors, who may think in different categories or simply use another expression for the concept in question.<sup>2</sup> Since the use of the alternative terms is no more consistent than that of the established, 'academic' ones, it was decided to employ the latter. An exception is our use of 'Yāri' for the religion, and 'Yāresān' and 'Yārān', with the adjectival form 'Yāresāni', for the community and (groups of) its members. So many of our informants protested against the term 'Ahl-e Haqq' (i.e. People of Truth, suggesting the claim to a monopoly on truth that is alien to Yāresāni thought), that we decided to avoid that term, except where it was used by informants themselves.

In the English texts, the transcription of Iranian<sup>3</sup> and Arabic words is kept simple and the use of diacritics is restricted to a minimum. For geographical names no diacritics are used, while in most other cases the only distinction made in the text is that between *a* and *ā*. The consonants *sh*, *ch*, *zh* are pronounced as in English; *kh* as in Scottish *loch*, and *gh* as its voiced counterpart. In the Bibliography and in texts in Iranian languages, a wider use of diacritics is made for terms in Persian, Arabic, Kurdish and Literary Gurani, and consonants are represented by a single symbol (see below). The Gurani and Kurdish 'thick' /ʎ/ and 'strong' /ʕ/ are transcribed in texts in those languages, but represented by 'll' and 'rr' elsewhere. Gurani manuscripts do not have a special transcription for the 'half-closed central continuant' allophone of *d* which MacKenzie (1966:7–8) transcribes as *ḍ*. As this consonant is not given its Gurani/Hawrāmi pronunciation by most speakers when reciting the *kalāms*, but pronounced as /d/, this phonetic peculiarity is not marked.

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- 1 An exception is the work of Hooshmandrad (2004), who prefers to adopt the terminology she heard from her Gurani teachers.
  - 2 Thus, in the early stages of our collaboration SF did not automatically understand the term *kalām*, asking if we meant *āhang* 'melody'. Kāka'i informants tend to use the plural form *jamāt* for a single ritual or combination of rituals.
  - 3 I.e. Persian, Kurdish and Gurani.

Arabic letter	In English text	In Iranian Texts and Bibliography
ث	<i>s</i>	<i>ṯ</i>
ح	<i>h</i>	<i>ḥ</i>
خ	<i>kh</i>	<i>x</i>
چ	<i>ch</i>	<i>č</i>
ذ	<i>z</i>	<i>ẓ</i>
ز	<i>r, rr</i>	<i>r, ř</i>
ژ	<i>zh</i>	<i>ž</i>
ش	<i>sh</i>	<i>š</i>
ص	<i>s</i>	<i>ṣ</i>
ض	<i>z</i>	<i>ḍ</i>
ط	<i>t</i>	<i>ṭ</i>
ظ	<i>z</i>	<i>ẓ</i>
ع	internal: '	'
غ	<i>gh</i>	<i>ğ</i>
ل	<i>ll</i>	<i>l</i>
<i>Hamze</i>	'	'

In the Bibliography and in Iranian texts, the Persian vowel system is transcribed with: *a, ā, e, i, o, u, ow, ey*. For Arabic terms the vowel system used is: *a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, aw, ay*. The transcription of the Kurdish vowel system comprises: *a, ā, e, i, ī, o, u, ū, aw, öe, ay*. In Gurani texts, the following vowels are used: *a, ā, e, ē, i, ī, o, ō, ö, u, ū, ü, aw, ay*.

# Introduction

## General

The Yāresān are a religious minority whose worldview and traditions deserve greater academic interest than they have received so far. Although several studies on this group have emerged in recent decades, neither its origins and early history nor the contemporary tradition of some significant Yāresān communities have been adequately documented. The voice of contemporary believers, moreover, is seldom heard in academic publications, so that a sense of the living reality of the religion is often lacking. For reasons that will be given below, the present work focuses on the religious life of the Yāresān of the Guran area, while taking into account the traditions of other communities, particularly the ‘non-Jeyhunabadist’ community of Sahne, and the Iraqī Kāka’i groups as far as information about these is available at present.

The community is known by several names. Besides *Yāresān* (Community of Friends), they are also called *Ahl-e Haqq* (People of Truth), and in Iraq *Kāka’i* or *Kāka’i* (Member of the Brotherhood).<sup>1</sup> Some Yāresān refer to themselves as *Tāyefe* (the Clan); the term *Ali Ellāhi* (One who says that Ali is God) is widely felt to be inappropriate in the Guran region, as it does not reflect the community’s beliefs about Ali.<sup>2</sup> For the religion, the term *Yāri* is now preferred by many. Members of the group were traditionally referred to as *Yār(ān)*, *Yāresān*, or *Ahl-e Haqq*; in contemporary Persian the adjective *Yāresāni* is often heard.

There are no exact data concerning the community’s size, estimates varying from one to four million. In Iran, groups of Yāresān now live in western Azerbaijan, Lorestan, Tehran, Hamadan, Kelardasht (in Mazanderan), and in some towns in central Iran such as Karaj and Sawe. The greatest concentrations of Yāresān in Iran are to be found in two regions: the Guran region to the west of Kermanshah city, and in and around the town of Sahne, between Kermanshah and Hamadan. In Iraq, groups of Kāka’is live in or near Erbil, Mosul, Kirkuk, Khaneqin and Halabja. In recent decades a considerable number of Yāresān have had cause to move to the West. There are sizeable communities in Norway and Sweden. Significant numbers of Yāresān also live in Paris and elsewhere in France, and in Germany.

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1 In Persian written sources the form *Kāka’i* is often found. However, Hawrāmāni’s (1984) spelling *Kāka’i* corresponds to the pronunciation generally heard among the group itself.

2 That this appellation was inappropriate for the Yāresān was already noted by Gobineau (1922.II:69).

A few Yāresān in Iran, and almost all Kāka’i in Iraqī Kurdistan still speak variants of a language that will here be referred to as ‘Gurani’.<sup>3</sup> In Iraqī Kurdistan various local forms of this language are known collectively as ‘Macho’. It seems that Gurani was the original religious language of the Yāresān community as we know it now. In its literary form it is the dominant language in the group’s oldest religious texts, the ‘Perdiwari *Kalāms*’,<sup>4</sup> and continues to be used for religious purposes by many communities even when their command of the spoken language is dwindling. Literary Gurani texts often contain traces of other dialects and languages of the Zagros region.<sup>5</sup> A few other hymns belonging to the Perdiwari *kalāms* are Persian and in the Jāfi dialect of Kurdish. A considerable corpus of *kalāms* exists in the Turkic language of Azerbaijan, which is now widely used by the Turkic-speaking communities as a religious language instead of, or alongside literary Gurani. The influence of Persian on the Yāresān textual tradition is increasingly making itself felt.

## History of the Study

The earliest references to the Yāresān in Western languages are found in accounts by European travellers from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> The first Western author to offer a more or less systematic description of the Yāri religion was the French diplomat, Count J.A. de Gobineau.<sup>7</sup> In this work, first published in 1859, the author offers valuable observations on Yāresān culture.<sup>8</sup> After De Gobineau’s time, the Yāresān occasionally figure in other travellers’ accounts.<sup>9</sup> Several decades later, V. Minorsky<sup>10</sup> and W. Ivanow<sup>11</sup> began to describe the group’s beliefs in detail on the basis of a range of sources of information, including some personal observations and important but limited textual evidence.<sup>12</sup> Other academic publications also appeared,

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3 On Gurani see further below, Ch. 2.

4 The term refers to Perdiwar, the place where the founder of the present community, Soltān Sahāk, first settled with his followers, perhaps in the 15th or 16th century CE. The texts in question are believed to have been known to, or composed by leading members of this community.

5 See Kreyenbroek and Chaman-Ara 2013.

6 Minorsky 1960:263.

7 De Gobineau 1922.II:68–140.

8 De Gobineau (1922.II:69–70), who describes the group as a homogeneous whole, states for example that: ‘While outwardly Muslims like all other dissident groups, they harbour to a greater degree than those, and (in fact) as much as the Jews and Christians, a sense of hate and contempt for them.’

9 Such as Wilson 1885.

10 Minorsky 1920, 1921, 1928, 1953, 1954, 1960.

11 Ivanow 1953.

12 Minorsky had access to a collection of religious texts said to have originated in a Yāresān community, which he called *Ketāb-e Saranjām* (Ivanow 1953:24–25; Geranpayeh 2007:6–7).



including a valuable article by F.M. Stead.<sup>13</sup> The Yāresān, then, had come to be recognised as a religious group that was worthy of study, though the information offered was necessarily limited and much still remained to be discovered. In spite of the opinions of experts such as De Gobineau<sup>14</sup> and Stead,<sup>15</sup> who remarks that the Yāresān are different enough from mainstream Muslims to seem like members of another religion, and Minorsky,<sup>16</sup> who speaks of Yāri as a ‘religion’, it is probably true to say that initially the Yāresān were widely thought of as heterodox followers of Islam. De Gobineau<sup>17</sup> and Minorsky<sup>18</sup> reject the term *Ali Ellāhi* for the Yāresān as inappropriate, but it is used by Stead,<sup>19</sup> and a deep veneration for Ali is often attributed to the Yāresān community as a whole.<sup>20</sup> This in turn strengthened the impression that the community has its roots in ‘extremist’ Shi’ite Islam.<sup>21</sup>

This view of the Yāresān’s origins was strengthened by a development that was to give rise to deep rifts in the community. It was caused by the Yāresāni reformist thinker and religious leader, Hājj Ne’matollāh Mokri Jeyhunābādi,<sup>22</sup> who proposed a new interpretation of the teachings of Yāri that led to severe controversies. Jeyhunābādi’s most important work is the *Shāhnāme-ye Haqiqat*, which was published by M. Mokri in 1966. He also wrote several treatises, including *Forqān al-*

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This text, which was written in 1843, consisted of 136 pages, and appears never to have been published. Given that the text originated in the Tehran area, where no Gurani Yāresān lived at that time, it seems unlikely that it was representative of the Gurani tradition. It is important to note, moreover, that the collection of texts on which Ivanow’s work was based also consist of material of non-Gurani origin. These include a long text (the *Tazkere-ye A’lā*) which originated among Turkic-speaking Yāresān whose ancestors had been resettled in the Waramin district near Teheran in the early Qājār period, and who were largely ‘Persianised’ when Ivanow met them (Ivanow 1953:24–6, fn. 3, 4). The other texts found in this work are *Resāles* written by Khāksāri derwishes of high rank who had been initiated into Yāri. These texts thus reflect the way Yāri teachings were perceived by these members of a Sufi Order (cf. Ivanow 1953:27). Another fragment published by Ivanow (1948) is strongly influenced by Islamic theosophy and appears to be highly untypical of Gurani Yāri beliefs.

13 Stead 1932.

14 See above, fn. 7.

15 Stead 1932:184

16 Minorsky 1960

17 De Gobineau 1922 II:69.

18 Op. cit.

19 Stead 1932:184.

20 On present-day veneration for Ali in the non-Jeyhunabadist tradition of Sahne see App. 3, passim.

21 E.g. Halm 1984 (who admits, however, that the veneration of Ali plays only a minor role in Yāri); Moossa 1988. This view is also accepted explicitly or implicitly by several Iranian authors on the subject (e.g. Khwāje al-Dīn n.d.; Walā’i 1372/1993), and by all those whose views on Yāri are informed by the teachings of the Jeyhunabadist school, on which see below.

22 See Membrado 2004, 2014. For a fascinating but clearly derogatory contemporary account of Hājj Ne’matollāh’s activities, see Stead 1932:188–189. Stead’s evidence suggests that at least some of his information came from Gurani Yāresān, who would not have been sympathetic to Hājj Ne’matollāh.

*Akhhār*,<sup>23</sup> which significantly influenced Minorsky's understanding of *Yāri*. Hājī Ne'matollāh died in 1920. His son, Nur-Ali Elahi, and his grandson, Dr Bahram Elahi, continued on the path towards modernisation that he had initiated. This group accepts converts far more easily than other Yāresān communities, which has led to the establishment of many 'Jeyhunabadist' centres both in Iran and the Western world. In the course of time all this gave rise to strong disagreements, and indeed to vehement clashes, between Jeyhunabadists and other communities, particularly in the Guran region.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1960s, after the period of Minorsky and Ivanow, the study of the Yāri faith came to be dominated by Mohammad Mokri, a native of Western Iran but not a follower of Yāri. The fact that he published Hājī Ne'matollāh Mokri Jeyhunābādi's *Shāhnāme-ye Haqiqat* suggests that he had strong links with that branch of the Yāresān. Mokri, moreover, had at his disposal a large number of Yāresān religious texts, several of which he published as separate works, offering explanations and comments whose nature suggests that his approach to religion was strongly informed by sociology. Somewhat later, the role of music in Yāri observance was studied by the musicologist Jean During,<sup>25</sup> who has close relations with the Jeyhunabadist group and makes no secret of his preference for this branch.<sup>26</sup> In 1990, Hamzeh'ee's informative work pointed to parallels between Yāri and Zoroastrianism, but implicitly assumed that the Yāresān's worldview is homogeneous, failing to draw attention to the very real differences between the various communities.

Until the 1990s, therefore, the existence of diverse Yāri traditions, at least one of which stresses the significance of the pre-Islamic elements in its worldview, was hardly reflected by Western academic literature, nor did a theoretical framework exist that could place such views into an appropriate context. The first references to the distinct Yāri tradition in the Guran region came in the early 1990s, with the works of Van Bruinessen<sup>27</sup> and Mir-Hosseini.<sup>28</sup> Around the same time, Kreyenbroek<sup>29</sup> pointed to similarities between Yāri, Yezidism and Zoroastrianism, with some reference to Alevism; aspects of the links with the latter group were studied in depth by van Bruinessen.<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere Kreyenbroek<sup>31</sup> stressed the relevance of the similarities between the cosmogony of the Yāresān and that of Roman Mithraism. It was suggested that aspects of Mithraism had been inspired by an Iranian but non-Zoroastrian religious tradition based in the region that now comprises the Kurd-

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23 See Weightman 1964.

24 See Mir-Hosseini 1995.

25 During 1989a, b.

26 During 1998.

27 Van Bruinessen 1995, 2014.

28 Mir-Hosseini 1994a, 1996.

29 Kreyenbroek 1995:52–61, 1996.

30 Van Bruinessen 1995.

31 Kreyenbroek 1992, 1994.

ish lands, and that elements of such a cult may have survived in Yāri and other religions (see further below, Ch. 1).

## The Gurani Tradition

To return to the tradition of the Guran region, it is now widely recognised by scholars that this has certain characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of Yāri. These include a strong tendency to regard itself as a religion in its own right,<sup>32</sup> a readiness to accept Sayyed Brāke (on whom see further below) as an incarnation of the Divine, a firm rejection of certain claims of the Jeyhunabadist branch, and a characteristic way of performing music.

While the Jeyhunabadist tradition can now be said to be adequately documented by the works of Mokri, Nur Ali Elahi, Bahram Elahi, During and Membrado among others, the Gurani tradition has received much less attention.<sup>33</sup> Although it should be stressed that in many respects all Yāresān traditions are identical or very similar, the present work aims to offer some sense of the variety between traditions by focussing on the Gurani group, while also offering some information on other traditions, notably Yāresāni communities in Iraqī Kurdistan and the non-Jeyhunabadist Yāresānis of the Sahne region..

Roughly since the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1997, the question of the essentially Islamic or pre-Islamic nature of the group has been regarded as key, both by Western scholars and in modern Yāresān communities in Iran and Europe. As Mir-Hosseini shows,<sup>34</sup> disagreements in this respect have at times had serious social consequences. A point that is rarely stressed in discussions on this theme is that this question does not appear to evoke strong sentiments among the Kāka'is of Iraqī Kurdistan, which is not deeply influenced by Jeyhunabadist ideas.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, it is not prominently reflected by sources dealing with earlier periods of the community's history in Iran. It seems possible, therefore, that it was only when Hājj Ne'matollāh and his followers began to stress their views on the Islamic identity of Yāri that negative reactions were provoked in some milieus, so that the community's religious affiliations became a matter of controversy. At a later stage, this development was greatly strengthened by the political developments in Iran since the Islamic Revolution.

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32 In this, it differs not only from the Jeyhunabadist school, but also e.g. from the views of Sayyed Khalil Ālinezhād, see App. 3.

33 Apart from the works already cited, Hooshmandrad 2004 is a detailed study of the musical tradition of the Gurani Yāresān.

34 Mir-Hosseini 1996.

35 As the Yāresāni politician and author Sayyed Falakeddin Kaka'i informed the author (verbal communication via Mrs Prshng Kaka'i, Göttingen, Autumn 2009): 'You must take us as we are, the question of whether we are Muslims or not cannot be answered unequivocally.'

## Aspects of the Yāri World-view

The traditional, religious world-view of the Yāresān has many aspects that may seem unfamiliar to a Western readership. It differs from that of most Muslims and Christians in that it stresses the fundamental unity of all things. A key element is the belief that life on earth is informed by two different forms of reality: on the one hand there is the variegated, ‘outer’ (*zāher*) reality we all know. Underlying this reality, however, and reflected by it to some extent, is the essential, unvarying, ‘true’ reality that is referred to as *bāten* (‘inner’). The Yāri tradition teaches that the essence of history effectively repeats itself over and over again in the outer world. The same ‘inner’ reality is reflected in each successive ‘cycle’ (Pers. *dowre*) that marks the history of the *zāher* world. This principle of recurrence also affects the life of the individual soul, in the sense that it is believed that the soul will be born time and time again. Persons who lived at different periods of history may, therefore, be manifestations of the same entity.<sup>36</sup> Another implication of the belief in reincarnation is the idea that the purpose of rebirth is to enable the individual souls to reach perfection. It is taught that all prophets and religions point to the same Truth, but that individuals and societies have different capacities of realising and understanding this truth. The soul acquires a higher capacity to perceive the truth after each meritorious life.

The details of this esoteric knowledge, however, are not the province of ordinary believers. They form the core of the esoteric tradition of the Yāresān, the accumulation of divine inspiration and insights acquired by leaders and ‘seers’ (*didedār*), and transmitted by learned members of the community, the ‘knowers of Scripture’ (*daftardān*), and ‘singers of sacred texts’ (*kalāmkhwān*). The hymns (*kalām*) constantly refer to this knowledge, and the community is reminded of it whenever the texts are recited, or the music associated with them is played. Details of this sacred knowledge are widely felt to be out of bounds to outsiders and may only be revealed with permission of religious leaders. Such knowledge is the province of deeply learned *daftardāns* and concerns most community members only indirectly. The present work, which chiefly aims to offer fuller and more coherent information on the religious life of a Yāresān community as a whole than was hitherto available, is not concerned with the contents of this profound knowledge. As was said earlier, it is sufficient for our purpose to recognise that such secrets exist and to analyse the role they play, as secrets, in the worldview of the community as a whole.

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<sup>36</sup> The Essence (*zāt*) of Divine Beings is also thought to become manifest in human form in each ‘period’ of history. Such beings may also be a ‘guest’ (*mehmān*) in the body of a human being for a limited time. See further below, Ch. 4.

## Aims and methods

When describing little-known minority religions such as Yāri, the usual, largely deductive way of describing religions – using accepted categories without enquiring into their relevance to, or their place in the religious system to be described – tends to be unsatisfactory. What is needed in such cases is an approach that is as inductive as possible, taking into account the evidence of the textual tradition and the realities of everyday life as far as this can be done. Interviews with informed Yāresān therefore play an important role in this book. Apart from the study of textual traditions (see below), the present work is based on repeated field research in the Guran region and Kermanshah, two field trips to Iraqi Kurdistan (2008, 2009), and frequent visits to community members now living in Tehran and in Europe, where many informal interviews and discussions were held. Furthermore, I was privileged to hold intensive discussions with leading figures among the Gurani Yāresān, notably Sayyed Fereidoun Hosseini, the son of the legendary Sayyed Wali Hosseini, and a learned expert in Yāri matters in his own right.<sup>37</sup> In Iraqi Kurdistan I benefited greatly from the knowledge of the late Sayyed Falakeddin Kaka’i, a well-known Kurdish politician and thinker. I also had at my disposal a number of formal interviews with members of various Kāka’i communities.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast to the largely synchronic approach of most of the book, the first chapter is largely dedicated to the question of the religion’s early roots, which now plays a key role in community debates on identity. In the past decades, enough information has come to light to allow us to see more clearly in this respect, although the choice of religious adherence can only be made by the believers themselves. The chapter also discusses the strong similarities between the Yāresān and certain other religious minorities in the Near East, such as the Yezidis and Alevis.

## The hymns in book form: collections of texts

One of the factors that encouraged us to bring out a new study on the Yāresān is the recent publication of several works seeking to present a more or less comprehensive corpus of the *kalāms*, or religious hymns, based on a compilation of privately-owned manuscripts. After a long time when all that was known in the West were a few isolated hymns,<sup>39</sup> several works now aim to publish most or all ‘classical’ *kalāms*, notably the older, ‘Perdiwari’ texts which are particularly venerated by

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37 Where longer passages are attributed to SF in the text, these are my translations of a series of interviews with him in Persian, held in Göttingen in June 2008.

38 Most of these were held by PM in November and December 2009.

39 A collection of *kalāms* in Turkic (Niknezhād 1973) was published earlier, but apparently did not receive much attention from scholars. For a discussion of the Turkic *kalāms* see Geranpayeh 2006.

many Yāresān in the Guran region.<sup>40</sup> The manuscripts that were consulted by the authors of these works (all of which appear to be relatively recent), show the variations that one would expect to find in a tradition where oral transmission has long played a key role. Nevertheless, the contents of the published works show sufficient similarities to afford a reasonable insight into the contents of this ‘classical’ *kalām* tradition. Besides these, a large number of more recent *kalām* texts have now also been published.<sup>41</sup> It is now possible, therefore, to study the contents and implications of something approaching an unofficial canon of *kalāms*. The newly available corpus of Yāri sacred texts throws new light on Yāri mythology, allowing us to study the contents of the great Yāri myths and their role in the religious tradition.

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40 See Ch. 6. A survey of these publications and their contents is given in App. 5.

41 E.g. Almās Khān n.d., Amir-e Zūle’i 1989, Anon 2.

## Chapter One: the Religious Background

As we saw earlier, in recent decades the question of the origins of the Yāresān community has preoccupied many members of the group, the key question being whether Yāri is to be considered as a branch of Islam or an independent religion. Since there is no doubt that elements originating in both pre-Islamic and Islamic times have contributed to shape the religious system of the Yāresān, such ‘essentialist’ questions are capable of different answers. No attempts will be made here to provide such answers. Rather, it is proposed to examine what is known about certain key phases of the religious history of the western ‘Iranian-speaking’ regions (including what is now northern Iraq), so as to offer the reader an opportunity of judging which Islamic and pre-Islamic ideas and beliefs may have informed the worldview of early Yāresān communities.

The communities in which the Yāri faith developed spoke Western Iranian languages such as Gurani and perhaps Lori, which suggests that their culture harks back to that of the early Iranian tribes who probably entered western Iran around or before 1000 BCE. These tribes in turn descended from the so-called proto-Iranians who, together with the proto-Indians, once formed the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European people. The Indo-Iranians, it seems, developed their own, characteristic religious tradition, which was carried on by both the ancient Indians and Iranians. Among the latter, however, the new teachings of Zarathustra (Greek: Zoroastrēs) gave rise to the origin of a new religion,<sup>1</sup> known to us as Zoroastrianism. It is widely believed that Zoroastrianism developed in the Eastern Iranian regions, around or before 1000 BCE. The Iranian people who settled in the west, such as the ancestors of the Kurds, probably had no contact with Zoroastrianism until much later. It can be assumed therefore that their religious tradition bore a significant resemblance to the religion of the Indo-Iranians, but was not a form of Zoroastrianism.

### The Indo-Iranian Religion: some relevant aspects

What we know about the religion of the Indo-Iranians is mostly based on a comparison between the ancient Indian religious texts, the Veda, and those of the early Zoroastrian Iranians, which are collectively referred to as the Avesta. Of the latter, the texts ascribed to Zarathustra himself, the *Gāthās*, and some others, were pre-

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1 Persian *dīn*, deriving from Avestan *daēnā*, ‘worldview’. Although the concept of a ‘religion’ may have been foreign to Zarathustra himself, his worldview did indeed become the foundation of a religion.

served in an ancient form of the Avestan language (Old Avestan). Other Avestan texts are in a later form of the language and are known as the ‘Young Avesta’. Young Avestan texts, having long been transmitted orally in a relatively free manner, may contain both very ancient and later elements.<sup>2</sup>

## Divinities and Beliefs

### *Divinities*

Particularly relevant for the purpose of this book are the following Ancient Iranian divinities:<sup>3</sup>

Mit(h)ra,<sup>4</sup> the Guardian of Contracts and human relations, who was also closely linked to the Sun and to the energy of Fire.

Verethraghna, the ‘resistance breaker’, the god of success and victory, who is sometimes represented as a wild boar, and is associated in the Avesta with Mithra as a lesser divinity.

Tiri, the god of the planet Mercury, who had strong connections with writing.<sup>5</sup>

A prominent female goddess is to be found in most early Indo-Iranian pantheons (Veda: Sarasvati; *Gāthās*: Spentā Armaiti; Young Avesta: Anāhitā, Ashi; Western Iran: probably Anāhitā).

A pair of twin gods is also a common feature of these pantheons (Veda: Aśvina; Av. Haurvatāt, Ameretāt; cf. in Roman Mithraism: Cautes and Cautopates).

Natural phenomena such as the Sun, Moon, Fire, Water and Wind were worshipped as divine beings.

Both Zoroastrianism and the Vedic religion know a group of seven prominent gods (Av. *Amesha Spenta*; Ved. *Āditya*);<sup>6</sup> both Yāri and Yezidism have similar Heptads. This suggests that the Indo-Iranians and early Iranians prominently worshipped a group of seven divine beings, and that the number seven continued to be associated with groups of divinities or holy beings in later times.

### *Elements of Nature*

The Indo-Iranians, it seems, had a pronounced veneration for elements of nature such as fire and water. The hearth-fire<sup>7</sup> played an important role in the religious life of both Vedic Indians and Iranian Zoroastrians. In Zoroastrianism both fire and water must be present when a major ritual is performed, and each of the seven ‘elements’ of nature (fire, water, earth, sky, plants, animals, and humans) is thought to

2 On this see further Kreyenbroek 1996b.

3 For possible correspondences with Yāri divine beings, see Ch. 4.

4 Henceforth ‘Mithra’.

5 See Boyce 1982:32–33.

6 On the *Ādityas* see Möller 1984:30. On the *Amesha Spentas* see Boyce 1979:22 *et passim*.

7 In Yezidism, the term for ‘hearth fire’ (*ojāq*) is used to denote a ‘priestly’ lineage (cf. Yar. *xāndān*).



be under the special protection of one of the seven *Amesha Spentas*. Such beliefs continue to some extent in Yāri and Yezidism.

### *Gods as 'Guests'*

The tendency to represent abstractions as divine beings is prominently present in Zarathustra's *Gāthās*.<sup>8</sup> It is also found later in the Middle Persian Books, where divine beings can be the 'guests' (*mehmān*) of humans, i.e. indwelling.<sup>9</sup> The belief that divine beings representing abstract qualities can become immanent in humans as 'guests' has now been shown to go back to the Indo-Iranian tradition.<sup>10</sup> The fact that, in Yāri certain people are also known to have divine beings as 'guests' (*mehmān*, see further Ch. 4) suggests that such beliefs were present among the Yāresān's early Western Iranian ancestors.

### *The Creation Myth*

On the basis of Zoroastrian accounts, in combination with the evidence of the Veda and of Roman Mithraism (on which see further below), it is possible to reconstruct a hypothetical Indo-Iranian myth of creation which is similar in many ways to that found in the Yāri tradition.<sup>11</sup>

In the beginning the world was generated in embryonic form: it was small, and contained in a small space or cave in a rock. The world was without movement, without light, and floating on water. On it stood the prototypes of animals and plants: one bull and one plant. Then Mit(h)ra – the Lord of Fire, the Sun, and Energy, who had until then been hidden in the rock (as fire is 'hidden' in stone) – came into the cave that held the embryonic world. Mithra made the first ritual sacrifice, killing the bull and drying and pounding the plant, as many generations of priests were to do later for major rituals. While Mithra did this, the Sun, which is closely connected with him, appeared in the cave and rose up, thereby causing the roof of the cave to be raised to three times its original height, so that it became the sky we know. Mithra's ritual actions caused both earth and waters to increase their volume three times, so that land and sea came into existence, and the world became as we know it. From the sacrificed prototypes of animals and plants sprang all species of animals and plants. Mithra, who was probably the head of a group of seven divine beings who take care of this world, had thus brought the world to birth by means of the first religious ritual, which involved killing a bull. He became Lord of this world and Guardian of Contracts, ruling over the relations between men.

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8 See Kreyenbroek 1985:10–30.

9 Kreyenbroek 1985:125–129.

10 Pinault 1998, cited by Parpola 2002:60, cf. Kreyenbroek 2010b.

11 See Kreyenbroek 1992, 1993, 1994a.

*Cyclical Time*

A belief in cyclical history, which is common to later Indian texts and to the Western Iranian traditions of Yāri and Yezidism, is not clearly attested either in the Avesta or in the Veda. The Vedic word *yuga*, which later meant ‘cycle’, can refer to ‘generations’,<sup>12</sup> i.e. to a recurring phenomenon. It seems unlikely that the Indo-Iranians had a clear concept of history, but it may be that the progress of time was associated, in some milieus at least, with repetition. The linear view of history that is implied in earlier Zoroastrian sources<sup>13</sup> was probably part of Zarathustra’s innovative teaching. Both the Yāri and Yezidi traditions reflect a belief in cyclical history.

*Reincarnation*

Similarly, the notion that history repeats itself may have given rise in some Indo-Iranian milieus to a belief in reincarnation. No trace of such a belief can be found in the Avesta or in the Veda but, as in the case of the cycles of history, it is a prominent feature of later Hinduism. The existence of similar ideas in Yāri and Yezidism suggests that a worldview that could give rise to a belief in reincarnation might already have been present among ancient Western Iranians.

**Priests, Ritual, Traditions***Priests*

The ritual was performed by priests; major rituals probably required more than one priest. Priests knew the right way to address the divine Beings through songs of praise and other religious texts. As writing was yet unknown, they learned these texts by heart and taught them to the younger generation of their family. Other members of the community presumably did not need to learn this detailed religious knowledge. Thus the priesthood came to be hereditary, and the division between priests and laymen was strictly observed. The same is true in modern Yāri and Yezidism.

*Ritual*

One of the central acts of Indo-Iranian ritual must have consisted in welcoming the gods with food, drink, and hymns of praise.<sup>14</sup> To this end animal sacrifice was made, and the juice of a certain plant<sup>15</sup> was extracted. Both meat and drink were consecrated by means of a liturgy that included songs to praise the divinity or divinities

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12 Rezania 2010:34–35.

13 It is perhaps significant that in later Zoroastrianism, this linear view of history was eventually reinterpreted so as to include three cycles, although these were not thought of as exact repetitions. See Kreyenbroek 2002a:36–39. On the subject of time in Zoroastrianism see Rezania 2010.

14 Thieme 1957b.

15 Ved. *Soma*; Av. *Haoma*.

who were invoked. The ritual sacrifice may have been regarded as a repetition of Mithra's original sacrifice, which 'delivered' the world. After food and drink had been ritually offered to the gods, they were partaken of by the humans attending the ritual.

### *Sacred Texts*

Texts of religious significance were transmitted orally, and memorised by sons of priestly families at an early age. Apart from an elementary training in reciting liturgical texts and performing rituals, some Indo-Iranian priests evidently received a further education that taught them to understand the deeper meaning of the texts, and in some cases to compose new ones.<sup>16</sup> Orality still plays a key role in the transmission of holy texts in Yāri and Yezidism.

### *Sacred Girdle*

The evidence suggests that many Indo-Iranians wore a sacred thread or girdle, which was apparently thought to have protective qualities.<sup>17</sup> A sacred girdle was traditionally worn by Yezidis,<sup>18</sup> and is still used for ritual purposes by Yāresān (see Ch. 5).

## Zoroastrianism in Western Iran

As has been shown elsewhere,<sup>19</sup> it was probably from the time of the Achaemenid King Darius I (521–485 BCE) onwards that Zoroastrianism came to be actively promoted in Western Iran, with strong support from the court. It seems plausible to assume that the acceptance of Zoroastrianism began in the heartlands of the Achaemenid Empire (i.e. roughly in the Iranian province of Fars), and gradually spread to other 'Iranian' lands.<sup>20</sup>

It seems likely that from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE onwards, Zoroastrianism co-existed and interacted in Western Iran with an older Iranian religious tradition.<sup>21</sup> Zoroastrian teachings, it seems, prevailed most fully in the Achaemenid heartlands, which were directly exposed to the influence of the court and the Zoroastrian priests it supported. On the periphery of those central regions, such as the lands where the Kurds now live, elements of the earlier belief system seem to have persisted, with some influ-

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16 In early Zoroastrianism some priests attended religious teachers for a period of three years to be trained in advanced religious studies. See Kotwal and Kreyenbroek 1992:62–63.

17 On the Zoroastrian *kusti* see Boyce 1979:31–32.

18 Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005:15.

19 Kreyenbroek 2006, 2010b.

20 Koch (1987) shows how this may have occurred. However, the details of the spreading of Zoroastrianism are still debated by scholars.

21 A third factor was the religion of the Elamites, which probably did not play a significant role in the north-western homelands of the ancestors of the Yāresān, and is therefore not discussed here.

ence from Zoroastrianism. From Achaemenid times onwards, Western Iran was therefore home to a range of cults arising out of the meeting between the earlier Iranian religion and Zoroastrianism. In what follows some characteristic elements of Zoroastrian teaching that may have influenced the development of Yāri beliefs will be discussed.

### **Good and Evil, Divine and Demonic Beings**

The older, Western Iranian religion probably regarded all that happens in the world as a result of the will of the gods, influenced to some extent by the behaviour of humans. In Zoroastrianism, on the other hand, the world is seen as a battlefield on which the forces of good can defeat evil, a battle in which humans play a key role. The Yāri worldview (see Ch. 4), which sees man's fate as being mainly in the hands of the Divine, could be interpreted as a continuation of the pre-Zoroastrian religious tradition. However, the Zoroastrian belief in opposition between good and evil also seems to be reflected in Yāri. A similar combination of belief in God's omnipotence and in the opposition between good and evil, however, can also be found in many forms of Islam.

#### *Seven Divine Beings*

As we saw earlier, a heptad of divine beings, the *Amesha Spentas*, plays a central role in Zoroastrian teaching. Each of these beings represents what we would call an abstract concept, and each has a special connection with one of the seven good 'creations' (Man, Plants, Animals, Earth, Sky, Fire, and Water) which Ahura Mazda created in the beginning. A group of seven great angels (Yār. *Haft Tan*; Yez. *Heft Surr*), some of which have links with elements of nature, is also found in the religious systems of both the Yāresān (see Ch. 4) and the Yezidis. It may be significant that, as in the case of the Zoroastrian *Amesha Spentas*, the Yāri *Haft Tan* include a female figure and two twin beings.

#### *Indwelling Divine Qualities*

At least some members of the Zoroastrian Heptad (such as 'Best Righteousness', 'Beneficent Devotion', and 'Good Thinking') can have a place in the human mind. The battle between good and evil is thought of as taking place both in the outside world and in the human mind. In Yāri teaching the concept of immanence also plays a significant role (see Ch. 4).

#### *Mithra and Anāhitā*

The earlier Achaemenid kings only invoked the Zoroastrian god Ahuramazdā in their inscriptions, with occasional references to 'the [other] gods who are'. From the time of Artaxerxes II (405–359 BCE) onwards,<sup>22</sup> we find the names of Mithra and

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22 Kent 1953:154–155.

Anāhitā following that of Ahuramazdā, which suggests that these divinities had been deeply revered in Western Iran before of the advent of Zoroastrianism, and eventually came to be worshipped as part of that religion.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Ahreman's Bull-killing*

In later Zoroastrianism the act of killing the primeval bull, which caused the world to become as we know it, is attributed to the Evil Spirit, Ahreman. Ahreman entered the ideal world created by Ahura Mazdā in order to spoil it, and killed or defiled Ahura Mazdā's seven ideal creations. The creations fought back, and the forces of good and evil are believed to be doing battle in our world. In the Yāri cosmogony, on the other hand, as in the hypothetical Indo-Iranian creation myth outlined above, the primeval sacrifice of a bull or deer is described as a positive act that brought the world into being.

#### **Time and Eschatology**

Zoroastrian teachings reflect a mainly linear view of history, in which each human soul is born only once and is recompensed for its life on earth in the afterlife. After death, the soul of the individual goes to heaven or hell. Our world is seen as a battleground in which the forces of evil that are present in the cosmos can be defeated by the powers of good with the help of humans. When evil has been defeated the final saviour will come; there will be a resurrection of the dead, and time will end.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Limited and Unlimited Time*<sup>25</sup>

The end of the world we know implies the end of time. Our world was created in 'limited time', which was fashioned out of non-dynamic time. At the end of time, the world will return to a 'timeless', non-dynamic state, but without the taint of evil. What is called limited and unlimited 'time' in the Zoroastrian scriptures probably also refers to a mode of being, a form of reality. While 'limited time' refers to our imperfect, dynamic world, 'timeless time' represents a non-dynamic, essential mode of being that is unlike that of 'limited time', but nevertheless underlies it. In this respect the Zoroastrian worldview seems to correspond closely to Yāri beliefs about 'outer' (*zāher*) and 'inner' (*bāten*) reality.

#### *The End of Time*

Zoroastrianism teaches that before the end of time, a saviour will appear who is miraculously born of a virgin. The dead will be resurrected. There will be a final judgement, and a final battle between good and evil, through which the last vestiges of evil will be overcome. By contrast, Yāri teaches a fundamentally cyclical form of history, although the belief that there will be an end to time is also attested. The end

23 On Anāhitā see Boyce 1982:216–220.

24 Kreyenbroek 2002a.

25 On concepts of time in pre-modern Zoroastrianism see Rezania 2010. See further Ch. 4, fn. 13.

of time as described by Yāresān sources is accompanied by some of the phenomena found in the Zoroastrian accounts. As several of these are also found in Islamic eschatological traditions, however, we cannot be certain how they came to be included in the Yāri belief system.

### *Heaven and Hell*

Until the end of time, the souls of the righteous will go to paradise, and those of the wicked to hell. Reincarnation does not form part of Zoroastrian teaching. As in the case of the end of time, the teachings of Yāri in this respect are ambiguous: on the one hand the soul migrates, but the concepts of heaven and hell also play a role.

### **Rituals**

Rituals play an important role in Zoroastrianism. The most important rite is the *yasna*, originally a sacrificial ritual in which meat,<sup>26</sup> bread and *haoma* juice were offered to the divine beings, accompanied by a liturgy in the Avestan language. The consecrated food was later partaken of by those present. Besides lengthy rituals like the *yasna*, there were shorter ceremonies such as the *bāj*, in which various foodstuffs were prayed over and divided among those present.<sup>27</sup> The Yāri *jam* and *niyāz* ceremonies (see Ch. 5) have some traits that are reminiscent of the *yasna* and *bāj* rituals respectively.

### *Sacred Girdle and Shirt*

When a person, usually a child, was accepted into the religion, they were invested with a ‘sacred cord’ (*kusti*) and a ‘sacred shirt’ (*sudreh*).<sup>28</sup> On the Yāri requirement for participants in a ritual to be *baste*, i.e. to wear a girdle or sash, see also p. 98 fn. 3.

## Roman Mithraism and the ancient Western Iranian religion

As we saw earlier, it can be argued that elements of the original Iranian religion lived on to the west of the Achaemenid heartlands. This is suggested by the combined evidence of the Yāri tradition, Yezidism, the *Khorramiya* of early Islamic times (on which see below), and indirectly by aspects of Roman Mithraism. Members of that cult claimed to be ‘Persians’; they greeted each other with an authentic Iranian expression and venerated a divinity with the Iranian name Mithras. Some relevant elements of Roman Mithraist beliefs are:

Mithras is most often represented while slaying a bull (*tauroctony*). This sacrifice apparently caused the sun to come up and brought to world into being.

<sup>26</sup> In later Zoroastrianism animal sacrifice no longer forms part of the *yasna*.

<sup>27</sup> Kreyenbroek 2010b.

<sup>28</sup> Yezidis also have a sacred shirt as well as a sacred girdle, see Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005:15.

The *tauroctony* took place in a cave, i.e. a small space in a rock.

Mithras himself is said to have ‘sprung from a rock’ (being called *Petrogenēs* in Greek) cf. the hypothetical *Urmythos* outlined above, where Mithra springs from the rock of the Cave.

Mithras is closely connected with the Sun (Sol).

Another key scene in Mithraic iconography is the ‘banquet-scene’, depicting Mithras and Sol sitting on the hide of the bull and partaking of a banquet.

The main ceremony of the Mithraist community consisted of a repetition of the primordial bull sacrifice, followed by the consumption of the meat.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Belgian scholar, Franz Cumont, noted the Iranian features of Mithraism, and concluded that Roman Mithraism derived from a form of Zoroastrianism.<sup>29</sup> This view was widely held until the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time the increase in information on Zoroastrianism led many scholars to reject this theory, which does indeed ignore some definite incongruities. Thus, as in Yāri, in Mithraism the *tauroctony* is represented as a positive act, whereas in Zoroastrianism it is the wicked Ahreman who kills the bull. When the ‘Zoroastrian hypothesis’ was given up there was a tendency to argue that Mithraism was an essentially Roman phenomenon that comprised a few Iranian elements.<sup>30</sup> These theories, however, left the Iranian elements largely unexplained. In the 1990s Kreyenbroek<sup>31</sup> drew attention to the possibility that Mithraic mythology was inspired by a non-Zoroastrian version of the Indo-Iranian creation myth that had survived in Western Iran. The possibility of an Iranian origin of key elements of Mithraism is now accepted, for various reasons, by some prominent Mithraic scholars.<sup>32</sup>

If all this is true, it seems likely that aspects of a Western-Iranian tradition were first adopted by Roman soldiers who had been stationed in the eastern regions of Anatolia or northern Mesopotamia around the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, and came into contact with Western Iranians there. These features subsequently developed into a cult that spread all over the Roman Empire. It should be noted, however, that the original Iranian religion was probably more complex than the Roman cult appears to have been. Roman Mithraism evidently focussed entirely on the veneration of Mithras, while the Iranian cult presumably worshipped a pantheon including the goddess Anāhitā and several other divinities besides Mithra.

## Hellenistic cults

The conquest of the Iranian lands by Alexander the Great in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE introduced Hellenistic culture to the inhabitants of these regions as a dominant cul-

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29 Cumont 1903.

30 Such as Gordon 1972.

31 Kreyenbroek 1992, 1993, 1994a.

32 Gordon 2001; Beck 2006:238–239.

tural force. The rule of the Seleucids, Alexander's successors in the Near East, led to the establishment of Greek cults at least in centres of Hellenistic civilisation. During this period, some divine figures belonging to one religious tradition came to be more or less identified with those of another, leading to a degree of syncretism. It is possible that the Yāri belief that a divinity may become manifest in different guises was influenced by such syncretistic tendencies.

### Gnostic Movements of late Antiquity, Manichaeism

In a study with ground-breaking implications, the Hungarian scholar Eszter Spät<sup>33</sup> has shown that several *topoi* that are found among the Gnostic movements of Mesopotamia in the early Christian centuries, including Manichaeism, occur again in the mythology of Yezidism, which shows many similarities to that of Yāri. Although no similar research exists so far for the latter, it is relevant to note that such gnostic storylines must have circulated in Western Iranian milieus several centuries later.

Another contribution that Gnosticism may have made to Western Iranian thinking was Mani's (216-77 CE) claim that all Prophets had brought the same message (so that their appearances in a way represented a recurring event). Manichaeism also taught a belief in the reincarnation of the individual soul. Such teachings may have strengthened the later belief in the re-appearance of the same divinity or individual in different forms, as in Yāri (see also below under *Khorammiya*).

### Christianity

Christianity had a relatively strong presence in Mesopotamia and Iran in the pre-Islamic period. There were many Christian monasteries in parts of the modern Kurdish-speaking regions, some of which were established in pre-Islamic times.<sup>34</sup> This may have affected the worldview of the surrounding populations to some extent. Insofar as the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century debates between Nestorians and Monophysites about the divine nature of Christ affected non-urban populations in Western Iran at all, their effect may have been to strengthen the view that God's Spirit can become incarnate in man, a notion that plays an important part in Yāri.

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33 Spät 2010.

34 See Bois 1967.



## Islam

With the advent of Islam in the course of the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, the inhabitants of the Kurdish-speaking lands were confronted with a phenomenon that was to influence their cultural and religious lives longer and more profoundly than any of the previous religions that had swept across their territories. Little detailed evidence is available for the early stages of the Islamisation of non-urban parts of Kurdistan, but it was probably a gradual process. Conversions, it seems, were often the result of social or financial pressures. Most of the ancestors of the Kurds probably lived outside urban areas, where such pressures were strongest, and the new faith may have pervaded their culture relatively slowly.

Unlike Christianity or Judaism, where a key function of the priesthood is to provide a living link between erudite theology and the religious needs of the masses, Sunni Islam does not recognise a professional class of priests.<sup>35</sup> The development of this 'orthodox' form of Islam therefore lay mainly in the hands of the *ulamā*, who chiefly relied on intellectual approaches in order to understand God's Will. Approximately from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards the dominant form of Islam came to be increasingly defined in terms of Islamic Law (*Shari'a*). Official, Sunni Islam, then, can be characterised as a scriptural and highly literate religion. For a long time, moreover, it used Arabic as the exclusive language of religion and learning. This form of Islam was consequently more easily accepted by the educated than by illiterate, Kurdish-speaking tribesmen. As we saw earlier, it took a long time for many non-urban Kurds to find their way to Islam, and when they did, they tended to chose a range of different, 'non-dominant' forms.

### Oral Transmission

There can be little doubt that Western Iranian culture outside urban centres was largely oral, which probably had significant implications for the development of religious traditions there. As 'official' Islam was progressively defined in ways conditioned by written culture, its dominant form may not have been easily compatible with the worldviews that were current in non-urban Kurdish regions. Although oral culture is by no means homogeneous, certain characteristic aspects of oral transmission seem to have played a significant role in the development of the traditions of the Yāresān and Yezidis.

In most non-literate milieus religion is transmitted directly, in a setting where the audience's readiness or refusal to accept the information offered is a key factor. If the speaker's words fail to find acceptance, the scriptural authority underlying it at best plays a subordinate role. What is felt to be true by the community therefore

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<sup>35</sup> It is true of course that in several countries such as modern Turkey and Central Asia (influenced, it seems, by Iranian culture and possibly Christianity), such priesthoods do in fact exist. However, this appears to be a matter of local custom (*'ādat*) rather than an institution sanctioned by Sunni Law.

tends to override the claims of official, orthodox teaching. In an oral culture, concepts that run counter to established views are not likely to be easily accepted: to be successful, the new teachings needed to be adapted to established beliefs.

Religious teachings were typically transmitted by means of narratives, such as myths, legends and anecdotes. Myths and legends originally belonging to a pre-Islamic tradition often continued to be transmitted as part of a new religious system. Certain oral cultures in Western Iran tended to construct a form of history that aims at fulfilling the needs of the community rather than representing objective facts.<sup>36</sup> This may mean that historical figures are depicted as having precisely those qualities which the community regards as typical of their functions. Abstract teachings are comparatively rare, and 'theology' in the Islamic or Christian sense seems alien to non-literate audiences. An implicit system of beliefs and attitudes can generally be found in such cultures, but this tends to become explicit only as a result of contacts or conflicts with other religious traditions.

In many non-literate milieus, the degree of one's personal belief in religious teaching is not regarded as a key issue. Religion is first and foremost part of social life. In Kurdish culture, as in many others, entire tribes could convert to Islam when this was felt to be advantageous. At the same time, however, new converts might continue to cherish many of their traditional beliefs.

In traditional non-urban Kurdish milieus, it seems, certain religious propositions could be accepted with a vehemence of emotion that is comparatively rare in literate, urban cultures. In this way a figure like Ali, whom Shi'ites regard as the legitimate successor to the Prophet Mohammad, came to be venerated in certain Western Iranian 'sectarian' milieus as a manifestation of the Divinity.

### **The Shi'a**

Some of those who could not identify with the dominant Islamic culture of their day as represented by the 'orthodox' Sunna, chose to join the Shi'a. This movement originated in tensions in the early Muslim community after the death of the prophet Mohammad (632 CE). A majority held that the succession of the Prophet as 'Leader of the Faithful' should devolve on his closest associates. Others, however, felt that family ties should take precedence, which meant that the succession should go to the Prophet's son-in-law, Ali, and his descendants. Ali eventually succeeded as the fourth and last of the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs', but was murdered after a brief period in office (656–661). His followers were known as the *Shi'at 'Ali* (Party of Ali). A crucial event in the subsequent history of the Shi'a was the killing of Ali's son Hoseyn in the battle of Kerbela (680), which confirmed the image of the Shi'a as a faith of martyrs. This may have enhanced the attraction of Shi'ite ideas for those who believed that worldly success was not necessarily a sign of divine approval. Early Shi'ite ideas took many forms and inspired a range of social groups. For the

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<sup>36</sup> Kreyenbroek 1995:36–39, 2008.

purposes of this book the most important Shi'ite movements were the Twelver Shi'ites, the Isma'ilis, and the *Gholāt* or 'excessive Shi'ites'.

### *Personal Leadership*

A key element of Shi'i thought is the belief that the world needs a personal religious Leader (*Imām*. Pers. *Emām*) who is qualified to lead the community because of his special status: he is omniscient and infallible. As time went on, allegiance to a living, human figure was transformed into the belief in an unseen Imām, whose return is expected at the end of time.

### *Twelver Shi'ism*

The form of Shi'ism that is best known in the West is the so-called Twelver Shi'a, which believes that the twelfth Imām is the last to have succeeded Ali. This Imām is 'hidden' and will appear again at the end of time. He is the Prophet's rightful representative on earth. The conviction that deeper layers of truth can only be fully known to the Hidden Imām strengthened beliefs in the gap between 'external' (*zāher*) and 'inner' (*bāten*) realities.

### *Isma'ilism*

A belief in the opposition between 'outer' and 'inner' truth plays an even greater role among the Isma'ilis. This group believes that the last Imām was Mohammad b. Ismā'il (d. 760), the eldest son and one-time heir designate of the sixth Imām, Ja'far al-Sādiq (d. 765). Ismā'il died before Ja'far, and the Twelver Shi'ites accepted Ja'far's later decision to let the Imāmate pass to his son Musā al-Qāsim (d. 799) and his successors. The Isma'ilis, on the other hand, reasoned that all Imāms are infallible, which in their view implied that Ja'far's original designation of Ismā'il as the next Imām continued to be valid. The fact that the designated Imām was no longer alive at his predecessor's death probably strengthened their belief that 'inner' truth is more significant than 'outer' reality. The Isma'ilis are often referred to as *bāteni*, or 'believers in esoteric truth'.<sup>37</sup> Missionary activity (*da'wa*) was characteristic of this group; from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, propagandists were sent all over the Muslim world, including Western Iranian lands.<sup>38</sup> Novices were initiated in stages into the deeper meanings of esoteric truth, which means that large numbers of adherents were only aware of relatively simple aspects of its teachings. The Isma'ilis and Yāresān both believe that the Divinity can show itself in human form, and thus become immanent or 'indwelling'; both groups believe that such manifestations of the Divine were recurrent events, repeating themselves in a number of 'periods' (Yar. *dowre*; Ism. *dowr*). Like the Yāresān, the Druze, a branch of Isma'ilism, believe in reincarnation. A minor but suggestive point of similarity is the special significance

37 The term could also be used for other groups who held similar beliefs.

38 Crone 2012:181: 'Al-Baghdādī explicitly says that the Isma'ilis recruited the Kurds of the Jibāl and the Khurramīs of Bābak's region...'

both communities accord to Ali's sword, *Zū 'l-Fiqār* (Pers. *Zu 'l-Feqār*).<sup>39</sup> At least one Yāri legend has a striking counterpart in the lore of a branch of the Isma'ilis, the Nizaris or 'Assassins'.<sup>40</sup>

### *Gholāt*

Groups of Shi'ites who have an extreme veneration for, or indeed worship of Ali are referred to in Muslim sources as *gholāt*. Several groups of this type combined their feelings for Ali with a belief system that presumably went back in part to a pre-Islamic substratum. The term Ali-Ellāhi (Those who think Ali is God), which is sometimes used for the Yāresān generally and may refer to certain non-Gurani groups, reflects *gholāt* teachings. The Yāri belief that certain figures act as mediators between the absolute and the temporal spheres, may have been informed by ancient Iranian beliefs about Mithra,<sup>41</sup> *gholāt* ideas, or a combination of both.

### **The Khorramiyya**

As we saw earlier, various groups of Shi'ites believed that there were significant aspects of truth that were not taught by legalistic Islam. The belief that knowledge that is not taught by mainstream Islam could nevertheless be true and profoundly significant presumably invited speculation on questions of religion. This in turn made it easy for ideas deriving from older faiths to merge with Islamic ones in popular belief. Shi'ite propagandists are known to have been active among the Kurds, who were probably especially receptive to teachings that coincided with their traditional beliefs.

A time when the hopes of various Shi'ite groups must have been raised was the end of the Umayyad Caliphate (661-749), when a protest movement against that dynasty was originally led by an enigmatic figure called Abu Muslim. A charismatic leader of non-Arab descent, Abu Muslim became the main focus of the aspirations of non-Arab, and notably Iranian dissidents in the Islamic Empire. The Umayyads were eventually defeated and a new dynasty of Sunni Caliphs, the Abbasids (749–1256) came to power. When Abu Muslim was killed shortly afterwards (754) during an audience with Caliph al-Mansur, protests arose in various parts of the Iranian lands.<sup>42</sup> In 760, only a few years after Abu Muslim's death, the sixth Shi'ite Imām died and the Isma'ilis regarded his deceased son Ismā'il as his legitimate successor (see above). These events gave rise to a series of popular movements that combined elements of a pre-Islamic belief system with the esotericism that was characteristic of Ismā'ilism.

39 On *Zu 'l-Feqār* in the Yāri tradition see further pp. 78, 92. On the role of this sword in Ismā'ili observance see <http://www.islamawareness.net/Deviant/Ismailis/dua-one.html>.

40 See below, Ch. 6 under *Gelim wa Kul*. On the Nizaris see Hodgson 2005.

41 Cf. Yt.10.55, where Mithra says he may come from his eternal sphere to that of 'limited time'.

42 See e.g. Hitti 1964:290–291.

In a ground-breaking work, Patricia Crone<sup>43</sup> has traced the way in which regions on the periphery of the Persian heartlands, such as western Iran, the Caspian Provinces and Khorasan, saw a series of rebellions by heresiarchs who combined political aspirations with un-orthodox beliefs. In these districts, it seems, popular religion seized the opportunity of reaffirming some of its traditional beliefs, at first through movements that were felt to be un-Islamic, whilst later uprisings of a similar nature were regarded as Islamic but far removed from orthodoxy. A general name for such groups was *khorrardini* or *khorrami*. The term was first used in Khorasan in the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>44</sup> and later came to be associated with groups that rebelled in the wake of Abu Muslim's death. A little later it is attributed to the Western Iranian rebel Bābak,<sup>45</sup> who ruled in Azerbaijan and the Zagros mountains from 816 till 838. Khorrami communities are known to have existed until the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>46</sup> According to the 10<sup>th</sup>-century theologian al-Maqdisi,<sup>47</sup> in the *Jibāl* (i.e. roughly the Zagros region) such communities believed that all religious leaders embodied the same spirit. In al-Maqdisi's time, the Khorramis claimed to be Muslims but did not perform such fundamental duties as (Islamic) prayer, fasting, ritual ablution, or avoiding non-*halāl* food. Most *Khorramis* regarded the views of virtually all other Muslims on the rightful succession of the Prophet as erroneous, and only their own as truly Islamic.

Although several Islamic sources<sup>48</sup> attribute the origin of the *Khorramiya* to the pre-Islamic movement of Mazdak, Crone's in-depth study of both movements led her to claim that the two groups in fact drew their inspiration from the same popular substratum of beliefs. These included a cyclical view of history,<sup>49</sup> the possibility for divine beings to become immanent or incarnate in humans at various periods of time (which appears to be attested particularly in and around the 'Kurdish' areas), and reincarnation.<sup>50</sup> In her Conclusion, Crone aptly writes: 'The closest restatement of

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43 Crone 2012. I am very much indebted to the late Professor Crone for showing me a draft of this very important work before it was published. The passages on the *Khorramiya* and the *Khurdanaye* in the present Chapter are largely based on her findings, and her work has profoundly influenced our understanding of Yāresān history generally.

44 Information I owe to Prof. Patricia Crone (private communication May 2011).

45 Crone 2012:40, 62ff. *et passim*.

46 Crone 2012:24.

47 See Crone 2012:229.

48 E.g. Nezam al-Molk 1955:195–243.

49 Crone 2012:244–245.

50 Crone describes such beliefs as part of a 'non-Persian Zoroastrianism', but it is far from certain to what extent the Zoroastrian tradition as it is usually defined by both modern believers and most academics was adopted in the mountainous periphery of Western Iran. Zoroastrianism, according to this definition, was characterised by its rituals with their elaborate liturgy in the ancient Avestan language; its belief in the more or less linear movement of 'limited' time from Creation till the End of Time; the incompatibility of its teachings with reincarnation; and in Sasanian times by its well-organised priestly hierarchy. The present writer therefore regards such features as deriving from a Western Iranian tradition that was not identical with Zoroastrianism proper, although there were many similarities.

old Iranian beliefs is that of the Ahl-i Haqq, also known as Ali Ilahis, Yārisān and Kākāi'is, whose beliefs seem to come in almost as many forms as Khurramism itself.<sup>51</sup>

### *The Khurdanaye*<sup>52</sup>

The same or very similar beliefs to those of the Khorramis were apparently held by a group referred to as *Khurdanaye*.<sup>53</sup> Dionysius of Tell Mahre (d. 848) says that the *Khurdanaye* of his time constituted 'a race of their own', and that they were pagans but their cult was Magian. They had accepted the religion of the Muslims, but they followed primitive paganism and Magianism. The word 'Magianism', which generally denotes Zoroastrianism proper, may be used here to mean a cult that was regarded as being 'Iranian' without being Zoroastrian in our sense of the word.<sup>54</sup>

### **Sufism**

The early Islamic community clearly respected those whose religiosity took the form of personal piety<sup>55</sup> or who combined mystical ideas with knowledge of theological matters.<sup>56</sup> In the course of time, however, the individual, personal quest for direct knowledge of the Absolute came to be regarded by a majority as alien to orthodox Islam. The conflict between these views came to a head with the execution of the great mystic Mansur al-Hallāj (d. 922),<sup>57</sup> whose exclamation, *Anā 'l-Ḥaqq* (I am the Truth)<sup>58</sup> illustrates the extent to which Sufi thinking had come to differ from the belief in God's absolute transcendence that was taught by mainstream Islam. In many forms of Sufism the concept of love for and from God plays a central role, and in Persian God is often referred to as *Yār* (The Friend), a usage shared by the Yāresān. Originally, the term 'Sufi' referred mainly to individual seekers, but from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards the popular appeal of Sufi teachings led to the formation of mystical orders or brotherhoods (*tariqat*). Besides those who dedicated their whole lives to the quest for the Absolute, these mystical orders included ordinary householders who attended communal meetings only at certain times.

Islamic mysticism not only validated personal religious experiences, but its teachings had strong esoteric elements, referring to truths that could only be apprehended by those who had achieved a profound understanding. This may in turn have strengthened beliefs in a dichotomy between 'outer' and 'inner' reality. In its

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51 Crone 2012:473.

52 Crone 2012:63–64.

53 The term is distinct from the usual Aramaic term for 'Kurds', *Khurdaye*, but to what extent this distinction represents a difference in meaning cannot be ascertained.

54 Pace Crone, cf. above, fn. 50.

55 Such as the 'People of the Bench' (*ahl al-suffa*), see Schimmel 1975:28.

56 Such as Hasan of Basra (d. 728), see Schimmel 1975:30, 31.

57 Schimmel 1975:62–77.

58 This exclamation could either mean, 'I am part of Absolute Reality', or, as was imputed to Hallāj by his opponents, 'I am God'.

later stages, Sufism offered personal leadership and guidance, with clear distinctions between *Pir* and *Morid* (mystical teacher and disciple). Thus it provided those who were culturally conditioned to need this with the possibility to venerate a living human being. Groups of a master's disciples, and later Sufi orders offered members a strong social basis and a pronounced sense of community.

Sufi teaching largely took place orally, using edifying tales and anecdotes rather than legalistic or theological discourse to illustrate religious truths. Music played an important role in various Sufi milieus. As the teachings of certain Sufi masters<sup>59</sup> focussed on the non-worldly, they tended to be tolerant of the persistence of pre-Islamic ideas, beliefs and practices. In such cultural milieus a great deal of pre-Islamic lore came to be accepted as part of Islamic belief.

## Yezidism

The ancestors of the Yezidis briefly came to Islam through their veneration of the Sunni mystic Sheykh Adi b. Musāfir (d. ca. 1160). They accepted only the mystical tradition, however, explicitly rejecting all expressions of Islam that were based on the *Shari'a*, including the Shi'a.<sup>60</sup> Eventually they repudiated Islam altogether. Yezidism is therefore generally recognised as an independent religion, and it certainly has no links whatever with the Shi'a. The Yāri tradition, on the other hand, has at least some connection with Shi'ism through its veneration of Ali. In spite of such differences there are striking similarities between Yāri and Yezidism. This strongly suggests that both go back at least in part to a common, pre-Islamic substratum of religious views and practices, a hypothesis that is confirmed by Crone's findings (see above).

## Beliefs, Practices, and Social Structures

### *Sacred Texts and Sacred Music*

As in Yāri, sacred texts<sup>61</sup> play a key role in the transmission of the teachings of Yezidism. In Yezidism the interpretation of these texts was the province of a specially trained hereditary group of 'transmitters' (*qewwal*), and of members of the 'priestly' lineages (see below); until relatively recently, 'seers' (*kocheh*) could also

59 Such as Sheykh Adi b. Musāfir, who played a key role in the genesis of modern Yezidism, see Kreyenbroek 1995:46–48.

60 Kreyenbroek 1995:27–36. For the community's rejection of the *Shari'a*, see e.g. the *Qewlê Melā Abu Bekir*, st. 1 (Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005:173): 'We are most thankful that we have stayed aloof from the *Shari'a*.' In st. 3 of the same *Qewl*, the community gives thanks to the house of Adi, 'that we have stayed aloof from the Rāfidites (i.e. Shi'ites).'

61 Yez. *Qewl, Beyt*; cf. Yar. *Kalām*.

influence religious belief. Similarly, among the Yāresān religious teaching devolves mainly on ‘priestly’ lineages, with some input from other learned ‘*kalām*-reciters’ (*kalāmxwān*) and ‘seers’ (*didedār*). As the contents of the sacred texts tend to be enigmatic, different interpreters may hold somewhat divergent views on aspects of religious teaching. During religious ceremonies, in both communities sacred texts are sung or recited to the accompaniment of sacred instruments. In Yezidism the tambourine (*def*) and the flute (*shibāb*) are regarded as holy, as the *tanbur* is in Yāri. In both traditions we find a legend to the effect that, at the time of creation, Adam’s soul refused to enter his body unless the sacred instrument(s) were sent to earth.<sup>62</sup>

### *Inner and Outer Reality*

As in Yāri, the opposition between ‘inner’ (*bāten*) and ‘outer’ (*zāher*) truth underlies the worldview of Yezidism.

### *Creation*

At Creation,<sup>63</sup> God in a sense caused the hidden, timeless ‘inner’ world to come into ‘outer’ reality. God himself, however, is chiefly thought of as existing in the other, ‘essential’ mode of being. According to both Yezidi and Yāri teaching God left the control of our world to a group of seven Holy Beings. Religious discourse tends to be less concerned with God than with the Seven, and with other beings whose influence on this world is thought to be more direct.

The act of Creation, then, was the sacred moment when the two modes of reality met. God made the Seven Beings manifest and appointed them as lords of this world (see below under *Myths*). This sacred act is thought to be repeated at the beginning of each new cycle<sup>64</sup> of the history of the ‘outer’ world. Although both communities believe in a cyclical form of history, beliefs in the end of time and the resurrection are also found there.<sup>65</sup>

### *Reincarnation*

The souls of humans are believed to reincarnate.<sup>66</sup>

### *Tawusi Melek*

An unusual Yezidi belief that is shared by some Yāresān groups is the veneration of Tawusi Melek (Yar. Malak Tāwus), the Peacock Angel. In Yezidism this figure is the leader of the Heptad, and the lord of this world. He is believed to be responsible for all phenomena in this world, whether good or bad. Curiously, both communities

62 For Yezidism cf. Qewlē Zebūnī Meksūr 40, 41 (Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005:62–63); for Yāri see Hamzeh’ee 1990:161 with fn. 18.

63 See Kreyenbroek 2008.

64 Yar. *dowre*, see below; Yez. *bedīl*, see Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005:21.

65 For Yezidi texts on the subject, see Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005:364–375.

66 Kreyenbroek 2010:21–22.



in some way associate this figure with *Sheytān* or Satan. While in Islam and Christianity that word denotes the principle of Evil, neither Yezidis nor Yāresān have such associations. A possible explanation is that the concept of Tawusi Melek goes back to that of Mithra, who even in his Zoroastrian hymn (Yt.10.29) is said to be ‘both wicked and very good to men’.<sup>67</sup> As we saw earlier, Mithra’s role in the Indo-Iranian religion as the demiurge who kills the primeval bull, is attributed in later Zoroastrianism to the wicked Ahreman. Since there is evidence that the Zoroastrians of the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE already associated the peacock with Ahreman,<sup>68</sup> it seems possible that the concept of a ‘good Satan’ originated in pre-Islamic discussions between Zoroastrians and followers of an ancient Western Iranian tradition about the role of Mithra and Ahreman.

### *Myths*

Ancient ‘Western Iranian’ influences are particularly evident in the Yezidi and Yāri myths of creation, which are almost identical. God the Creator first fashioned a pearl, a small object containing all the elements that were to form the universe. God then evoked the Seven Beings, made a covenant<sup>69</sup> with their leader (the Mithra-like lord of this world), and left the control of the world to the Seven. At this stage, it seems, a bull-sacrifice was performed,<sup>70</sup> after which the pearl exploded, forming the variegated world we know. In both traditions each member of the Heptad has a special link with one of the ‘elements’ of which the world consists. This belief has a counterpart in Zoroastrian doctrine, where each of the seven *Amesha Spentas* is held to be the guardian of one of the ‘creations’.<sup>71</sup>

Other ancient Iranian myths survive in common themes in Yezidi and Yāri traditions, e.g. the notion that a divine being can become manifest in the shape of an eagle or falcon, which is reminiscent of ancient Iranian legends.<sup>72</sup> The Yezidi, Yāri and Alevi traditions all have a narrative about a saint riding a wall or rock.<sup>73</sup>

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67 It is highly unusual in Zoroastrian texts to find positive and negative qualifications attributed to the same being; the passage in Yt. 10 probably reflects ancient and deeply held beliefs about Mithra.

68 On the evidence of the 6<sup>th</sup> century Armenian author Eznik of Kolb see Kreyenbroek 1995:60, 66, fn. 123.

69 The Old Iranian noun *mithra*, meaning ‘contract, covenant’ is attested in the Avesta.

70 References to this element of the myth have not yet been found in the recently discovered Yezidi *Qewls* (see Kreyenbroek 1995), but a bull-sacrifice is performed each year as part of the great autumn Feast of the Assembly, which corresponds to the Zoroastrian *Mehragān*, the feast of Mithra.

71 See Kreyenbroek 1995:53, 57.

72 See Kreyenbroek 2010a.

73 See Van Bruinessen 1992; Bumke 1979:540; Kreyenbroek 1995:290–299.

### *Customs and Observances*

Traditionally, male Yezidis, Alevis and Yāresān were conspicuous for their large, unkempt moustaches, which were regarded as signs of their identity.

Yezidism has several seasonal festivals that are not known to Islam and may be of ancient Iranian origin. Only one of these, however, has a counterpart among the Yāresān: both groups celebrate a winter festival associated with the appearance of the organiser of the modern community (Yez. Sheykh Adi; Yar. Soltān Sahāk), which is accompanied by a three-day fast.<sup>74</sup>

### *Social Structures*

Like Yāri, Yezidism distinguishes strictly between ‘priestly’ and ‘lay’ families. The former are divided into two groups whose ritual functions are somewhat different: in Yezidism these are known as *Sheykh* and *Pir*; in Yāri as *Pir* and *Dalil*.<sup>75</sup> Both communities call the laity *Morid*.<sup>76</sup> All members of the community, priests and laity alike, must have their own Sheykh or Pir, a relationship that is normally hereditary. Several of the priestly lineages are held to be descended from prominent companions of Sheikh Ādi.<sup>77</sup>

Another such social institution that is shared by Yāresān,<sup>78</sup> Yezidis and Alevis (see below), is the contract of ‘ritual brother/sisterhood’, a formally consecrated bond between two or more individuals (Yez. *Birayē/Xuška Axiretē*, Brother/Sister of the Hereafter; Yar. *Brāy/Wälley Yārī*, Brother/Sister in Yāri). On the Alevi counterpart see below. In Yezidism, as in Yāri, at least one of the ‘brothers/sisters’ usually belongs to the priestly classes.<sup>79</sup>

A Vedic hymn dedicated to Mitra<sup>80</sup> begins with the words: ‘Mitra, when speaking, assigns men their places’. According to his Zoroastrian hymn,<sup>81</sup> Mithra presides over the relationships between men. Given the complexity and importance of social bonds in both Yezidism and Yāri, it may not be far-fetched to assume that the pre-Islamic concept of Mithra as lord of relationships between men, informed these later traditions.

74 See Kreyenbroek 1995:53.

75 In Yāri all members of the priestly group are called ‘Sayyeds’, an originally Islamic term that is not used in Yezidism.

76 As was mentioned earlier the term originally denoted the disciples of a Sufi master.

77 Among the Yāresān the present-day situation is more complex, as will be discussed later.

78 Among Yāresān communities, this institution only survives in Iraqi Kurdistan. See further below.

79 See Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005:11–12, 18.

80 *Ṛgveda* iii.59,1 (Macdonnell 1917:79). The translation was modified in the light of later insights (cf. Benveniste 1964).

81 Yt.10.116, 117, see Gershevitch 1967:130–133.

## Alevism

The term Alevi (follower of Ali) can refer to members of a large and diverse section of the population of Turkey, whose religious cults and traditions have certain resemblances but also show a great deal of variety. It is in the Zazaki- and Kurdish-speaking region of Tunceli (or Dersim) in particular, that a number of traditions can be found which have parallels among the Yāresān and Yezidis. Most of these common elements suggest non-Islamic roots. The fact that elements that have counterparts in Yezidis, and Yāri occurs prominently in one particular region suggests that an early common substratum of pre-Islamic beliefs lived on locally.

### Beliefs, Practices, and Social Structures

#### *Beliefs*

As in Yāri and Yezidism, belief in reincarnation is attested among Alevi communities.<sup>82</sup> The same is true of the belief that the Divine can become manifest in humans (*holul*). In both Yāri and Alevism such beliefs may be connected with an extreme veneration for Ali, who is regarded as a manifestation of the Divine. This is clearly so in the case of Alevism. On the role of Ali in Yāri see Ch. 4. A recently discovered Alevi account of the Creation<sup>83</sup> accords a role to Meleki Tavus, the Peacock Angel, cf. above

#### *Sacred Texts and Sacred Music*

The Alevis have their own sacred texts (*nefes*), unrelated to the Qor'ān. Their sacred instrument, the *saz* or *bağlama*, closely resembles the Yāri *tanbur*.

#### *Customs and Observances*

Neither traditional Yāresān nor Alevis observe the five 'pillars' (*arkān*) of Islam: the recitation of the Confession of Faith (*šahāda*); the observance of the fast during Ramazān (*šawm*); payment of the religious taxes (*zakāt*); and the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*).

Like Yāresān and Yezidis, Alevis traditionally did not shave their moustaches. The core ritual practice of Alevis and Yāresān is called Al. *cem*, Yār. *jam*. These rituals have several features in common, notably the singing of sacred music and playing of sacred instruments (see above), and the fact that participants form a circle (on the Yāri *jam* see Ch. 5).

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82 Bumke 1979:540.

83 See Gezik 2009, 2015.

*Social Structures*

Just as the Yāri and Yezidi ‘priesthood’ is divided into two groups (see above), the Alevis recognise two groups of ‘priests’, known as *Pir* and *Rēber*

As in the other two traditions, each Alevi must recognise a member of a ‘priestly’ family (Al. *ocak*; Yez. *ocax*; Yār. *xāndān*) as a spiritual preceptor.<sup>84</sup> The connection between preceptor and disciple represents a hereditary bond between families.<sup>85</sup> The need for all individuals to have a living spiritual leader may have its roots in the religious culture of ancient Iran.<sup>86</sup>

The Alevis recognise the equivalent of the ‘Brother/Sister in Yāri’ system (see above). Such unions are known as *müsahtiplik*.<sup>87</sup>

Traditionally it was forbidden for members of all three groups to marry outside their own community.

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84 On the priestly lineages among Alevis, Yezidis and Yāresān see van Bruinessen 2017.

85 For Alevism see e.g. Bumke 1979.

86 Sasanian and early post Sasanian Zoroastrianism had the institution of *dastūrī*, the obligation on all Zoroastrians to choose a spiritual leader (*dastūr*). See Kreyenbroek 1994b.

87 See e.g. Bumke 1979:534.

## Chapter Two: The Yāresān Community and its Social Organisation

The Yāresān community is divided along several intersecting lines. The main dividing factors are: (1) language; (2) geography; (3) ‘caste’, i.e. membership of Morid (lay) or Sayyed (‘priestly’) families (the latter are subdivided into families who function as Pirs and those who traditionally acted as Dalils or Khādems, see below); (4) affiliation to a lineage of Sayyeds (*khāndān*); (5) adherence to certain religious leaders, such as Sayyed Brāke or Hājj Ne’matollāh Jeyhunābādi (on this see further Chapter 3).

### Languages

#### *Gurani*

As we saw earlier, the language of most of the Yāri holy texts, or *kalāms*, is a literary form of Gurani, the traditional language of the Guran region, which is located to the west of Kermanshah city. Gurani is closely related to the language of Hawraman to the north. From a historical-linguistic point of view it is said to be more closely akin to the Zazaki language of Eastern Turkey than to Kurdish.<sup>1</sup> ‘Literary Gurani’<sup>2</sup> uses somewhat simplified grammatical forms of Gurani and often contains elements from the surrounding languages and dialects. These texts therefore probably reflect a milieu in which speakers of various dialects and languages<sup>3</sup> participated on an equal footing and contributed elements of their natural speech to the sacred compositions. From the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century till 1867, the Guran area and the Shahrezur region in north-eastern Iraq were ruled by the Ardalān dynasty, who promoted Gurani as the language of culture in their realm. Until the rise of Sorani Kurdish in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, most of the literature of the Eastern Kurds was in literary Gurani or other forms of that language.<sup>4</sup> After that time, however, Gurani lost much of its traditional prestige. Although Yāri religious poetry continued to be composed in Gurani, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards the language of such texts suggests that many composers’ command of Gurani was deteriorating. The increasing dominance of Persian and local languages or dialects is clearly reflected there. At the time of writ-

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1 See MacKenzie 1961.

2 See Kreyenbroek and Chaman Ara 2013.

3 Such as Kalhori and Lakki.

4 See J. Blau in Kreyenbroek and Marzolph 2010:7–9.

ing, among the Yāresān of Iran Gurani has largely been reduced to the position of a liturgical language. It is used for religious purposes such as the recitation of *kalāms*, but only a few communities in Iran still speak a form of Gurani as their first language, and not many Yāresān now have a good active command of literary Gurani. In Iraqī Kurdistan, on the other hand, most Kāka’i communities and some others still use forms of Gurani (there called ‘Macho’) in their daily as well as their religious lives.<sup>5</sup>

### *Kurdish*

Certain Perdiwari *kalāms* that are attributed to Kurdish-speakers, such as Ābedin Jāf, a Muslim who became a follower of Soltān, are in the Jāfi dialect of Kurdish. In Western Iran most communities now speak a local form of Kurdish, such as Kermanshahi, as their first language,<sup>6</sup> and Persian as their second.

### *Persian*

Only a few texts belonging to the Perdiwari *kalāms* (notably those ascribed to the Period of Shāh Khoshin) are in Persian. However, the increasing prestige of Persian in later times is reflected in the textual tradition of the Yāresān. The very popular poetry of the so-called ‘Thirty-Six Poets’ of the time of Sayyed Brāke (19<sup>th</sup> century), for instance, is in literary Gurani but shows strong Persian influence. Minorsky<sup>7</sup> states that he acquired an authentic manuscript in Persian in Tehran in 1902, which was entitled *Ketāb-e Saranjām* and contained ‘a collection of religious legends listed under epochs... and also a number of *kalāms* in Turkish.’<sup>8</sup>

### *Turkic*<sup>9</sup>

There are important Turkic-speaking Yāresān communities in Iranian Azerbaijan and Hamadan, and many religious texts in that language.<sup>10</sup> The Yāri tradition claims that all early communities used Gurani as their religious language, but that in the

5 The Sārli, who are Yāresān (see below with fn. 19), the Bājalān (about whose religion more research is needed), the Shabak, some of whom have their own religion (see below fn. 18), and the Muslim Zangāne and Rojbeyāni tribes each speak their own dialect of this language. Cf. Leezenberg 1994.

6 Much of this information is based on the findings of the Hamburg-based Research Project ‘Documentation of Gorani, an endangered language of the Kermanshāh province (West Iran)’, sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation, in which the author participated.

7 Minorsky 1960:263

8 Iwanov (1953) also published religious texts in Persian which he regarded as belonging to Yāri. As Iwanov was aware, however, these texts were written by Khāksār *darwishes* (see below), who are ‘affiliated’ (*chasbide*) to the Yāresān community and have a great deal of knowledge about Yāri. Nevertheless, the Khāksār are Sufis, not born Yāresān (see below) and the texts cannot be said to form part of Yāri religious literature.

9 The term ‘Turkic’ is used here for languages and dialects of Turkic origin that differ from the standard language of the Republic of Turkey (‘Turkish’).

10 See Minorsky 1953, 1954; Geranpayeh 2007.

course of time some groups were forced to adopt a Turkic language closely akin to Azeri for all purposes, including religion.<sup>11</sup> Some *kalāms* are said to have been translated into this language by Qushchioghli, whom the tradition describes as a companion of Shāh Ebrāhim.<sup>12</sup>

### *Other languages*

*Kalāms* in Lakki are said to exist or have existed, but no independent evidence of this could be found.<sup>13</sup> There are both Lakki- and Lori-speaking communities in Lorestan, and a few Arabic-speaking Yāresān communities in Iraqī Kurdistan.

## Geography

According to Yāri history, the first manifestation of the divinity in the form of a Yāri leader took place in Lorestan, to the south of the Guran region, during the period of Shāh Khoshin. Although this manifestation is said to have been secret and known only to those who were capable of recognising Shāh Khoshin's divine nature, the tradition does suggest that one or more groups whose beliefs and traditions resembled those of modern Yāri existed in Lorestan, and possibly elsewhere, before the advent of Soltān Sahāk (see further Ch. 3).

Soltān Sahāk, whose presence and teachings led to the establishment and organisation of the modern community, was a native of Barzinja in the Shahrezur region to the south of Suleymaniya in Iraqī Kurdistan. From there he moved to Perdiwar in the Hawraman area, where his sanctuary is still a major place of pilgrimage. In spite of the importance of Perdiwar and Hawraman in the Yāri tradition, that region is now solidly Sunni and no Yāresān communities live there. The tradition claims that the early community was forced to leave Hawraman.<sup>14</sup> Some Yāresān, it is said, moved along the mountain path to what is now the Iraqī side of the border, while others, led by Bābā Yādegār, migrated south to Zarde in the Guran region. Bābā Yādegār's sanctuary is located at Sarane on the road from Sarpol-e Zahab to Rejab, somewhat to the south of Zarde. It is situated on the Dalahu mountain range, which has great spiritual significance for the Yāresān; the same is true of another mountain, Mt Shahu in the vicinity of Perdiwar.<sup>15</sup> From Zarde, it seems, the Yāri tradition first spread to other places in Guran. In our time, the urban centre of the Guran region is

11 Verbal communication from Dr Behrouz Geranpayeh, Göttingen, June 2006.

12 Hamzeh'ee 1990:206.

13 During (1989:314) makes this claim for the *kalāms* of Almās Khān, whose *khāndān* is particularly strong in Lorestan. A copy of a manuscript of these texts, said to be in Lakki, was presented to PK in 2004. These texts, however, were in fact in literary Gurani.

14 See further Ch. 3. The community's history was explained in detail to PK by SF in Göttingen in June 2008. References to such an account of history are often heard in the community.

15 [http://www.geographic.org/geographic\\_names/name.php?uni=10335446&fid=2858&c=iran](http://www.geographic.org/geographic_names/name.php?uni=10335446&fid=2858&c=iran)

Kerend, which has a Yāresān majority and where the sanctuaries of Pir Benyāmin and Pir Musi are situated.<sup>16</sup> Another important centre is the village of Gahware. Guran, then, appears to have been the place where the tradition assumed much of its present form, and whence it spread further to other regions, notably to the north and west (see Ch. 3).

Most of the Kāka'i communities in Iraq speak forms of Gurani that are closely related to the speech of Zarde, which tuarync seems to confirm the Yāresān's account of their early history.<sup>17</sup> As will be shown in the next chapter, there is evidence to suggest that descendants of those who migrated west directly from Perdiwar are still living in the Shahrezur region, while other communities are probably descended from communities that moved from Perdiwar to Zarde and moved west at a later stage. Most speakers of 'Macho' are Yāresān, while others are Muslims or follow the Shabak religion.<sup>18</sup> The religious tradition of the Sārli<sup>19</sup> community near Eski Kalak, who are sometimes described as a separate ethno-religious group, appears to differ from that of other Yāresān in very minor matters only.<sup>20</sup> The available data on the Bajalān, who are sometimes said to be Yāresān, are contradictory and more research is needed.<sup>21</sup>

In Iran, communities in Lorestan and perhaps Ilam probably accepted a new form of what was already an established religious tradition in their region. Furthermore Yāri spread to Azerbaijan and Hamadan, where Yāresān communities now speak a Turkic language (see above). As we saw earlier, the greatest concentrations of Yāresān are to be found in the Guran region and in Sahne, on the road between Kermanshah and Hamadan; the religious cultures of these two communities differ

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16 Mir-Hosseini 1996:117.

17 Verbal information from PM, a linguist and a native speaker of Hawrami, November 2009.

18 On the Shabak see recently Leezenberg 2014. More research is needed on the religious affiliations of this community. While it is often claimed that the Shabak are first and foremost a religious group, this is denied by some of those who speak the Shabak form of Macho and call themselves Shabak. During a visit to the Shabak village of Zangal on 27.11.2009 it was forcefully pointed out to PM and PK that most Shabak are Sunni or Shi'i Muslims, whilst only a minority follows the 'Shabak' faith.

19 Or Sārli. The Sārli themselves state that their name derives from the Arabic words *ṣāra lī*, which they implausibly translate as 'they came to me' and attribute to an early leader. In fact the name may be connected with Turkish *sarmak* 'to wrap, encircle', and mean 'those who tie a cord or cummerbund around their waist', i.e. who are *baste* (see p. 98 with fn. 3). A somewhat similar suggestion, connecting the name with *sarlmak*, 'being bound, wrapped', was made by a Muslim Kurd to Edmonds (1957:195). On the relationship of this group with the Shabak in modern times see Leezenberg 2014.

20 On earlier close contacts and intermarriages between Sārli and Shabak see Leezenberg 1994.

21 This is also true of the religious traditions of the Shabak. This group speaks a form of Macho, i.e. a language originating in western Iran, but regards itself as closely akin to the Turkomen. Some Shabak (cf. above, fn. 18) follow a tradition that appears to be closely related to that of the Turkomen of Iraq and the Bektashis of Turkey. They intermarry with Bektashis, but not with Kāka'is.



considerably in some ways.<sup>22</sup> Sahne, a prosperous town situated on a busy trade route, tends to be open to outside influences, and less conservative than the poorer and more isolated Guran region. Mir-Hosseini<sup>23</sup> reports that in 1992 the Yāresān community of Sahne was deeply divided by tensions between adherents and opponents of the 'Jeyhunābādi' school. These tensions still exist. While the Gurani Yāresān regard their religious tradition as independent of Islam, the Sahne community tends to be more open to the view that their religion is a branch of Islam. In the course of time, moreover, Yāresān communities and individuals have migrated to other places in Iran. As early as the late 19th century, Zhukovskii<sup>24</sup> states that there were Yāresān in Tehran and Shiraz. A few decades later, Minorsky met members of this community in Tehran and Maku.<sup>25</sup> Thriving communities are now to be found in Tehran, Karaj and Sawe, and there is a community in Kelardasht in Mazendaran. SF, a prominent representative of the Gurani tradition, describes the differences between the tradition of Guran and those of other regions as follows:

If you take the Guran region as the centre of the Ahl-e Haqq religion, the farther you get away from Guran the greater the influence of Islam as regards world-view and other things. All the way from Hamadan to Tehran and Ardabil you will find Yāresān villages, but they pray just like Muslims. You can find all sorts of Muslim customs there. You see it in Teheran too, people who wear a moustache but go on *Hajj*,<sup>26</sup> visit *Emāmzādes*,<sup>27</sup> pray *namāz*.<sup>28</sup> In the Sahne region they tell people they can be Yāresān and pray *namāz* as well. As you get farther away from the centre, you get more and more admixture. Also, people have been under terrible pressure.

In recent decades, religious, social and economic pressures have caused a number of Yāresān to migrate to Europe. The Jeyhunābādist community actively welcomes converts,<sup>29</sup> which has led to the formation of significant Yāresān communities of this persuasion, both in Europe and in Iran.

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22 See App. 3.

23 Mir-Hosseini 1996:117–118.

24 Zhukovskii 1887 cited by Minorsky (1911:VIII).

25 Minorsky 1911:IXf.

26 The Islamic pilgrimage.

27 Islamic sanctuaries.

28 The Islamic prayer.

29 On the attitude of other Yāresān to conversion see below, pp. 37–38.

## ‘Caste’, ritual functions, social institutions

### ‘Caste’ and other social relationships

#### *Sayyed, Pir, Morid.*

As was said earlier, the Yāresān community is characterised by the distinction between ‘lay’ (*Morid*) and Sayyed families. A Sayyed must be present at all major Yāri rituals, such as the *jam*. Sayyeds can function as spiritual guides (*Pir*) to believers; this status is hereditary and independent of personal ability or interests. On the death of a Pir, his heirs inherit his Morids (who may themselves be Sayyeds). Personal choice may play a limited role, e.g. when a Sayyed leaves several heirs, but essentially such relationships are predetermined by tradition. Most Yāresān are Morids, and all Morids (as well as most Sayyeds) need to have their own Pir, and in some traditional communities their own Dalil (see below). The quality and intensity of the Pir-Morid relationship, i.e. the personal spiritual guidance offered by a Sayyed to his followers, is determined by individual factors, but it is normally life-long.

#### *Dalil/Khādem*

Traditionally the ‘religious classes’ of the Yāresān (like those of the Yezidis and Alevis), are described as consisting of two hereditary groups, Pirs and Dalils, who are thought to represent Pir Benyāmin and Dāwud respectively in matters of ritual. In several cases the founders of Dalil families were closely associated with those of a *khāndān* of Pirs.<sup>30</sup> The function of a Dalil is first of all that of an assistant (*Khādem*) to the Sayyed during the *jam* ritual (see Ch. 5). Secondly, the Dalil has the task of introducing the candidate to the Sayyed at the *sar sepordan* ceremony.<sup>31</sup> In modern practice, however, these tasks can usually be performed by any pious person. The older custom still persists in Gahware in Guran, where the *Khādem* is known as *Kāki* and must belong to a certain family.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Didedār*

People with special religious gifts may be recognised as ‘having the vision’ (*didedār*), i.e. possessing the ability to see deeply into ‘inner’ reality, which may be accompanied by the ability to predict the future or perform miracles.<sup>33</sup> Those who are recognised as *didedār* are greatly respected. Hājj Ne’matollāh based his authority on his status as a *didedār*,<sup>34</sup> and advocated that it was such ‘seers’, rather than the hereditary Sayyeds, who should play a leading role in the community.

30 On the Pir and Dalil families of the Āli Qalandar, Bābā Yādegāri, Shāh Hayāsi and Bābā Heydari *khāndāns*, see Hamzeh’ee 1990:206–209.

31 On these rites see further below.

32 Information I owe to SF, interview Hamburg, 21 April 2011.

33 Jeyhunābādi 1966:7; Mir Hosseini 1996:119.

34 Jeyhunābādi 1966:7–8.

*Brother/Sister in Yāri*

As we saw earlier, an institution that is shared by Yāri, Yezidism and Alevism is the special bond between two (or in some cases more) individuals,<sup>35</sup> whose participants are known among the Yāresān as *Birāy/Wāley Yāri*, 'Brother/Sister in Yāri'. Although this institution is referred to in several works on Yāri,<sup>36</sup> it was unknown to all my Iranian informants, some of whom denied that it had ever existed. Among the Kāka'i, however, at least among followers of the Mostafā'i *khāndān*, contracts between two 'brothers' or 'sisters' are still concluded, suggesting that this *khāndān* has preserved an ancient custom that has disappeared elsewhere. As in Yezidism, the relationship usually exists between a Morid and a member of the religious class. The conclusion of the contract is typically preceded by a period of 'wooing' on the part of the lay partner.<sup>37</sup> Gender does not play a key role here; a man can have a Sister and *vice versa*. A *jam* is held to formalise the relationship; the 'brothers' exchange girdles during this ceremony.<sup>38</sup> The brothers 'must do everything for one another', and there is a belief that a person who does not have a Brother or Sister in Yāri may not make pilgrimage to the Yāresān holy places.<sup>39</sup>

**Initiation, conversion, marriage**

Membership of the Yāresān community can be acquired in two ways. Those who are born into a Yāresān family are automatically eligible to be initiated into the community. Initiation takes place through the ritual of *sar sepordan* ('offering one's head'), in which candidates are symbolically introduced by their Dalil to their prospective Pir, who then accepts them as his Morid. Such 'born' Yāresān are called *chakide* (lit. 'dropped'). Unlike Yezidism, where conversion is widely considered to be impossible, Yāri admits a Sayyed's right to accept as his Morid a person who is not a born Yāresān but who is spiritually advanced. Such individuals are known as *chasbide* (lit. 'clinging').<sup>40</sup> While the Jeyhunābādīst Yāresān actively accept and encourage such conversions, these are much rarer in other Yāresān milieus. The following account by SF describes a case of conversion in a Gurani community:

35 See above, Ch. 1, and Kreyenbroek 1996:103.

36 See with references Hamzeh'ee 1990:222–223. Hamzeh'ee calls the institution *shart-o eqrār*, a term which according to our informants refers to a range of Yāri institutions, and not specifically to the 'religious brotherhood'.

37 This consists of repeated declarations of one's wish to enter into this relationship with the person in question. Dreams often play a role in finding one's 'Brother'. Information received from Mr Falakaddin Kaka'i in Erbil in November 2011 and confirmed independently by his daughter Mrs Prshng Kaka'i in Göttingen in January 2012.

38 A relative of Mrs Prshng Kaka'i told her that this girdle should be placed on the coffin when one dies.

39 Mrs Prshng Kaka'i, oral communication, Göttingen. January 2012.

40 On the *chakide* and *chasbide* relationships see Hamzeh'ee 1990:204–205. On the status of some Khāksāri *derwishes* as *chasbide* members of the community see above, fn. 8.

Yāri represents a very high spiritual level, but it can still be achieved by those who were not born into the religion. Mr X is an engineer. His parents were both Shi'ites, but he has become Ahl-e Haqq. He has thought deeply about *Haqiqat* and *Ma'refat*<sup>41</sup> for himself and was ready (to become a Yāresān). He must have led a very good life in his last incarnation, so he has come this far. It is all a matter of level... It is like the progression of learning, from kindergarten and elementary school up to University and Ph.D.

Although heredity determines the individual's place in Yāri society in many ways, in some communities lay people may take an active interest in religious matters and have strong opinions on religious issues.

Traditionally there was a strong taboo on marriage between Sayyeds and Morids. Hājī Ne'matollāh Jeyhunābādi writes:<sup>42</sup>

Now if Sayyeds and lay people, laity and Sayyeds, are joined (in matrimony), that is far from desirable.

If Morids and Pirs, Pirs and Morids, desire union, they will not be happy.

It is a sin against the Command of the One Essence<sup>43</sup>

Formerly, marriage between Yāresān and outsiders was forbidden, or at least very much frowned upon, as it still is in Yezidism and Zoroastrianism. At present, however, these rules are no longer widely observed in the Yāresān community.

### Khāndāns

The use of the term *khāndān* (lit. 'family'), varies to some extent. According to SF<sup>44</sup> it should be used only for lineages of Sayyeds who act as Pirs. It seems, however, that Dalil families who were associated with such a lineage could traditionally also be regarded as members of the *khāndān*.<sup>45</sup>

Eleven *khāndāns* are generally recognised at the present time;<sup>46</sup> the Jeyhunābādists add the *khāndān* of Hājī Ne'matollāh as a twelfth lineage. Seven

41 I.e. advanced stages of spiritual development, which are thought to be the basis of the Yāri religion, see further below.

42 Mokri 1966:563, lines 11000–11001. Translation by PK.

43 I.e. God.

44 Verbal communication by telephone to PK on 30 June 2011.

45 Hamzeh'ee (1990:210) speaks of the Dalils of a *khāndān*.

46 Geranpayeh (2007:75), describing the Turkic-speaking branch of the Yāresān, states that he was informed by the authoritative community leader, Sayyed Kāzem Niknezhād, that sixteen *khāndāns* are recognised by that community. Apart from the generally accepted *khāndāns*, Sayyed Kāzem classifies the Khāmushi and Abu'l-Wafā'i *khāndāns* as separate lineages, omits the Mostafā'i *khāndān*, and adds the *khāndāns* of Khān Ahmadi, Dāwud Qoli, Joneydi and Sayyed Habib Shāhi.

*khāndāns* are believed to have been established by contemporaries of Soltān Sahāk, while the others came into being at a later stage.<sup>47</sup>

Describing Hājī Ne’matollāh Jeyhunābādī’s affiliation, Mokri<sup>48</sup> writes that he ‘was of the Shāh Ebrāhimi “orientation” (Fr. *tendence*) and belonged to the Shāh Hayāsi *khāndān*.’ Both Jeyhunābādī<sup>49</sup> and SF<sup>50</sup> explain the concept of ‘orientation’ as referring to the fact that all other *khāndāns* are essentially subdivisions of the original lineages of Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim. The founders of the other *khāndāns* were ‘outer’ (*zāher*) incarnations of either Bābā Yādegār or Shāh Ebrāhim. When a person is initiated into a *khāndān* of the Bābā Yādegāri ‘orientation’, the Pir states as part of the liturgy that, ‘Bābā Yādegār is on the throne’ (*Bābā Yādegār bar takhtan*); *khāndāns* affiliated to the Shāh Ebrāhimis say ‘*Pir-e Shāh Ebrāhim bar takhtan*.’<sup>51</sup> For a historical explanation of this state of affairs see Ch. 3.

### *Bābā Yādegāri khandāns*

According to SF, the *khāndāns* affiliated to the lineage of Bābā Yādegār are:

1. Āli Qalandar. Interestingly, traditions vary as to whether Āli Qalandar lived before<sup>52</sup> or after<sup>53</sup> Soltān Sahāk established the *khāndāns*. It is said that he was beheaded by unbelievers.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps based on this account of his death, there is a belief that he was an earlier incarnation of Bābā Yādegār, who according to one tradition was killed by Shāh Ebrāhim.<sup>55</sup> One source claims that the Safavid Shāh Esmā’il was ‘his substance’.<sup>56</sup>
2. Khāmushi or Sayyed Abu’l-Wafā’i. Sayyed Abu’l-Wafā’<sup>57</sup> is said to have been a contemporary of Soltān. Sayyed Akāber, also known as Sayyed Khāmush, was his descendant, being the youngest son of Sayyed Sheykh Ali, who was Abu’l-Wafā’<sup>58</sup>’s son or grandson. When Sayyed Khāmush was

47 Hamzeh’ee 1990:205-16; Mir-Hosseini 1996:122-123.

48 Jeyhunābādī 1966:8. Translation by PK.

49 *Apud* Hamzeh’ee 1990:226.

50 Verbal communication by telephone to PK, May 2011. It is confirmed by the evidence of Jeyhunābādī (*apud* Hamzeh’ee 1990:226).

51 This phrase is not mentioned in Hamzeh’ee’s version of the prayer in question (Hamzeh’ee 1990:210).

52 Hamzeh’ee 1990:206.

53 So Safizāde 1997:76:306, citing Nur Ali Elahi’s *Borhān al-Haqq*.

54 Van Bruinessen 1995 (Internet):8.

55 So also Jeyhunābādī 1966:561, line 10946.

56 Ivanow 1953:170.

57 Intriguingly, a figure named Sayyed Abu’l-Wafā also plays a role in the early history of Yezidism. He is said to have been a contemporary of Sheykh Adi ibn Mosāfer, who challenged the Yezidi leader while riding a lion; Sheykh Adi then mounted a rock and defeated him. See Kreyenbroek 1995:28 with n. 9; 48; 292-293. On the role of Abu’l-Wafā in Yezidism and Alevism see van Bruinessen 2017:82, 84-85.

58 SF (telephone conversation with PK on 22 July 2011) said he was Abu’l-Wafā’s son, while

chosen over his older siblings as leader of the *khāndān*,<sup>59</sup> a conflict arose that eventually led to the foundation of the Zu'l-Nuri *khāndān* (see below).<sup>60</sup> While in Guran this lineage is considered to be affiliated to the Bābā Yādegāris, and its Sayyeds mention Bābā Yādegār in the liturgy of the *Sar Sepordan* ritual, elsewhere they are said to be affiliated to the Shāh Ebrāhimis.<sup>61</sup>

3. Miresuri. According to SF the Miresuri *khāndān* was originally Bābā Yādegāri, but was forced to switch allegiance to the Shāh Ebrāhimi Sayyeds in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century CE.
4. Bābā Heydari. The Sayyeds of this *khāndān*, it seems, were originally followers of Shāh Ebrāhim,<sup>62</sup> but later on they joined the Khāmushi *khāndān* and thus came to follow the authority of Bābā Yādegār. According to Hamzeh'ee,<sup>63</sup> members of this lineage act as Pirs to other Pirs, which may reflect their status as leaders of the Yāri community. The present head of the *khāndān*, Sayyed Nasreddin Heydari, is considered to be the highest Yāresān spiritual authority in the Guran region, an office he is said to hold because he is a descendant of the charismatic Sayyed Brāke (on whom see Ch. 3).

#### *Shāh Ebrāhimi khāndāns*

*Khāndāns* of the Shāh Ebrāhimi 'orientation' are:

1. Sayyed Mostafā'i. This *khāndān* is now mostly found in Iraqī Kurdistan and in the district of Hamadan in Iran.
2. Babu Isi.
3. Zu'l-Nuri. This lineage is said to have split off from the Abu'l-Wafā *khāndān*.<sup>64</sup> Sayyeds of this *khāndān* may not eat cockerels.

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Hamzeh'ee (1990:206) states that Abu'l-Wafā's son and immediate successor was Sayyed Ud, Sayyed Ali being Sayyed Ud's son.

59 According to Hamzeh'ee (1990:207) this was determined by the Sayyeds of the Shāh Ebrāhimi *khāndān*.

60 Hamzeh'ee 1990:206–208.

61 Hamzeh'ee (1990:211) states that the Sayyeds of the Khāmushi and the Shāh Ebrāhimi *khāndāns* 'offer their heads' (*sar sepordan*) to one another, i.e. they act as each other's Pir. This information, which is based on the work of Hājj Ne'matollāh Jeyhunābādi, reflects the tradition of Sahne.

62 Hamzeh'ee (1990:208--9) states that Shāh Hayās, who was of the Shāh Ebrāhimi orientation, approved the establishment of this *khāndān*.

63 Hamzeh'ee 1990:20, on the authority of Nur Ali Elahi.

64 Why, in that case, they should belong to the Shāh Ebrāhimi orientation is not clear. The Zu'l-Nuri, Ātashbegi, Shāh Hayāsi and Bābā Heydari *khāndāns* are said to have been formed after the original institution of the other seven *khāndāns*.

4. Ātashbegi. The origins of this lineage and that of Shāh Hayās (see below) are said to be interrelated.<sup>65</sup> One of the Sayyed families of this lineage is that of Ātash Beg’s descendant Almās Beg.<sup>66</sup> Almās Beg himself is famous for his powers of prediction.<sup>67</sup>
5. Shāh Hayāsi. On the origin of this *khāndān* see above. Hājj Ne’matollāh Jeyhunābādi was a Morid of this *khāndān*.

The Zu’l-Nuri, Ātashbegi, Shāh Hayāsi and Bābā Heydari *khāndāns* are generally said to have been formed after the original institution of the other seven *khāndāns*.<sup>68</sup> The Ātashbegi, Shāh Hayāsi and Bābā Heydari *khāndāns* are usually described as having originated more or less at the same time. Some uncertainty, perhaps reflecting historical developments, clearly exists in the matter of the ‘orientation’ of certain *khāndāns* over the centuries. The Bābā Yādegārī tradition has it that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Shāh Ebrāhimis had the upper hand and forced many groups to abandon their earlier affiliation to Bābā Yādegār. Apparently transitions in the opposite direction also took place.

#### *History of the khāndāns*

It is clear that speculation plays a role in accounts of the history of the *khāndāns*. Hamzeh’ee<sup>69</sup> (who generally follows Jeyhunābādi, who was of the Shāh Ebrāhimi orientation) claims that three founders of *khāndāns*, Bābā Yādegār, Shāh Ebrāhim and Āli Qalandar, belonged to the *Haft Tan*, the ‘spiritual Heptad’ of Yāri, while others belonged to the ‘terrestrial Heptad’, the *Haftawāne* (see Ch. 4). On the other hand, as we saw earlier, Āli Qalandar is not thought to have been alive when the *khāndāns* were instituted by Soltān Sahāk, whilst it is generally thought that all members of the *Haft Tan* were Soltān Sahāk’s contemporaries. Furthermore, the Bābā Yādegārīs stress that Āli Qalandar was an earlier incarnation of Bābā Yādegār, and believe that Shāh Ebrāhim was a member of the *Haftawāne*.

As we saw earlier, most traditions imply that the *khāndān* system was established by Soltān Sahāk and that founders of the seven original lineages were his contemporaries. In this the Yāresān tradition is similar to that of Yezidism, which also associates its ‘priestly’ lineages with the time of the founder.<sup>70</sup> This could mean that both accounts go back to a common tradition predating the origin of both Yezidism and Yāri, which legitimised the existence of a hereditary priesthood by claiming

65 According to Hamzeh’ee (1990:91), this lineage and the Shāh Hayāsi *khāndān* originated with the appearance of a man named Shāh Weys-Qoli in the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century, who predicted that after his death two people would come after him, both of whom would be *Shāh-mehmān*, meaning that the Divine had become immanent in them.

66 Hamzeh’ee 1990:208.

67 Zahedi Moghaddam 2019.

68 Mir-Hosseini 1996:122. On this question see also Jeyhunābādi 1966:561–563.

69 Hamzeh’ee 1990:208.

70 See Kreyenbroek 1995:38–39.

the authority of an eminent early figure. In other words, a preconceived idea concerning the origin of priestly lineages may have given rise to these accounts, perhaps irrespective of historical accuracy. (On the historical roles of Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim in establishing the *khāndāns* see further Ch. 3.)

### The Khāksār derwishes

Although there is no evidence that the custom plays an important role in the Gurani tradition,<sup>71</sup> mention must be made of the curious symbiosis of certain groups of Yāresān, notably the Ātashbegi *khāndān*, and Sufi derwishes of a group known as Khāksār(i). Ivanow writes:<sup>72</sup>

The Khāksār darwishes, in order to attain the rank of the independent *murshid* (i.e. to receive the *ḥaqq-e irshād*),<sup>73</sup> are bound by custom to ‘to hand over their heads in the house of Ḥaqqīqat<sup>74</sup> (*sar dar khāndān-i Ḥaqqīqat supurdan*) When admitted to the *jam*, and coming into contact with the AH, they try to learn as much as they can concerning the ceremonies, prayers recited on various occasions, etc., all that the ordinary member of the sect has known since childhood.

Such derwishes, in other words, are initiated as *chasbide* members of the Yāri community.<sup>75</sup> The relationship between the Khāksāris and the Yāresān has recently been described in detail by Raei.<sup>76</sup>

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71 Questions about this topic were generally answered with vague and general statements such as ‘the Khāksāris are Yāresān who pray the *salāt* (Islamic prayer ritual)’; no further information could be elicited.

72 Ivanow 1953:27.

73 I.e. in order to qualify as a religious leader of the Order.

74 I.e. ‘Truth, God’.

75 See also Hamzeh’ee 1990:104.

76 Raei 2014, 2017:175–177.



## Chapter Three: Mythical and Factual History

It is probably true to say that each culture constructs its history in ways that are compatible with its needs and the means it has to preserve this vital knowledge. Cultures where history is chiefly transmitted orally tend to preserve only the most relevant elements of their history, which may be told in the form of prose narratives, poetry, or a combination of both.<sup>1</sup> As in Yezidism, in the Yāresān culture myths, legends, and accounts of past events are placed in a framework of more or less recurring ‘cycles’ (*dowre*) of history. Besides informal stories in prose there is a corpus of carefully memorised, formal poems (*kalām*)<sup>2</sup> dealing with the same material in a way that is less liable to change and thus helps to ensure that the tradition is preserved in its original form. The *kalāms* form the core of Yāri religious knowledge, and they are the basis of the community’s understanding of its own history.

The present chapter begins with a discussion of aspects of Yāresān history from an ‘emic’ point of view. This vital part of Yāresān culture could be described as mythical or sacred history, and has as much validity and significance for the average Yāresān believer as the Western form of history has for us. This ‘emic’ part will be followed by an ‘etic’ examination of historical sources and other considerations that can yield information about what we would call the factual history of the Yāresān community generally, and that of Guran in particular.

### Mythical History

#### Cycles and Stages

A key element of the Yāri view of history is the belief that a core, inner (*bāten*) reality is reflected, albeit imperfectly, in the outer (*zāher*) existence we experience on earth. This implies that that outer history repeats the same essential reality time and time again, in a series of cycles. Such a worldview might be thought to imply that history is entirely cyclical, repeating itself without upward or downward trends. However, in the case of Yāri we also find a belief in progressive ‘stages’ in the development of cultures and religions, from the elementary *Shar’iat* stage to the very advanced one of understanding *Haqiqat* or Divine Truth. As these terms also occur

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1 For an account of Yezidi historiography see Kreyenbroek 2008.

2 On this use of the word *kalām* see above under ‘Terminology and Transcription’.

in mystical Islamic teaching it may be supposed that earlier Yāresān culture has integrated certain Islamic beliefs into its original worldview.

### The concept of ‘Dowre’

The term *dowre* is used in Yāresān discourse to denote a range of concepts which, though related, would seem distinct to the average Westerner. First of all the term denotes a cycle of history, a period of time that began when the Essences (*zāt*) of the Divine and of members of the two Heptads<sup>3</sup> became incarnate in certain human beings. Outer history is thought to repeat itself more or less in each *dowre*.<sup>4</sup>

As was said earlier, most cycles of history have a number of *kalāms* that are associated with them, and the corpus of texts connected with each cycle is also known as a *dowre*. Because of this association, people’s knowledge of the textual *dowres* frequently serves as a mental map of Yāresān history. History, in other words, is imagined on the basis of what is known about the hymns and the cycles they belong to.<sup>5</sup>

Then, probably when Yāri came into contact with Sufi thought, the progression of humanity’s religious development through various stages was accepted and combined with the belief in the progression of cycles. The term used for these stages is again *dowre*. In this way the concept of spiritual development in ‘stages’ was incorporated into Yāri belief. It also came to be associated with the progress of the individual soul through reincarnation (see further Ch. 4).

The Yāresān use the word *dowre* for all these concepts – i.e. for a period of time; a cycle of texts; and a stage in the religious development of humanity – and obviously regard them as very closely connected. As this is not the case in Western culture, the term will be translated here according to the sense it has in the context.

### Stages

The first of the stages is that of *Shari’at* (Law), where one was (or is) guided by (Islamic) Law alone. As SF says, ‘The stage of *Shari’at* was necessary, for men were still at a low spiritual level. Truth (*Haqiqat*) existed, but was not perceived.’ The stage of *Shari’at* was followed by that of *Tariqat* (the ‘Path’ of a mystical

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3 The *Haft Tan* and the *Haftawāne*, on which see further Ch. 4.

4 It is important, however, to differentiate here between beliefs that have been accepted by the community in a general manner, and those which are deeply held and inform the personal religious lives of many Yāresān. The belief in the cyclical nature of time belongs to the former category, and can sometimes be found side by side with other ideas that appear to run counter to it.

5 In a passage quoted more fully below, SF said: ‘The *dowre* of Sayyed Brāke can be divided into several *dowres*, like the *Kalām-e Warzāwar* and the *Asrār-e Yāri*.’ Here the words ‘several *dowres*’ clearly denote groups of religious texts composed by contemporaries of Sayyed Brāke, but the earlier phrase ‘The *dowre* of Sayyed Brāke’ refers to the cycle of history that Sayyed Brāke is thought to have initiated. The difference between a period of history and a cycle of poems was apparently not strongly present in the speaker’s mind.

Order), an intermediate stage which is marked by the development of mystical brotherhoods so that people may learn about esoteric truth. The stage of *Ma'refat* (Esoteric Knowledge) is sometimes added as one of the stages between *Shari'at* and *Haqiqat*. The latter is the stage of development in which the advanced mystic fully realises esoteric Truth.

In Yāri, as we saw, this progressive concept of history has been integrated into an existing cyclical view of history, so that the recurring cycles of history are understood to reflect the progressive 'stages' recognised by Sufism. Thus, from the Yāri point of view, the time of the Prophet Mohammad was the quintessential *dowre* of *Shari'at*. The following period reflected the stage of *Tariqat*, and the coming of Soltān Sahak marked the beginning of the *dowre* of *Haqiqat*. This is only true, however, in the sense that each of these stages saw the establishment of a form of social organisation that enabled the corresponding phase of understanding to manifest itself in the *zāher* world in some communities. So, while the Yāresān now live in the *dowre* of *Haqiqat*, this is not true of all of mankind. Most outsiders are still thought to exist in *Shari'at* or in the intermediate stages of *Tariqat* or *Ma'refat*. It is only those souls that are far enough advanced to comprehend the Truth (notably the Yāresān themselves), who can take advantage of the spiritual opportunity offered by the establishment of Soltān Sahāk's community. In the following passage, SF illustrates the way in which the evolution of the individual and that of societies are intertwined in the Yāri worldview:

From the Creation of Mankind up to and including the time of Prophet Mohammad it was the stage of *Shari'at*. This stage saw the genesis of all [established] religions, those which believe in God and those that do not, such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Buddhism and others.<sup>6</sup> Then come the stages of *Tariqat* and *Ma'refat*: from the time [after] Mohammad until the *dowre* of Soltān Sahāk. This time comprises the cycles of Bohlol, Bābā Sarhang, Shāh Khoshin, etc. After that comes the stage of *Haqiqat*, which begins with Soltān; at this time the whole Truth was revealed.

All beings have a tendency towards perfection. The *Shari'at* period was necessary for men were still at a low level. Truth (*Haqiqat*) existed, but was not perceived. Sheikh Amir says that Truth was a Pearl. Existence was like a glove, and we think the glove was a particle (*zarre*) of *Hazrat-e Haqq* (the Lord Truth, i.e. God). Then *Hazrat-e Haqq* produced four Angels. The Four Elements (Earth, Fire, Water and Wind) came from the essence (*zāt*) of those Four Angels.<sup>7</sup> The Four Elements are the material signs of the appearance of the four Angels on earth. We have *Haqq* (Truth, God), *Hazrat-e Haqq* (the Lord God), and *Hazrat-e Soltān* (Lord Soltān Sahāk), who reached the status

6 Christianity is also thought to have originated during this stage.

7 The same association between the elements of creation and the Beings governing this world is found in both Zoroastrianism and Yezidism (Kreyenbroek 1995:53, 57).

of the Divine. And we have the Four Angels, who are light and spirituality. They are represented in the material world by Earth, Water, Fire and Wind. All creatures consist of those elements [here follow quotations from *kalām* texts]. [The poet] Nowruz says that *Hazrat-e Haqq* lent humanity his *Ma'refat* (divine knowledge). He gave of this knowledge to mankind, so that humans could live. However, some received much of that knowledge and others less. This is how the perfection of the path towards *Haqiqat* operates. One individual becomes manifest in several incarnations. Reincarnation (*dunāduni*) means that the soul leaves one body and enters another. We believe that someone may be a Muslim but may become an Ahl-e Haqq later. There are derwishes (mystics), whom we call *darwish-e tariqati* (mystics of the Path), who have left *namāz* (Islamic prayer) and (the stage of) *Shari'at* behind them; they have moved on and are now traversing the next stages. Perhaps in this life they will come to *Haqiqat*.

### Cycles

The period of *Shari'at* is generally said to have begun at Creation and ended with the Prophet Mohammad and to have comprised the origin of all world religions. All accounts are agreed that the stage of *Haqiqat* began with the cycle of Soltān Sahāk. Most Yāresān believe that it continues to the present day. Some communities, on the other hand, think that a later figure, such as Sayyed Brāke or Hājj Ne'matollāh, initiated a *dowre* of his own. The various narratives differ slightly, moreover, about the sequence of cycles during the middle stages of *Tariqat* and *Ma'refat*. Clearly such questions about remote history had little relevance for simple believers whose fundamental view of history was mainly cyclical.

#### *The Cycles of Shari'at*

In his religious testament, the 'Exegesis',<sup>8</sup> Sayyed Wali Hosseini, a revered religious leader, described some of the cycles that preceded the Prophet Mohammad, and thus belong to the period of *Shari'at*. His description of these *dowres*, in which he described which figures became manifest during certain early cycles, and in which form, runs as follows:

*The Cycle of Noah:*<sup>9</sup> Noah himself was Benyāmin; his master shipbuilder was Dāwud; no other names are recorded for this period, but his Ark is likened to the world.

*Hazrat-e Ebrāhim.*<sup>10</sup> Ebrāhim himself was Shāh Ebrāhim. His son Esmā'il was Yādegār. No others were present in this period, but in accounts of Esmā'il's sacrifice Benyāmin, Dāwud and Ramzbār are mentioned<sup>11</sup> ...

<sup>8</sup> See App. 1.

<sup>9</sup> All translations in this chapter are by PK.

*Hazrat-e Musi*.<sup>12</sup> Musi himself was Dāwud. And in the presence of *Haqq*, at a specific time, Sharaf has given details about him. Musi had the White Hand and the Stick, as has been recorded in the *Daftar*.<sup>13</sup> Light and brilliance were in his hand. Mostafā<sup>14</sup> also had conversations with *Haqq*. In the period of Pir Musi there is no mention of the presence of the rest of the *Haft Tan*...

*Hazrat-e Soleymān*:<sup>15</sup> Soleymān himself was Dāwud; his Crown (was) Soltān; his signet ring was Benyāmin; ...<sup>16</sup> of Soleymān, Belqis<sup>17</sup> (was) Ramzbār, as is explained below....

*Hazrat-e Isā*:<sup>18</sup> Jesus himself was Benyāmin. Apart from Jesus none of the *Haft Tan* and the rest are mentioned.

[*Zarathustra*]:<sup>19</sup> On the page about Zarathustra,<sup>20</sup> which describes him fully, Hushang,<sup>21</sup> the originator of the *Gabr*<sup>22</sup> religion, is celebrated and made known. In the books on Iranian history, Ferdowsi quotes Khosraw Parwiz<sup>23</sup> as saying, 'I am not ashamed of the ancient religion; there is no one better in the world than Hushang.'

### Ali

The role in Yāri of Ali, who is intensely revered by some Yāresān communities but less so in Guran, raises questions. Ali is accepted by most Yāresān as a manifestation of the Divine.<sup>24</sup> However, no *kalāms* are associated with him and there appears to be no evidence that he is thought to have had his own cycle. It would seem therefore that, although Ali is accorded a high status in Yāri, he never became fully integrated into the mythical history of that religion. In the Introduction to the *Daftar-e Diwān-e Gewre-ye Perdiwari*,<sup>25</sup> we find the following reference to Ali's somewhat anomalous position:

10 The Biblical Abraham.

11 I.e. in the *kalāms*.

12 I.e. the Biblical Moses, also known in Yāri lore as Pir-e Musi.

13 The corpus of *kalāms*.

14 A member of the *Haft Tan* during the cycle of Soltān Sahāk.

15 The Biblical Solomon.

16 Unreadable in the Ms.

17 Solomon's wife, the Queen of Sheba.

18 Jesus.

19 The name is not mentioned here in the Ms.

20 The reference may be to a part of the Ms. that was not available to me.

21 A mythical hero who plays a role in Zoroastrian mythology.

22 I.e. 'Zoroastrian'.

23 A Sasanian king.

24 For the non-Jeyhunabadist tradition of Sahne, which has a great devotion to Ali, see App. 3.

25 Anon. 1, 2008:2.

The conditions of each dowre are set out in the *Daftar*, and the explanations are in the language of [this] *Daftar*. The various chapters describing the appearance of *Haqiqat* are as follows: as is described in this chapter (*daftar*), although Mortazā Ali [i.e. Ali] belonged to the [stage of] *Shari'at*, nevertheless the Ahl-e Haqq regard him as a full manifestation (*mazhar*) of *Haqiqat* because he completed the stage of *Shari'at* and caused it to move on; he strengthened and helped the *Shari'a*.

In the list of *dowres* following this passage, there is no mention of Ali.

Sayyed Wali wrote further:

The *Shari'a* of Mohammad,<sup>26</sup> the manifestation of the Prophet among the Arabs, and his greatness, power and knowledge are generally known. The *Daftar's*<sup>27</sup> explanation of this will be discussed later. The commandments of the *Shari'a* and the formation of the Islamic religion reached its full form through the necessary manifestation of Mohammad. Its commandments (and) its established religious principles and customs became manifest through the agency of Mohammad. Mortazā Ali (i.e. Ali), whom the Ahl-e Haqq regard as a manifestation of the Essence of God, took steps to establish the spread of the true cause of Islamic and religion with the utmost seriousness. As was mentioned earlier, he established Islam and made it popular. God is manifest and present in all religions. He has changed and moved (through) the epochs of the world step by step, epoch by epoch, and incarnation by incarnation. The common people, collectively and individually, are also always in a state of change through the transmigration of the soul, from stage to stage until the end.<sup>28</sup> ...

#### *The cycles of Tariqat and Ma'refat*

SF's account of the stage of *Tariqat* and *Ma'refat* begins with the cycle of Bohlul-e Māhi,<sup>29</sup> which he situates in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.H. (ca. 800 CE). Others state that this stage was perfected by Shāh Fazl, and also suggest that it began with him.<sup>30</sup> After the period of Bohlul came the cycles of Bābā Sarhang, Bābā Jalil, Shāh Khoshin and Bābā Nā'us, whom SF places around 1000 CE. The historical sequence of these cycles is said to be of little importance.<sup>31</sup>

26 Here the word is used to mean 'Islamic Law'.

27 I.e. the explanation offered by the *kalāms*, particularly the Perdiwari texts.

28 I.e. the End of Time, on which see below.

29 On the 'madman' Bohlul in Islamic culture see Marzolph 1983.

30 So Anon 1 2008:3, and Hamzeh'ee 1990:44–45.

31 Tāheri (2007:1–6) acknowledges that the sequence he gives in his work may be controversial.

*Bohlul-e Māhi*

It is perhaps significant that many Yāresān claim that their religion was founded by the ‘wise fool’ Bohlul, a figure whose inner knowledge and strength were not recognised by outsiders and who was held up to ridicule. According to the Islamic tradition Bohlul formed part of the entourage of the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid in Baghdad around 800 CE. He is said to have shown the Caliph the shortcomings of his reign, pretending to be insane so as to escape punishment.<sup>32</sup> The Yāri tradition states that Bohlul-e Māhi was a Kurd from Māh-Kufe in the Kermanshāh area, who founded a community in the Hawraman region before moving to Baghdad with some of his companions. In Baghdad he is said to have met the Shi’ite Emām Ja’far al-Sādeq.<sup>33</sup>

*Shāh Fazl*

This figure, known as Shāh Fazl or Shāh Fazl Wali, does not appear to be very prominent in the Gurani tradition, but is regarded by some Yāresān communities as one of the early full manifestations of the Divine.<sup>34</sup> He is strongly associated with the period of *Ma’refat*.<sup>35</sup> Van Bruinessen<sup>36</sup> gives the following account of this figure:

In the name of the third great manifestation, Shāh Fazl, we may recognise that of Fazlallāh Astarābādi, the founder of the Hurufī sect (d. 1393). One of his associates is called Nasimi, obviously the Turkish Hurufi poet of that name, who was flayed alive in Aleppo in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.

During this cycle, it is said, Mansur al-Hallāj, Nasimi, Zakaryā and Torke were the incarnations of the four great male archangels; Eyne that of Ramzbār. The ‘Lamb’ (*barre*) which is killed and eaten whenever the Companions are hungry<sup>37</sup> is sometimes regarded as a manifestation of Bābā Yādegār, who was also killed. The Introduction to the *Diwān-e Gewre-ye Perdiwari* says:<sup>38</sup>

Shāh Fazl is the Soltān of *Ma’refat*, he perfected and set in motion the stage of *Ma’refat*... This is described extensively in the *Daftar*. References to the Lamb and Eyne-ye Mansuri<sup>39</sup> in particular occur in each *dowre*.

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32 See with references Hamzeh’ee 1990:42–44.

33 Safizāde 1997:38. Hamzeh’ee 1990:44.

34 See Hamzeh’ee 1990:44.

35 See Anon. 1, 2008, Introduction, p. 3.

36 Van Bruinessen 1995 (Internet).

37 Van Bruinessen 1995 (Internet):10.

38 Anon. 1 2008:3.

39 I.e. ‘Eyne who belongs to Mansur’. She is, however, a religious figure in her own right.

*Bābā Sarhang*

This figure is predominantly associated with social struggle.<sup>40</sup> SF describes his life and times as follows:

He was against feudalism, like Robin Hood. He didn't steal, but he took the land from the landowners by force and gave it to the peasants. The feudal landowners hated Sarhang. They were Sunni Muslims, they misinterpreted Islam and became like that. He lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H.... Bābā Sarhang's *dowre* came after that of Bohlul. Bābā Sarhang was a man who was on the side of the poor and he had great courage. He rose up against the *Khāns* (landowners); it was the time of feudalism and he rose upon behalf of the farm labourers. They say that before Soltān the Muslims used to come and take away the possessions of those who believed in Yāri. They had disputes and debates about religion, about possessions, about everything. So, many people chose his side. In Islam there is a story that the Christians doubted Mohammad and he challenged them to come out and debate. He came with ten figures who were close to him, and the Christians didn't dare to appear. We have something similar: Bābā Sarhang told the Muslims, 'Let us discuss this matter of our property, to whom it belongs'. With the help of the faith and belief of Shāh Khoshin, and through the power of God and Gabriel, who comes to us from Heaven at God's behest, they gave evidence to show to whom the property belonged. Quarrels about such matters belong to the period of Bābā Sarhang. In Islam private property is very sacred.

*Bābā Jalil*

Although his period is usually mentioned in the list of cycles preceding that of Perdiwar, not much appears to be known about Bābā Jalil. SF said:

Jalil investigated all the different religious groups over the ages, and saw both their good and bad sides. Then he came to the Yāresān and said, 'This group is perfect. It has no shortcomings.'

Hamzeh'ee, following Jeyhunābādī, states that Bābā Jalil was an incarnation of the Divine who lived some centuries after Soltān Sahāk, and did not found a *khāndān*.<sup>41</sup>

*Shāh Khoshin*

This is the best-known figure from the *Tariqat* stage. He was one of the full manifestations of the Essence of the Divine (*zāt-mehmān*),<sup>42</sup> and his *dowre* is believed to

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40 Alqāsi 1979:20.

41 Hamzeh'ee 1990:209.

42 See below, p. 77. The same claim is made about Ali (see above), and again about Soltān Sahāk.



have been a ‘complete’ one, in which all members of the *Haft Tan* and Haftawāne were present in human form.<sup>43</sup>

Shāh Khoshin is said to have lived in Lorestan in or around the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>44</sup> A well-known *kalām* describes how his mother, the virgin Jalāle – the daughter of Āmāne, a powerful leader in Lorestan – becomes pregnant by the Divine Essence through a ray of sunlight entering her mouth. She complains bitterly of being despised by the community as an immoral woman. Kākā Redā, one of the Heptad, then comes to her rescue and admonishes the community to respect her as the mother of a great future leader, Shāh Khoshin. Khoshin is said to have met the poet Bābā Tāher, and to have performed many miracles. According to the tradition he ‘disappeared’ in the Garmāsiyāb river.<sup>45</sup> Khoshin is said to have been a ‘revolutionary personality, who offered guidance to Morids and Pirs in questions of justice and truth’.<sup>46</sup>

In the Introduction to the *Daftar-e Diwān-e Gewre* we find:<sup>47</sup>

The *dowre* of Shāh Khoshin is wholly complete, and was full of grandeur. It lasted a long time, perhaps the King [God?] and the servants of that *dowre* renewed their incarnations, and returned as parts of that *dowre*. This is well documented in the *kalāms*. [Khoshin’s] birth and appearance took place as follows. He was the son of the daughter of Mirzā Āmāne. Mirzā Āmāne himself was a chief in Lorestan, in the period in question the leadership was his. His daughter Jalāle, while a virgin, became pregnant through an illumination by lights (*tajalli-ye anwār*). Her father accused her of immoral conduct and banished her from the tribe. At the time of the [annual] migration he abandoned her in the mountains. His daughter, who was pure and of righteous conduct, was left anxious and desperate when Kākā Redā encountered her and saw her in that condition. He gave her good tidings and made her hopeful about her pregnancy, making her happy by announcing the good news of the appearance of Shāh Khoshin, as is explained in the *Daftar*.

SF said:

Shāh Khoshin had a high spiritual status, he was a master of all the sciences that existed in Lorestan at that time. That he lived in Lorestan shows that the use of Gurani was far more widespread than it is now.

According to the *Tazkere-ye A’lā*,<sup>48</sup> Shāh Khoshin defeated a number of ‘pretenders’, i.e. miracle-workers, whom he reduced to obedience. Furthermore, Shāh

43 Alqāsi 1979:17.

44 Alqāsi (1979:16) assigns him to the 4<sup>th</sup> century HQ. Safizāde (1997:27) states that he was born in Lorestan in 1015 CE.

45 Hamzeh’ee 1990:49. For an account of Shāh Khoshin’s miracles see Hamzeh’ee 1990:267–270.

46 Alqāsi 1979:17.

47 Anon. 1 2008:3–4.

48 Ivanow 1953:112. On the *Tazkere-ye A’lā* see Introduction, fn.12.

Khoshin is associated with the introduction of the *tanbur* as the sacred instrument of the community. SF said:

The *tanbur* is several thousand years old, but under Shāh Khoshin it became the religious instrument of the Yāresān. People use it for their rituals. Shāh Khoshin said, 'Wherever one takes up a *tanbur* that is tuned, there I shall be.' Others say that this is true only when the *tanbur* is being played, but the first version is more correct. Every time you take up a *tanbur* you need to tune it.

Taking a very different view of the role of Shāh Khoshin in Yāresān history, Van Bruinessen<sup>49</sup> writes:

The second great manifestation, bringer of the *tariqat*, was Shāh Khushin. In him we do not recognise a specific historical person, but rather a certain class of popular mystics. The legends about him seem to be related to the incursion of large numbers of Qalandar-type dervishes into western Iran. The deification of Shāh Khushin, therefore, may be read as an acknowledgement of spiritual indebtedness to Qalandar-ism. It is not the only acknowledgement: the term Qalandar has strong honorific overtones among the AH; one of the most beloved later saints of the Guran was called Āli Qalandar.<sup>50</sup>

Associated with Shāh Khoshin is another prominent figure, Pir Shahriyār or Pir-e Shaliyār, who is said to have been a Zoroastrian priest. Tradition has it that he originally lived in Yāfte-Kuh in the Lakki region, and later moved to Hawraman.<sup>51</sup> An annual festival in Hawraman, in which both Muslims and Yāresān participate, still bears his name.

#### *Bābā Nā'us*

Not much is known about this figure. There is a story to the effect that when he revealed his divine nature many people rejected his claim. His brother Shiru taunted him and changed him into a pig.<sup>52</sup> SF gave the following account of his life and character:

Bābā Nā'us came after Shāh Khoshin, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century (A.H.). They say that the life and times of Bābā Nā'us mostly took place in the countryside around Sanandaj, in (the Iranian province of) Kordestan. That was his field of activity. First there were the Dodāniyān. The Dodāniyān were those who were left of Pir Mikhā'il and that lot.<sup>53</sup> Sargar is a place near Sanandaj and Bābā Nā'us

49 Van Bruinessen 1995, Internet:7.

50 On Āli Qalandar see above, p. 39.

51 Hamzeh'ee 1990:51–52.

52 Hamzehe'ee 1990:270.

53 According to Hamzeh'ee (1990:274–275), Pir Mikhā'il was an advanced mystic as well as a powerful tribal leader, living near the Sirwan river. It is said that when Sahāk came there with his companions, Mikhā'il came to challenge the newcomers, riding a lion. Dāwud then mounted

was there. The women of those regions tried to vex him with female wiles and tricks. True Ahl-e Haqq have to sit in the corner of solitude.<sup>54</sup> Bābā Nā'us said, 'I swear and promise that I shall put you, unclean ones, in your proper corner'. He said he would bring them into such a state that they could only sit and do nothing. He said, 'You only see the *zāher*, you mock me, you call me a heathen who does not pray, and so on. We are not heathen. We seek the *Yār* (the Beloved, God) inside ourselves, in our hearts.' He said, 'Oh King, the court of *Hazrat-e Haqq* is in our own hearts. Oh Seekers of Pearls, our own house is a pearl. Our hands may be empty [i.e. we have no books, ours is an oral tradition], but our (inner) eye is full. To outsiders, our place of refuge is secret. Anyone who comes from the Pearl, his refuge is the Pearl.<sup>55</sup> The beginning and the end is the Pearl. We have no need [of books].'

### *Soltān Sahāk and the Stage of Haqiqat*

This *dowre* is the key period of Yāresān history, being the era in which the community acquired its present form in the outer world. Myths and legends about Soltān Sahāk abound. SF gave the following account of Soltān's appearance:

Soltān Sahāk came as the one who completed the Path of the others... The core of the Yāri religion is reincarnation. Soltān had appeared in various forms in different periods, until he had traversed *Shari'at*, *Tariqat* and *Ma'refat*. Now as to the *dowre* in which he appeared as Soltān, we don't stress the physical heritage, so we don't stress who his father and mother were. It was felt that he had passed through the stages of *Shari'at* and *Ma'refat* and was approaching *Haqiqat*. Then Soltān's original companions, Dāwud, Benyāmin and Pir Musi came in search of Soltān. They felt it was time to reveal *Haqiqat*. They were looking for the Friend (*Yār*), that is, for Soltān. They had been together before and wanted to become manifest again. They sensed that their Friend was somewhere in Iraq. They travelled everywhere in order to find him. Eventually they felt drawn to someone called Sheykh Isi. He was a rich Sunni and had many sons. But it [the object of their search] was not one of the sons! As it happens, Soltān had not yet been born. So they consulted together. The wives of Sheykh Isi were past childbearing age, so they went to Sheykh Isi and talked to him, for they knew the child had to come into his family. So they found him a new wife, a daughter of Hoseyn Beg Jāf. The Jāf are a Kurdish tribe whose language is close to Sorani.<sup>56</sup>

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a wall and won the contest. A very similar story is found among the Yezidis and the Alevi (see Kreyenbroek 1995:290–293; Van Bruinessen 1992). Incidentally, the legend seems to confirm the presence of 'priestly' families in pre-Sahāk Kurdistan.

54 This was apparently the reason for the women's animosity against Bābā Nā'us.

55 The Pearl being the embryonic form of the world, in which God dwelled before Creation.

56 I.e. Central Kurdish as spoken in the Autonomous Region.

There are Jāf in Iran, near Kermanshah, and in Iraq. In Barzinje there were speakers of Gurani and of Jāfi Kurdish.<sup>57</sup>

Now Sheykh Isi was seventy years old. They went to Hoseyn Beg Jāf to ask for his daughter, Dāyerak, who was very young. They insisted, so in order to avoid unpleasantness Hoseyn Beg Jāf said: 'I will give you my daughter on one condition. I want a thousand mares, a thousand cows, and a thousand sheep as a bride price.' They said, 'All right, we'll come tomorrow'. Hoseyn Beg went to sleep without worries; he thought that seven<sup>58</sup> dervishes can never find so many animals. But we believe that because of their miraculous powers they collected the animals and brought them to Hoseyn. So Hoseyn could do nothing, and his daughter was willing. In those days the father had complete power over his daughters.

There are two versions about what happened next.<sup>59</sup> A wealthy merchant, Bābā Rokneddin, had given those four dervishes a field, for they were farmers. A white falcon<sup>60</sup> came to sit on one of the bushes, and on that bush there grew a melon. They took this melon to Dāyerak. She fell pregnant and Soltān was born. The three *darwishes* watched over him. The other version says that Rokneddin had given them a field, and there was a melon bush. They had been told, 'When the bush flowers, then you'll know that you have found your *Yār*'.<sup>61</sup>

Then some things happened. Sheikh Isi loved his new son very much, and the other sons were jealous. After Isi's death there was a conflict [with the other sons], and Soltān left the region. Of all his father's great wealth he only took one pan, one small carpet and one tablecloth. He went to Hawraman and settled in a cave called Mara Now in order to write down matters of religion. His half-brothers, led by Hushang-e Chickek came after him and found him.<sup>62</sup>

### *Bābā Yādegār*

Bābā Yādegār's status as Soltān's successor is described by SF as follows:

57 It could be that this myth reflects the role of both Hawrami speakers and Jāf in the early development of Yāri.

58 A reference, presumably, to the number of members of the *Haft Tan* of the period of Soltān. In fact, according to this narrative, there were only three Companions who were searching for Soltān.

59 A long version of the story can be found in Hamzeh'ee 1990:271–272.

60 The falcon, and particularly the white falcon, plays a special role in Kurdish folklore. It is probably connected with the pre-Islamic Iranian concept of *khwarnah* or *farr* (on which see Kreyenbroek 1997), which in the Avesta (Yt.19.35, 36, 38) took the shape of *vārayna* bird, i.e. probably a falcon or eagle.

61 In this version, in other words, there is no reference to a falcon.

62 For the sequel to this account, which explains the origin of the Yāri fasts, see p. 110.

Bābā Yādegār, who was Soltān's successor (*jāneshin*), never married and had no children. For the transmission of the spiritual heritage we have no need of marriage. Bābā Yādegār was tested in various ways, for instance he was locked into an oven, and so he was transformed into a Pir.<sup>63</sup> Bābā Yādegār received the essence (*zāt*) of Soltān, he was the only one who was completely like Soltān; the essence of Soltān merged with Bābā Yādegār. Yādegār lost himself in Soltān and the other way round. In order that people should not become arrogant, Soltān submitted his head to him. He said, 'You are my Pir'. Now Bābā Yādegār transmitted that pure essence of Soltān to Khiyāl and Wesāl, two brothers. The Sayyeds of the *khāndān* of Bābā Yādegār are descended from them.

The Introduction to the *Daftar-e Diwān-e Gewre-ye Perdiwari* offers the following account:<sup>64</sup>

Bābā Yādegār is at one with the *dowre* of Soltān and he had [lit. 'is'] the very essence of Soltān...After [Soltān] had bestowed on Yādegār the 'leaf of His own colour' (*barg-e xodrangi*),<sup>65</sup> i.e. the colour of Soltān, and had recognised him as his own 'commemorator' (*yādegār*) and replacement, Soltān drew a curtain over Perdiwar.<sup>66</sup> The well-known groups and others were afflicted by the iniquities of the Sunnis, and did not have the strength to maintain themselves there. They fled, each [group] going its own way. Bābā Yādegār, for whom Sarane and Mt Dalahu<sup>67</sup> had been appointed [as places to live] in the Presence of Soltān, was forced at a young age to move from Perdiwar to Sarane, and lived there all his life. The coming of Shāh Ebrāhim from Baghdad to achieve a resolution, and its result, are well known.

Golmorad Moradi<sup>68</sup> quotes several verses that illustrate the close relations between Soltān Sahāk and Bābā Yādegār, including the following:

*Pādešāh maramo: wēmanān šādat u gawāh Yādegārī wēman Yār-e Pādešāh*

The King<sup>69</sup> declares, 'I myself bear witness and testimony: Yādegār, who is myself, is the Friend of Pādešāh.'

63 Legend has it that Bābā Yādegār was baked in an oven for three days and that this experience transformed him into a worthy successor of Soltān.

64 Anon I, 2008:10.

65 This expression denotes that Soltān bequeathed his Essence to Yādegār.

66 I.e. he let the period of Perdiwar end.

67 A mountain near Sarane in the Guran region.

68 Moradi 1999:252.

69 I.e. Soltān Sahāk.

Other passages cited by Moradi<sup>70</sup> state that Soltān ‘gave all of Kurdistan to him [i.e. Yādegār]’; that Yādegār ‘shares the Secret of Soltān Sahāk’; and that ‘Shāh Yādegār represents<sup>71</sup> Soltān’.

### *Shāh Ebrāhim*

He is described as Bābā Yādegār’s great rival. Both are founders of important *khāndāns*. According to a tradition that is current among followers of the Bābā Yāgedāri ‘orientation’, Shāh Ebrāhim killed Bābā Yādegār. Many of Shāh Ebrāhim’s followers deny this. On the history of these two rivals see further below.

### *Āli Qalandar*

On this figure see Ch. 2.

### *Ātash Beg*<sup>72</sup>

According to some, Ātash Beg, who lived in 18<sup>th</sup> century and became the founder of a *khāndān*, was another full manifestation of the Divine Essence. One of his brothers was Almās Beg, who foretold the future and has many followers in Lorestan. SF said:

Apart from the Thirty-Six Poets there are other texts, e.g. that of Khān Almās, who could foresee the future. He belonged to the *dowre* of Khān Ātash, which is also known as Ātashbegi.

The reference here to Ātash Khān’s *dowre* seems to imply that Ātash had his own ‘cycle’ in history, which may not be what SF intended. While these leaders are believed to have been manifestations (*zohur*) of the Divine, their times are not generally regarded as *dowres* in the original sense of the word, because they did not begin with a manifestation of the *Haft Tan*. An article on the Website ‘Kermashan’<sup>73</sup> defines this state of affairs as follows:

The fourth epoch comprises the time from the period of Sayyed Brāke of Guran till the present day. Between the third period [that of Soltān], and the fourth there were some other, incomplete *dowres* of so-called manifestations of God on earth, such as the appearance of Khan Almās, Khan Ātash, Sayyed Farzi, or Sheykh Amir Zule’i<sup>74</sup> and those around them, but none of these pe-

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> The half-verse reads: *Yādegārā yādegārī Soltān*, lit. ‘Yādegār is the memory (*yādegār*) of Soltān’.

<sup>72</sup> See also Ch. 2. On this figure see also Ivanow 1953: 173–177.

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.kirmashan.com/?q=node/127> consulted on 9 October 2011. Translation by PK.

<sup>74</sup> The much-venerated author of popular *kalāms*. Here the close association between religious leaders and the *kalāms* describing their life and times has given rise to a belief that the authors of the *kalāms* were themselves manifestations of the Divine.

riods witnessed the *jam* of *Bayāwbas*<sup>75</sup> or the august Assembly of the Friends of Truth.<sup>76</sup>

### *Sayyed Brāke*

The next full manifestation the Divine, according to many Gurani Yāresān, was a man called Sayyed Heydar (1823–1876), who used to address people as *brākem*, ‘my brother’, which earned him the nickname of ‘Sayyed Brāke’. Sayyed Brāke lived in the Gurani village of Tutshami. Many members of his entourage composed religious verse. Collectively these came to be known as ‘the Thirty-Six Poets’. SF says:

The Gurani believe that the Essence (*zāt*) of God and the *farr*,<sup>77</sup> and the knowledge (*ma’refat*) of Soltān and Bābā Yādegār have come to Sayyed Heydar, who was known as Sayyed Brāke. He was so kind that he called everyone *brākem*, ‘my brother’. The Gurani believe that he had a wife and children but that he experienced a spiritual revolution and withdrew from the world. The people of Guran believe that the *zāt* and *ma’refat* of *Hazrat-e Haqq* from the time of Soltān, 460 years before, appeared in Sayyed Heydar, Sayyed Brāke, who lived at Tutshami. His descendants are Sayyed Rostam and Sayyed Ayyāz. The entire *zāt* was there [in him].

That period was the renaissance and renewal of the Yāri religion, for they had suffered a lot, especially under the Safavids. They had been driven from Hawraman; some came to Zarde.<sup>78</sup> Others committed suicide. No one was left alive in Hawraman. They had suffered since the time of Soltān, so that no one is left in the region of Hawraman now.

In another context, SF said:

Then came the *dowre* of Brāke. The people of Guran, who are the original Yāresān, generally accept him. But in Azerbaijan, Tehran and such places, they don’t accept this. They believe that the last time the *zāt* became manifest was in Soltān, and never again. In Tehran they mostly accept the Perdiwari *kalāms* but not the Thirty-Six Poets.<sup>79</sup> The Guranis, who are mostly Bābā Yādegāri or Shāh Ebrāhimi, accept the Thirty-Six Poets.... They believe that all secrets were revealed at the time of Soltān, but in a mysterious, cryptic way. Therefore the Thirty-Six Poets expressed the secrets anew.

<sup>75</sup> On the *Bayāwbas* see further Ch. 4, pp. 80, 84–85 *et passim*

<sup>76</sup> I.e. the *Haft Tan*.

<sup>77</sup> On *khwarnah* or *farr* see above, fn. 60.

<sup>78</sup> A town in the Guran region. On the migration to Zarde see further below.

<sup>79</sup> I.e. the religious poets who were members of Sayyed Brāke’s entourage.

We have had a lot of people with poetic talents, who either composed religious texts or *Shāhnāme* texts.<sup>80</sup> Sayyed Brāke had the Thirty-Six Poets. The Essence of God became manifest in Sayyed Brāke and he inspired the Thirty Six. They were inspired by the *zāt* that was incarnated in Sayyed Brāke. They said that it wasn't they who wrote the texts, it was done through inspiration. There was also Darwish Qoli, who was a good man, but was not inspired like the Thirty-Six; he did not have the *zāt*. Such poets explained the same things as the Perdiwari texts, but much more simply.

At the time of writing, some Yāresān of Guran are reported to have carried their veneration for Sayyed Brāke and his descendants so far as to regard his descendant and successor, Sayyed Nasreddin Heydari, as a full manifestation of the Divine mainly because of his lineage.<sup>81</sup>

#### *Hājj Ne'matollāh Jeyhunābādi*

The Gurani Yāresān generally reject the teachings of Hājj Ne'matollāh and his successors (see below), and resent both their claims that Yāri is an integral part of Shi'ite Islam and the support this group is believed to enjoy from the authorities of the Islamic Republic.<sup>82</sup> Many Jeyhunabadists believe Hājj Ne'matollāh to have been a full manifestation of the Divine Essence and the founder of a new *dowre* – claims that were rejected by my Gurani interlocutors. The Jeyhunabadists, in short, mostly figure in the mental map of Gurani Yāresān as the quintessential 'others', who pervert the tradition from within.<sup>83</sup>

## Factual History

The cyclical view of history that is characteristic of Yāri thought and the linear history of the West are bound to result in somewhat dissimilar accounts. Unfortunately we have few reliable sources for an objective historiography of the Yāresān community.

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80 I.e. epic texts resembling Ferdowsi's Persian *Shāhnāme*. The heroes of the *Shāhnāme*, the Iranian national epic, have a special status among the Yāresān, being regarded as incarnations of divine beings. See further Ch. 6, pp. 121, 129 *et passim*.

81 Verbal communication by SF, 8 October 2011.

82 On the tensions between the Jeyhunabadists and other Yāresān in the early 1990s see Mir-Hosseini 1996.

83 A very different view of this group is presented by Membrado (2014), who describes it as the 'mystical path with the Ahl-e Ḥaq Order'.



## Early history

### *Origins*

As we saw in Chapter 1, over the period between the advent of Islam and that of Soltān Sahāk, Kurdistan saw the appearance of a succession of heresiarchs who succeeded in finding acceptance for their teachings, which generally consisted of a synthesis between Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs and practices. These heresiarchs thus became the founders of new religious communities. While earlier movements of this type were relatively short-lived, two later ones, Yezidism and Yāri, endure to the present day.<sup>84</sup> Both these religions owe their origin to leaders whom later generations of followers believe to have ‘re-established’ existing beliefs and practices in a new and more acceptable form. The historical founder of Yezidism, Sheykh Adi b. Musāfir, can be shown to have been a Sufi Sheykh, whose community returned to their earlier, largely non-Islamic beliefs and practices after his death.<sup>85</sup> However, Yezidism has preserved much of the imagery and terminology of Sufism, which are used in a novel way that is uniquely its own.

Whether some of the earlier Yāresān leaders who are mentioned in the tradition were also heresiarchs of the type described above, we have no means of knowing. In the case of the ‘wise fool’ Bohlul, who is best known in Islamic literature for his activities at the Abbasid court in Baghdad, this seems relatively unlikely. Since the Yāresān tradition does acknowledge Bohlul’s connection with the court of Baghdad, and thus appears to be based at least partly on historical fact, one might conjecture that the other community leaders were also historical figures, but more than that one cannot say.

The first documented reference to a Yāresān leader is a *waqf* deed<sup>86</sup> of 1526 CE, a copy of which was published by Mokri.<sup>87</sup> Mokri’s version, which is said to be based on a number of later copies of the original, refers to Bābā Yādegār in the following terms: ‘the Lord Sheykh of the time, his excellency of holy epithets, Sheykh Yādegār, who is a follower of the descendants of Ali, son of Abu Tāleb, ...the leader of the age, the knowledgeable one of the time and the period, a descendant of the house of Mostafā [Mohammad] and the family of Mortazā [Ali], peace be upon him, of a family of sheykhs, Sheykh Yādegār’.<sup>8889</sup> Another, probably late copy of the text

84 Turkish Alevism, on the other hand, does not appear to have been ‘re-organised’ by a single, outstanding figure.

85 See Kreyenbroek 1995:33.

86 I.e. a deed making a pious bequest.

87 See Mokri 1963, whose transcription of the text is said to be based on a number of different copies, none of which was the original.

88 *Āqā-ye Šeyx-e zamān, janāb-e moqaddas-alqāb Šeykh Yādegār, ke bande-ye owlād-e ‘Ali-ye Abu Tāleb mibāšad... pišwā-ye dōwrān wa ‘āref-e zamān (wa)\* ‘ašr ... salāle-ye dudmān-e Mošāfā wa xāndān-e Morteḏā ‘aleyhe ‘s-salām, šeyxzāde Šeyx Yādegār.*

89 Elsewhere in the document we find the words in \**Šeyx Yādegār owlād-e ‘Ali ast*, ‘This Sheykh Yādegār is a descendant of Ali’; and *Šeyx Yādegār ke nabire-ye owlād-e ‘Ali-ye Abu Tāleb*

describes him as ‘a descendant of the family \*and the *khāndān* of Soltān’.<sup>90</sup> Yādegār is said to live at *Sarā-ye Zarde-ye Yazdejerdi*, ‘Sarā(y) of Zarde of Yazdegerd’, which probably refers to present-day Sarane. This document, in other words, shows that Yādegār was prominent in that region as a religious leader in early Safavid times, and that he was regarded (by some Shi’ites at least) as having strong links with the Shi’a. In a recent publication,<sup>91</sup> Shahrokh Raei has pointed out that Khāksāri derwishes who become affiliated to the Yāresān,<sup>92</sup> ‘must go to an Ahl-e Ḥaqq master, a man known as *sayyed-e vaqt* (“the master of time”)’. It is possible, therefore, that a title meaning, approximately ‘Leader of the Time’ was already the traditional appellation of a Yāresān leader at this early stage, and that this usage continued with slight variations.

#### *Soltān Sahāk and the early history of his community*

The character of the historical Soltān Sahāk is shrouded in legend, the only tangible evidence he left behind being the existence of the Yāresān community, and possibly the coherence of its beliefs and traditions.

If the Yāri tradition is to be believed, two major events in the early history of Soltān Sahāk’s community were the move away from Perdiwar and the rift between Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim. This conflict seems to have taken place some time after the migration from Perdiwar in Hawraman to Zarde in the Guran region, which is said by many sources to have been led by Bābā Yādegār. If this is true, it is not unlikely that the conflict between Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim was in fact a contest for the leadership of the community after it had survived the difficulties of the move away from Perdiwar.

#### *The founding of the khāndāns*

The various accounts of the early history of the *khāndāns* are unanimous in claiming that the *khāndān* system was established by Soltān Sahāk, and that the seven original lineages were those of his contemporaries. In this the Yāresān tradition is similar to that of Yezidism, which also associates the origin of its ‘priestly’ lineages with the time of the founder.<sup>93</sup> As was pointed out earlier, this striking unanimity could mean that both accounts go back to a tradition predating both Yāri and Yezidism, which

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*mibāšad*, ‘Sheykh Yādegār, who is the offspring of the descendants of Ali b. Abi Tāleb.’ These qualifications are said to have been used by Qamām al-Din, who granted the land to Bābā Yādegār.

90 *\*salāle-ye dudmān \*o xāndān-e Soltān*. The version where this occurs appears to be a late copy made by a Yārsān scribe. The text can be found under:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=756079157747473&set=pcb.756084587746930&type=1&theater>

91 Raei 2014:240.

92 On this custom see Raei 2014:240–241, and cf. above Ch. 2 with fn. 8 and 40.

93 See Kreyenbroek 1995:38–39.

legitimised the existence of a hereditary priesthood<sup>94</sup> by claiming the authority of eminent early figures. In other words, a preconceived mental image as to how the lineages originated may have informed these accounts, perhaps irrespective of historical accuracy.

### *The Perdiwari Kāka'is*

In the villages of Hawar, Hawara Kon and Dere Tuy Mate, on the Iraqi side of a mountain path leading westwards from Perdiwar in Iran, lives a small community of Yāresān whose religious tradition differs in significant ways from those of all other known groups. They have Sayyeds but follow no *khāndān* and use the word *shākh* (branch) for that concept instead of *khāndān*, which is used by all other communities. Their *shākh*, they say, 'is Perdiwar'. Perdiwar is also their *qibla*, i.e. the direction they face while praying, a tradition that is not generally found among Yāresān. They hold monthly meetings to celebrate the *jam* but have no fixed place (*jamkhāne*) for these meetings. The celebration of the *jam* in their community requires three key celebrants, a Sayyed, a *Khalīfē* and a *Farrāsh* ('Servant', i.e. Dalil).<sup>95</sup> Unlike the other Kāka'i communities, the Perdiwaris do not speak a form of Gurani, but have adopted the local form of Kurdish.

Moreover, while most Iranian Yāresān associate their (beneficent) *Sheytān*<sup>96</sup> with Dāwud,<sup>97</sup> the Perdiwaris believe that *Sheytān* is associated with Benyāmin. Unless the striking resemblance between certain Yāresān holy figures and ancient Iranian divinities is entirely fortuitous,<sup>98</sup> Dāwud shares significant characteristics with the Old Iranian divinity Verethraghna (Bahrām), one of Mithra's 'helpers' (*hamkār*). Benyāmin, however, owes several of his traits to Mithra, who is the most likely Old Iranian divinity to have given rise to the concept of a 'good Satan'.<sup>99</sup> This state of affairs, then, suggests that the Perdiwari tradition has preserved an original, early tradition, while most Yāresān communities in Iran have come to associate Satan with a less prominent figure, perhaps at a later stage.<sup>100</sup>

94 Both the account of the origin of the lineage of Āli Qalandar (but cf. Van Bruinessen, above), and the narrative about the rival priests of the Dodāniyān clan (see above under 'Bābā Nā'us') suggest that such 'priestly' families – perhaps known as lineages of descendants of the Prophet (Sayyed) or of Sufi Sheykhs – existed at the time of Soltān.

95 See above, p. 36, and below, p. 98 fn. 4.

96 I.e. 'Satan', on the origin of the concept of a 'good Satan' see above, Introduction. As in Yezidism, this figure is referred to by several groups of Yāresān as *Malak Tāwus*, the Peacock Angel.

97 See Kreyenbroek 1992b and below, pp. 90-91. Sayyed Wali Hosseini (App. 1) wrote, 'In (the phase of) *Shari'at*, Malak Tāwus is given the name of *Sheytān*. In *Haqiqat* he is called Dāwud.'

98 On these similarities see Kreyenbroek 1992b, and p. 91.

99 See Ch. 1, p. 10 *et passim*

100 Certain other groups of Kāka'is share the Perdiwaris' identification of *Sheytān* with Benyāmin (see the evidence of Sayyed Khalil Āghābāb Kāka'i in App. 2). This suggests that the identification with Dāwud took place in Iran at a later stage, after the Kāka'i communities moved westward, but further research is needed.

Another intriguing point about the Perdiwaris is that they have no *tanbur*, and claim to have lost the musical tradition that plays such a key role in other communities. During *jam* ceremonies, they just recite sacred texts.<sup>101</sup> There is no way of knowing whether this ‘loss’ was a real one, perhaps owing to the vicissitudes of the community’s history, or if it goes back to a stage in the development of Yāri when the role of music had not yet reached the importance it has for most Yāresān today. If the latter scenario is true, it could be taken as another indication that the Perdiwari group, and possibly other groups of Kāka’is, split off from the main body of the Yāresān before the religious tradition acquired the form it now has.

This hypothesis receives further confirmation from the fact that, unlike most Yāresān – but like some other Kāka’is<sup>102</sup> – the Perdiwari community does not seem to recognise a distinction between the *Haft Tan* and *Haftawāne*, claiming that these Heptads ‘are the same.’<sup>103</sup> Both Zoroastrianism and Yezidism recognise only one group of seven holy figures, which indicates that the distinction between a ‘spiritual’ and a ‘material’ Heptad is peculiar to the Yāri tradition. Given that the Perdiwari community appears to have preserved the tradition of a relatively early phase in the history of Yāri in many respects, one might speculate that the distinction between the two Heptads came to form part of Yāri belief at a later time, when the Perdiwari community had already separated from the main body of Yāresān.

### After Soltān

The combined evidence,<sup>104</sup> then, makes it seem likely that the ancestors of the Perdiwari Kāka’is separated from the main body of the Yāresān community before the *khāndān* system and other institutions that are shared by most other communities, were established. This is all the more likely because of the Perdiwaris’ physical proximity to Perdiwar. The fact that many Kāka’i dialects share characteristics with that of Zarde,<sup>105</sup> moreover, suggests that most Kāka’i groups moved into present-day Iraq after a common move from Perdiwar to Zarde in present-day Iran, and stayed there long enough to adopt the local form of Gurani as the basis of their later forms of speech. Such a scenario is confirmed, moreover, by the Yāresān tradition.<sup>106</sup> The Perdiwaris, on the other hand, did not share this history and, being an isolated minority, adopted the local form of Kurdish.

In the tradition, the figure most clearly associated with the migration from Perdiwar to Zarde is Bābā Yādegār, who can be objectively dated to the 16<sup>th</sup> centu-

101 Either entire *kalāms* or only a few lines.

102 Information from Sayyed Falakeddin Kaka’i, in a written communication to his daughter, Mrs Prshng Kaka’i, undated.

103 This was emphatically stated in an interview PK and PM had with Perdiwari leaders in the village of Hawar, on 21.11.2009, see App. 2.

104 See also Kreyenbroek 2017.

105 I am indebted for this information to PM, a linguist and a native speaker of Hawrami. Oral communication to PK, November 2009.

106 See the information by SF, p. 57.

ry.<sup>107</sup> However, in a *kalām* entitled ‘The birth of Shāh Ebrāhim’,<sup>108</sup> we hear that Soltān ordered Ebrāhim’s father, Sayyed Mohammad, to migrate from Mt Shahu (near Perdiwar) to Mt Dalahu (in Guran) with his household, his animals and all his people. His wife, Khātun Zaynab, complains bitterly about this because she cannot bear to abandon the loveliness of Mt Shahu. She begs her husband not to obey the order. Her pleading is in vain and the family moves to Guran. Clearly, then, it was not just Bābā Yādegār and his followers who moved south to Guran. Shāh Ebrāhim’s family also migrated there, which suggests that their move to Guran may have been part of a mass migration of Soltān’s followers away from Perdiwar, presumably after the death of Soltān, who is buried at Perdiwar.

According to the Yādegāri account, Shāh Ebrāhim<sup>109</sup> came to Zarde when he learned of Bābā Yādegār’s success in establishing his community there. We then hear of tensions between these two leaders, which according to the Bābā Yādegāri account culminated in Shāh Ebrāhim’s killing of Bābā Yādegār.<sup>110</sup> In more objective terms this suggests that the families of Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim both moved to Guran. It seems possible that at some stage the two fought over the leadership of the early post-Perdiwari community. Unless Shāh Ebrāhim always had a power base there, it may have been after this conflict that he moved to Baghdad, where his shrine still is.

As was shown in Ch. 2, all *khāndāns* are divided into followers of Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim. This would be consistent with the assumption that it was during the early Zarde phase, when both Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim played leading roles in the community, that the *khāndān* system came to be established, possibly because the ‘priestly’ families<sup>111</sup> of the time took sides in the conflict and so came to be permanently associated with either Bābā Yādegār or Shāh Ebrāhim. This seems the more likely in view of the immense authority of Soltān Sahāk over the Perdiwar community, which would hardly have admitted of a second tier of authority. It is also relevant to note that in the *waqf* deed referred to above, Bābā Yādegār is said to belong to the *khāndān* of Soltān, rather than his own.

As we saw earlier, the tradition that the initiators of seven ‘priestly’ lineages were close companions of the religion’s founder, may have existed in Kurdish culture irrespective of historical fact. Moreover, Yāresān traditions generally agree as to the identity of most of Soltān Sahāk’s close companions: Benyāmin, Dāwud, Pir

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107 Mokri 1963b, and above, p. 59.

108 Tāheri 2007:915–923.

109 Kāke’i (2012:200 *et passim*) gives arguments to suggest that Shāh Ebrāhim was Soltān Sahāk’s grandson. If this is true, it can be assumed that Soltān flourished in the 15<sup>th</sup> century CE.

110 For a survey of different accounts of the relations between Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Esmā’il see further Ch. 4.

111 The fact that priestly families emerged as part of very similar structures in Yāri, Yezidism and Turkish Alevism, suggests that priestly families already existed at the time of Soltān Sahāk. The tradition that Āli Qalandar was no longer alive when his *khāndān* was established also suggests that he was the head of an existing lineage at that time.

Musi, Ramzbār<sup>112</sup> and, according to several accounts, Mostafā. Of these figures, the only name to be associated with a known *khāndān* is that of Mostafā.<sup>113</sup> With the exception of Shāh Ebrāhim and Bābā Yādegār, in fact, little appears to be known about the founders of the other lineages, several of whom are said to have been incarnations of the *Haftawāne*. Oral tradition tends to compress and simplify historical facts, sometimes making them conform to a pre-existing pattern, and the evidence suggests that this happened here. In other words, the historical developments surrounding the genesis of the first *khāndāns* were probably more complex than the tradition leads us to believe, and most of the early *khāndāns* may in fact have been sub-divisions of two main lineages, those of Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim.

#### *The later khāndāns*

The Yāresān tradition claims that four of the eleven<sup>114</sup> *khāndāns* which are now recognised came into being well after the time of Soltān. The lineages in question are the Zu'l-Nuri, the Ātashbegi, Shāh Hayāsi and Heydari *khāndāns* (see Chapter 2). As the claim that the *khāndāns* were somehow connected with the Seven Divine Beings may have been based upon legend, the distinction between seven original lineages and four later ones might possibly be equally legendary, intended to account for the current number of lineages. One argument against this assumption, however, is that in praxis it would have been difficult to find popular acceptance for the notion that a lineage known to have existed since the early days of the faith, was in fact a recent one. Furthermore, far more details are remembered about the foundation of the later *khāndāns* than about most of the earlier ones,<sup>115</sup> which would be consistent with the assumption that they did indeed come into being at a latter stage, and their history is therefore better remembered.

In view of the available data it can be said that, while we are not sure of the time of origin of several of the 'earlier' lineages, the 'later' ones probably did come into being in or around the 18<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>116</sup>

112 See e.g. Hamzeh'ee 1990:99.

113 It is true that the Bābā Yādegāris usually include Bābā Yādegār in their list of incarnations of the *Haft Tan* at the time of Soltān, but in most other accounts he is represented as Soltān's successor rather than his contemporary. The Bābā Yādegāri tradition has it that Soltān caused Bābā Yādegār to be baked in an oven for three days. After that period Bābā Yādegār came out alive and unhurt, and Soltān 'offered his head' (*sar sepord*) to him. This myth seems to refer to a transfer of authority, rather than to an enduring situation where the founder of the religion accepted the spiritual authority of one of his disciples.

114 The Jeyhunabadists include an additional *dowre* of Hājj Ne'matollāh, and some Guranis refer to a *dowre* of Sayyed Brāke.

115 The exception being the Khāmushi *khāndān*. It may be significant, however, that Sayyed Khāmush also lived several generations after Soltān's contemporary, Sayyed Abu'l-Wafā. It may have been because of the conflicts arising from Sayyed Khāmush's leadership that the *khāndān*'s early history is still remembered in detail.

116 Hamzeh'ee (1990:208), connects the origin of the Ātashbegi, Shāh Hayāsi and Heydari *khāndāns* with the appearance in the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century of a man called Shāh Weys Qoli.

*Sayyed Brāke*

A major event took place in Gurān in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Sayyed Heydar (1834–1872), who became known as Sayyed Brāke (see above), became a leading figure in the Gurān region. Sayyed Brāke was regarded by many as a manifestation of the Divine. He was surrounded by a group of thirty-six poets who composed new *kalāms* in Gurani, which are now very popular there. The spiritual leadership of the Gurani Yāresān continues in Sayyed Brāke’s family, the present incumbent being Sayyed Nasreddin Heydari, who is deeply venerated by Yāresān and non-Yāresān alike. Photographs of Sayyed Nasreddin can be found in almost every house in Guran.

*Hājj Ne’matollāh Jeyhunābādi*

Hājj Ne’matollāh Jeyhunābādi was born in 1871 at Jeyhunabad near Sahne. He must have been charismatic and highly intelligent, but did not belong to a family of Sayyeds. Nevertheless, he aspired to the spiritual leadership of the community of the Sahne area; non-Sayyeds, particularly if they have special visionary gifts (being *didedār*), may indeed fulfil such a role. After a worldly career Hājj Ne’matollāh retired to Jeyhunabad in 1899 in order to devote himself to religious works. During an illness he is said to have visited the ‘World of the Unseen’ (*‘ālam-e gheyb*), where he was ordered to ‘reveal the Truth’. His task in doing so was to unite the various *khāndāns*, whose teachings at that time showed considerable differences. He soon acquired a large following in Sahne, who accepted his claim to be the *Sāheb al-Zamān* (Lord of the Age). This led to tensions with the established religious leadership in the region, who banished Jeyhunābādi and humiliated his followers. Later Hājj Ne’matollāh returned to Jeyhunabad, giving up all claims to active leadership but continuing to follow his spiritual calling. He devoted the rest of his life to the study of the traditions of the various lineages.

In his writings he re-stated ancient teachings in contemporary terms, aiming to reconcile the Yāresān faith with Twelver Shi’ism.<sup>117</sup> He also advocated curbing the hereditary powers of the Sayyeds while elevating the status of ‘visionaries’ (*didedār*) like himself, whose divine inspiration was not conditioned by heredity. His teachings had a great impact on the Yāresān outside the Guran region, particularly in the Sahne area, where it led to deep rifts in the community.<sup>118</sup>

An interesting account of the early activities of Hājj Ne’matollāh, and his appeal to the population, is given by Stead:<sup>119</sup>

... from time to time strange heresies arise. One such started about twenty years ago in the village of Sahnah. A man named Ni‘mat Allah claimed to be a special apostle, and proclaimed a speedy advent of the Lord. Just who

117 See Jeyhunābādi 1966.

118 See Mir-Hosseini 1996.

119 Stead 1932:188–189.

would appear, whether the Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam of the Shiah Muslims, the Christ of the Christians, or someone else, is not clear. But people from all around flocked to his black standard. At his command, they ceased to use tea, tobacco and opium, and the men let their hair grow. He announced the time of the advent, and people sold their little patches of land and their homes and sacrificed their sheep and cattle. Ni'mat Allah constantly urged the people to repent of their sins, and imposed penances for evil deeds. Among other things he made them crawl on their hands and knees and bark like dogs. .... When the time for the advent came, a great crowd waited outside Ni'mat Allah's house. The hour passed. Then after a while, the apostle sent out a message from a secret chamber saying that the advent had been postponed, owing to the sins of the people, that he was fasting and praying in secret for them and commanded more sacrifices and penances. And said that the advent would take place on a certain day some months later. When the advent failed a second time, Ni'mat Allah shut himself up for several months ... He said he was fasting and praying and undergoing penance for the sins of the people. It was during this time that he wrote me a letter saying he was waiting for the Holy Spirit to come upon him.

As a result of Hājī Ne'matollāh's activities a new, 'modernist' branch of the Yāresān emerged, which opened membership of the community to outsiders more easily than is customary among other Yāresān. Jeyhunābādi's successors, Nur Ali Elahi and Dr Bahram Elahi, have had increasing numbers of followers of non-Yāresān origin, both in Iran and in the West. The group maintains that the Yāresān are Twelver Shi'ites. It rejects many elements of the community tradition as 'superstitions' and demands a high degree of obedience to the leadership.

### **The modern period**

#### *In Iran*

The coming of the Islamic Republic in 1979, followed by the Iran-Iraq War, which made the authorities particularly wary of developments in the border regions, gave rise to a situation where the régime sought to ensure that all those who were not Sunnis or members of other recognised religions, accepted the authority of Twelver Shi'ism. In the early years of the Republic, force was repeatedly used to make the Yāresān of Guran conform to Shi'ite customs (see below). At a later stage, such overt measures gave way to other means to put pressure on the Gurani Yāresān, which include close surveillance by the secret police. The early conflicts between the Gurani community and the Islamic authorities are illustrated by the following anecdote by SF:



In 1979 and 1980, things were very difficult in Guran. People were forced to take part in *Tāsu'ā* and *Āshurā* ceremonies.<sup>120</sup> They [the authorities] said it was part of local culture and they wanted all of us to come out for the mourning processions. Of course we don't have *sine-zani*<sup>121</sup> and such things, but they put a lot of pressure on us. The first year no one went, but the second year they said 'OK'. Iranians are always compliant but they go their own way, look at the way they accepted Islam but transformed it into the Shi'a! The Yāresān are the same. I remember, I was there! They [the Muslims] were saying, 'What are you, are you infidels, Yezidis,<sup>122</sup> that you don't want to take part?' Do you know what my father did? You know when we bury the dead we have a procession led by Sayyed, who plays the *tanbur* and sings *Fāni, fāni, a kalām* about death. That is what my father did. He said, 'Come on, let us go.' The people formed a procession behind my father and he recited religious poems by Yāresān poets for Hazrat-e Hoseyn, with the melody of *Fāni fāni*, and people beat their chests. After that we had no further difficulties, but the custom continued and now it would be difficult to get people to give it up.

In the Islamic Republic the Jeyhunabadist branch is recognised as *maktabi* ('belonging to a religious school', and therefore acceptable to Shi'ites),<sup>123</sup> while other groups are denounced as 'devil-worshippers' (see App. 4). All this has led to deep conflicts between the two groups. The Yāresān of Guran generally maintain that Yāri is independent of Islam, and that it is only the 'followers of Bahram Elahi' who try to push them towards Islam. Gurani Yāresān sometimes attribute the Jeyhunabadist position to the fear of possible reprisals, in case the Iranian authorities were to regard the Yāresān as being beyond the pale of Islam, and therefore not protected by Islamic Law.

The traditional tensions between the main *khāndāns* of the region, the Shāh Ebrāhimis and Bābā Yādegāris, are also said to have been exacerbated through outside agencies. SF said:

The hostilities [between Shāh-Ebrāhimis and Bābā Yādegāris] came later. They came, the authorities came and realised they couldn't simply eliminate the Ahl-e Haqq like that. They decided that the best way to destroy the Ahl-e Haqq was from inside, to set the Yāresān against each other. So they fanned the flames of the opposition between Bābā Yādegāris and Shāh Ebrāhimis. This was how these hostilities came into being among the people, and they

120 Shi'ite mourning ceremonies held to remember the martyrdom of Ali's son Hoseyn.

121 The custom of beating one's chest as a sign of grief during mourning ceremonies.

122 As the historical Caliph Yazid b. Mu'āwiya was the antagonist of Hoseyn and is felt to have been responsible for his death, the term 'Yezidi' is used by Shi'ites in a highly pejorative sense.

123 See e.g. [https://www.ecoi.net/local\\_link/181186/298482\\_de.html](https://www.ecoi.net/local_link/181186/298482_de.html), 23.3.18

became each other's enemies. I have seen a few times that people said, 'No, we won't give you our daughter, or we won't accept your daughter in marriage,' because of this hostility.<sup>124</sup>

In official and semi-official publications, the Gurani Yāresān are referred to as a 'misguided sect' (*ferqe-ye zāle*),<sup>125</sup> and the term *sheytānparast* (Devil-worshipper) also appears regularly to describe Yāresān who refuse to identify with Islam.<sup>126</sup>

Besides Islam, only three religions, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, are recognised in Islam as 'People of the Book' (*Ahl al-Kitāb*), and these are the only protected religious minorities in Iran.<sup>127</sup> Yāri enjoys no such protection. The problems this poses for the Yāresān have been described as follows:<sup>128</sup>

Discrimination against the Yarsans has taken various forms including banning the faith, religious assembly, places of worship, religious monuments, symbols and rituals, religious speech, political and religious representation, publications, the right to education and communication in Kurdish, Yarsan dress code, employment ... Yarsan religious and community leaders have been repeatedly summoned, interrogated, and often threatened or detained incommunicado by the Intelligence Agencies of the Islamic Republic.

At least from 2015 onwards, applications have been made by Yāresān to the Iranian Government to be accorded protected status,<sup>129</sup> but so far without success. According to Amnesty International's Annual Report 2017:<sup>130</sup>

Other religious minorities not recognized under the Constitution, such as Yaresan (Ahl-e Haq), also faced systematic discrimination, including in education and employment, and were persecuted for practising their faith.

In public many Yāresān are forced to behave as if they were Muslims. On 7 November 2012, Firuz Yusefi wrote on the Facebook page *Yari, Tāyefe-sān, Yāresān*:<sup>131</sup>

We in Iran are thirsting for freedom of expression and freedom of belief. Thousands have given their lives in this pursuit. During every Fast the Yāresān are the objects of contempt and oppression, being called unbelievers, Devil-worshippers, unclean, etc.

124 Marriages between followers of these groups were relatively common in earlier times.

125 See Sharifi 2013, and Ayatollāh Golpāyegāni in App. 4.

126 See App 4.

127 <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iran/religion.htm>.

128 Sharifi 2013.

129 [http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2015/03/150320\\_145\\_yaresan\\_khamenei\\_letter](http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2015/03/150320_145_yaresan_khamenei_letter).

130 <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1067002018ENGLISH.PDF>

131 [http://www.facebook.com/pages/%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C\\_-yari-%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86\\_%D8%B7%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%81%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86\\_-yarsan/274238239264903](http://www.facebook.com/pages/%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C_-yari-%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86_%D8%B7%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%81%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86_-yarsan/274238239264903)

The original text is in Persian. Translation by PK.

We want the government to recognise our religion officially because we are tired of the long years we have had to be Yāresān at home and Shi'ites at school, to worship Soltān and Dāwud in the privacy of our *jamkhāne* but to swear by Abu'l-Fazl and Fāteme Zahrā<sup>132</sup> in the University, at school, and among our Muslim classmates. To be Yāresān at home and Muslim in the Islamic workplace. We are tired of the false identity we have been forced to adopt.

Only a few of the many individual conflicts between Yāresān and the Iranian authorities, or sections of the Muslim public, have been reported in the press. In 2004 Yunes Āqāyān and some other Yaresān from Azerbaijan were arrested for refusing to remove religious slogans from the entry of their farm, and were charged with *Mohārebe bā Khodā* (War against God). Āqāyān and others were condemned to death, a sentence that was upheld in the Supreme Court in 2005. In 2009 and 2012 representatives of the UN Human Rights Office contacted the Iranian Government with pleas to prevent Āqāyān's execution.<sup>133</sup>

There have been reports of the destruction of the shrine of Sayyed Farrokh in the village of Khobyaran Jalalvand in Kermanshah province in June 2011.<sup>134</sup> In 2013 three Yāresān burnt themselves to death because a coreligionist's moustache had been shaved off in prison, an act that they saw as a supreme insult to their religion.<sup>135</sup> In 2016 there were protests in Eslamabad-e Gharb, Gahware and elsewhere after public insults to the community by a newly elected Member of Parliament.<sup>136</sup> In December 2017 another Yāresān activist from Karaj disappeared and is feared dead.<sup>137</sup>

The murder in 2001 of the musician and religious leader Sayyed Khalil Ālinezhad in Gothenborg deeply shocked both the Diaspora community and others, particularly in the Sahne region, where Sayyed Khalil was born. The reasons for his murder, it is claimed, were never adequately investigated. As Sayyed Khalil was a known antagonist of the Jeyhunabadist group, rumours in the community blame that group for his death. Others accuse the Iranian government. Sayyed Khalil has become a cult figure among certain groups of Yāresān, notably those in or from Sahne.

Furthermore, such factors as television and economic migration to central region of Iran lessen the previous isolation of the Gurani community and strengthen the influence of the dominant, Shi'ite culture. While SF states that Yāri traditionally disapproved of ostentatious grieving at funerals, for instance, most Yāresān funerals are now indistinguishable from the very demonstrative Shi'ite ones. Yāresān chil-

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132 Important figures to Shi'ites.

133 Sharifi 2013.

134 Ibid.

135 <https://www.en-hrana.org/another-yarsan-followers-mustaches-shaved>

136 <http://kurdistanhumanrights.net/en/irans-yarsani-religious-community-continue-protests-against-discrimination/>

137 <http://kurdistanhumanrights.net/en/concern-over-fate-of-a-yarsani-detainee-in-karaj/28.3.18>

dren who are taught to pray in the Islamic manner in school and at University no longer perceive this as an alien custom. Owing to the many pressures to conform to the Shi'ite norm, one sees that the younger generation gradually loses the sense of being distinct from mainstream Shi'ism.

### *In Iraq*

In the Kurdish Region of Iraq, the various groups of Kāka'is are subject to different pressures. Although the Kāka'i religion has been officially recognised by the Kurdistan Regional Government (though not by the state of Iraq) since 2015,<sup>138</sup> and at least one member of the group, Falakeddin Kaka'i, has served as a Government minister and Member of Parliament, it is probably true to say that Kāka'i communities in Iraqi Kurdistan have not yet acquired the degree of emancipation that is now enjoyed by the Yezidis. Many Kāka'is prefer to avoid drawing attention to their religious identity for fear of adverse reactions by Muslims. Many hold *jams* in private homes and the location of *jamkhānes* is generally kept secret.<sup>139</sup> The community is divided on the question as to whether their faith is a form of Islam or an independent religion.<sup>140</sup> At the time of writing, members of the community are described as 'Muslim' on their identity cards.<sup>141</sup>

From the mid-1970s till the late 1980s, particularly during the *Anfāl* campaign in 1988, some Kāka'is were dispossessed as a result of Saddam Hussein's efforts to Arabise the Kurdish regions, and pressures were brought to bear on them to identify as Arabs.<sup>142</sup> In 1997 the Kāka'is of Kirkuk and others were threatened with deportation unless they changed their ethnic identity to Arab.<sup>143</sup>

The appearance of ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) in 2014 gave rise to intense fears in the community. In Nineveh province several thousand Kāka'is and Shabak were forced to flee their villages, some of which were recaptured by KRG forces in 2016.<sup>144</sup> Fear of ISIS apparently inspired some Kāka'is to declare at a press conference that they were Muslims.<sup>145</sup> In 2015 the Kāka'is formed three military regiments under the Ministry of Pēshmerge Affairs; PUK- and KDP-affiliated forces were reported to be vying for the allegiance of these fighters.<sup>146</sup> At the time of writing there are indications of an increase in self-confidence among a few groups of

138 <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/e40eb3e1-b1d3-4594-b398-0c8be95c7d5d/kr-g-stresses-religious-based-tolerance>

139 Hosseini 2018:8.

140 On claims that they are Muslims see Hosseini 2018:1, 7; for the opposite view see <http://ekurd.net/iraq-kakai-kurds-not-Muslims-2016-02-11>.

141 Hosseini 2018.

142 See Leezenberg 1994:11–13; Hosseini 2018

143 Hosseini 2018:6.

144 Salih 2016; Salih and van Wilgenburg 2015.

145 See Hosseini 2018:1, 7, with fn. 9, and

<http://faithkeepers.clarionproject.org/isis-targets-isolated-kakai-religious-minority-in-iraq/>.

146 András Derzsi-Horváth, 2017.

Kāka'i, and a readiness to speak out,<sup>147</sup> but heavy pressures are also brought to bear upon Kāka'i communities.<sup>148</sup> At the moment, it seems impossible to predict the future of this group in Iraq.

*In the Diaspora*

Pressures on Yāresān in the Islamic Republic and fears of ISIS in Iraq have led to considerable migrations of Yāresān and Kāka'is. Diaspora communities in Europe, particularly in Scandinavia,<sup>149</sup> are now large enough to affect the future development of the Yāri faith worldwide. So far, however, there appears to have been a certain amount of internal dissension as the Diaspora community seeks to redefine its religious identity in the context of the surrounding culture.

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147 In May 2019 the BBC broadcast a programme entitled 'the secretive Kaka'i of Iraq are finally speaking out',

[https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-48301954/the-secretive-kaka-i-of-iraq-are-finally-speaking-out?SThisFB&fbclid=IwAR1G9u\\_tyJYn-3FOwfc\\_mNAS1CGDAHHQ3kDEQJS-rYML59fxwTBpayEhZY](https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-48301954/the-secretive-kaka-i-of-iraq-are-finally-speaking-out?SThisFB&fbclid=IwAR1G9u_tyJYn-3FOwfc_mNAS1CGDAHHQ3kDEQJS-rYML59fxwTBpayEhZY)

148 On pressures on Kāka'is, particularly from Shiite forces in Iraq see USDOS # 2004254, US Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2018 Iraq. Information I owe to Philipp Ber. See:

[https://www.ecoi.net/de/dokument/2004254.html?fbclid=IwAR2c9ivCB\\_nt-GPBIDBfubXXCgf6vHSDOw3ssKJCJTz3VwGipFyPIUwdpp](https://www.ecoi.net/de/dokument/2004254.html?fbclid=IwAR2c9ivCB_nt-GPBIDBfubXXCgf6vHSDOw3ssKJCJTz3VwGipFyPIUwdpp)

149 For a study of the community in Sweden see Hosseini 2015.



## Chapter Four: The Religious Universe

### Aspects of the Yāri Worldview

#### Spirituality

A central element in the religiosity of the Yāresān is the presence of God in all elements of Creation.<sup>1</sup> As Alqāsi puts it:<sup>2</sup>

The Yāresān believe firmly in the Unity of God, who is present in an atom, in the solar system, and in the systems of other celestial bodies. They believe that the Essence (*zāī*) of God illuminates<sup>3</sup> all creatures of the world. He is not bound to a particular place... In the course of time, illumination by the Essence of God has been present to an unusual degree in certain personalities who appeared as Prophets, Imāms, Scholars, and Leaders who became sources of guidance and service to humanity.

In order to perceive these hidden truths, however, one's 'spiritual eye' needs to be opened. SF said:

You see, we have this concept of *didedār* (having the Sight). Those who have not yet come to us, people say that their (spiritual) eye is not yet open. In the *kalāms* they say that there is a muddy curtain before their eyes. As long as water is muddy you cannot see through it, but when it becomes clear you can. So all the great figures of the Yāresān are called *didedār*. For instance, Hazrat-e Nowruz<sup>4</sup> was a *didedār*. You see, we distinguish two kinds of seeing, 'outer' (*zāher*) with the eyes in the head (*sar*), and 'inner' (*bāten*), with the secret (*serr*) eye. So someone may have perfect eyesight, but from our point of view he is 'blind to the spiritual' (*kur-e bāten*). Among the Yāresān, if someone cannot understand something, they call him *kur-e bāten*. For instance, if someone says bad things about the Yāresān they say, 'He is *kur-e bāten*, don't worry about him!'

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1 This is sometimes connected with the Islamic concept of the 'Unity of Being' (*wahdat al-wojud*; so Alqāsi 1979:7). However, a belief in the presence of the Divine in all good aspects of Creation is also taught in Zoroastrianism.

2 Alqāsi 1979:9, translation by PK.

3 I.e. 'is present in'.

4 A well-known author of *kalāms*.

Among the Kāka'is of Northern Iraq, those who have the spiritual sight are known as *chāwdār* 'having the Eye'. Sayyed Khalil Āghābāb Kāka'i<sup>5</sup> used the word for those who have composed religious texts.

Q. What kind of poems are recited at the *jam*?

A. In this film which I see here,<sup>6</sup> these people sing the *kalām* of a *chāwdār*. That is, they repeat the words of the *chāwdārs*. Because in those parts there are many Shi'ites, the words of a *chāwdār* are like Shi'ite texts. They emphasise the word Ali!

Q. What do you mean by *chāwdār*? ...

A. A *chāwdār* was someone who loved the religion a great deal and was inspired to compose poems.

### 'Pillars of Faith'

In this context it is also relevant to mention the moral code symbolised by the 'four pillars' of the Yāri faith, which are constantly referred to in Yāresān discourse: *Pāki-o Rāsti-o Nisti-o Redā*, 'Purity, Truthfulness, Non-existence (of the ego),<sup>7</sup> and Acceptance (of God's Will)'.<sup>8</sup> SF said:

Anyone who follows those four things is a Yār, whether he is a German or an Iranian. *Rāsti* means 'honesty, right speech'; *Pāki* means being free of polluting elements; *Nisti* has several meanings; it means the absence of one's animal traits, such as coveting, greed and lust. But it also has another meaning: to pay more attention to the rights and interests of others than to one's own, to feel part a community. A revolutionary who gives his life for a revolution is a Yār, for he has accepted *Nisti*. *Redā* means not to be stuck up and arrogant, to be kind without giving yourself airs. This is the essence of all the contents of the Perdiwari *kalāms*, contained in just one verse. My father used to say that some people may be Yāresān without knowing it. Someone who serves humanity without pride or has caused the salvation of millions of people, there are many examples of people whose work has benefited millions, like Pasteur for instance, what else can they be? That is a Yār (a follower of Yāri). It is all contained in this verse about Yāri and *Pāki*.

The key role of faith and adherence to a moral code in Yāresān religiosity cannot easily be represented in a work of this type but, as is the case in most religions, believers' awareness of God's presence and their faith in the Divine gives meaning to all other aspects of their religion, while the moral code informs both individual atti-

5 Interview with PM, Khāniqin, 7.12.2009, see also Appendix 2.

6 In a film of a *jam* held in an Iranian community.

7 I.e. the belief that the ego has no ultimate reality.

8 These concepts illustrate the influence of Sufi thought on the development of Yāri.



tudes and social behaviour. The following pages are necessarily dedicated to aspects that are to a greater or lesser degree peculiar to Yāri, but in reading this chapter the overarching importance of faith in the Divine should be borne in mind.

### **Serr-e magu, Taqiye**

Traditionally it was forbidden for Yāresān to reveal the secrets of their religion, which are known as *serr-e magu*, ‘the secret that may not be spoken’. Many Kāka’is in Iraqi Kurdistan feel bound by this taboo, as do some Yāresān in Iran. One reason for this, presumably, is that the deeper truth of Yāri is too sacred to communicate to outsiders. Another reason for secrecy was the hostility with which the outside world regarded the followers of Yāri. This taboo has led, and still leads, many believers to practise *taqiye* (dissimulation), pretending to adhere to the beliefs and practices of the majority when in fact this was not the case.

### **Religious History and Mythology**

The spiritual and moral worldview of the Yāresān is clearly informed by their mythology and awareness of their religious history. The myth of Creation, whose essential features are believed to recur at the beginning of each new Cycle, plays a prominent role. The belief in reincarnation, the distinction between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ reality, and the recurrence of all things in a cyclical manner, informs the religious thinking of the Yāresān. The great Yāri myths are referred to again and again in Yāresān discourse on questions of ethics and morals.

Different *khāndāns* may teach versions of religious history that are at variance on certain points. Such differences may be reflected in their beliefs and sometimes their social conduct. Thus, as we saw earlier, the Bābā Yādegāri *khāndān* teaches that Bābā Yādegār was the legitimate successor of Soltān Sahāk, and was killed by Shāh Ebrāhim. A range of interpretations of this theme can be found among the Bābā Yādegāris; some simply blame Shāh Ebrāhim, whilst others believe that this killing was preordained and that, as in the case of Jesus and the Sufi mystic al-Hallāj, it was God’s Will that Bābā Yādegār should be killed. Followers of the Shāh Ebrāhimi *khāndān*, on the other hand, tend to deny that such a killing took place and have a different account of events.<sup>9</sup> Socially, tensions between members of the two *khāndāns* can often be observed nowadays, particularly when they meet in a religious setting. SF said:

It is believed that Shāh Ebrāhim killed Baba Yādegār. Some Bābā-Yādegāris therefore believe that they should take revenge. Others believe that this was destined to happen in each *dowre*, that Bābā Yādegār was willing to be killed

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<sup>9</sup> The version given by Hājj Ne’matollāh (Mokri 1966:521–523) states that Shāh Ebrāhim had once intended to become the leader of the community as a successor to Soltān, but that God blamed him for his arrogance and preferred Yādegār. After this the two are said to have become reconciled. Later Shāh Ebrāhim died, and Bābā Yādegār led the community until his death.

because he knew it was the will of God. There is no difference in beliefs, except that Ebrāhimis do not accept Baba Yādegāri Sayyeds as Sayyeds.<sup>10</sup> There is no animosity on a personal level.

Another instance of the connection between a lineage and the attitudes of its adherents is that followers of Almās Beg,<sup>11</sup> who is known for his predictions of the future, tend to attach great weight to such prophecies.

### Inner and Outer Reality

#### *Recurrence*

As was discussed briefly in the Introduction, many elements of the Yāri worldview are connected with the fundamental belief that a profound, eternal and unchanging, ‘inner’ (*bāten*) reality is reflected, albeit imperfectly, by the variegated manifestations of the ‘outer’ (*zāher*) reality we normally experience in the world. The core belief that all earthly phenomena reflect a deeper, unchanging Truth appears to be directly linked to the belief in the principle of ‘recurrence’ which is implicit in Yāri thought. The *zāher* world began with the process of Creation, and the events of Creation will be repeated at the beginning of every major *dowre*, when a manifestation of the Divine and the Seven Holy Beings (the *Haft Tan*) appears on earth.<sup>12</sup>

Various aspects of Yāri spiritual life – from the visionary activities of the *didedār*, via the religious knowledge that identifies certain historical figures as manifestations of a Holy Beings, to the ecstatic experiences many Yāresān have during the *jam* – are connected with a fundamental desire to apprehend the deeper reality underlying all earthly phenomena.<sup>13</sup>

10 Bābā Yādegār was unmarried and had no children. He therefore chose two of his disciples, Khayāl and Wesāl, as his successors, and the Bābā Yādegāri Sayyeds are descended from these figures. The followers of the Shāh Ebrāhimi *khāndān* do not recognise the legitimacy of succession by appointment, and thus refuse to recognise the Bābā Yādegāri Sayyeds as such.

11 On Almās Beg see Zahedi Moghaddam 2019 and above, Ch. 2, pp. 33 fn. 13, 41 with fn. 66, 67.

12 On this concept see Ch. 3. A number of ‘lesser’ *dowres* are thought to have witnessed the appearance (*zohur*) of only some of those who were present at Creation.

13 Recent developments in the study of Zoroastrianism show that there is a close correspondence between the Zoroastrian world-view on the one hand, and that of the Yāresān and Yezidis on the other, suggesting that these Yāri beliefs may have pre-Islamic roots. Rezanian’s work on the concept of Time in Zoroastrianism (Rezanian 2010) suggests that in Zoroastrianism the opposition between ‘ultimate’ and ‘mundane’ reality is defined in terms of time. ‘Unlimited Time’ represents essential, unchanging reality. ‘Limited Time’, in which we live, is dynamic. Unlimited Time did not cease to exist when Limited Time came into being, but continues to underlie and inform the events of Limited Time. This relationship between the two ‘times’ has a close parallel in the Yāri concepts of *zāher* and *bāten*, traces of which can also be found in the Yezidi tradition (Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005:21–22). A key difference between the two, however, is that in Zoroastrianism, Limited Time is essentially linear, being created in order to enable the forces of good to overcome those of evil. It is true, of course, that Islamic mystics also sought to perceive the truth that is hidden behind the veil of terrestrial existence. Other

*Zohur and Zāt*

The Essence (*zāt*) of the Divine is expected to become incarnate in human form at certain points of history. Humans who fully embody this Essence are called its ‘manifestation’ (*mazhar, zohur*). The Divine Essence can also become a ‘guest’ (*mehmān*) in humans who are not full manifestation of the *zāt*, for a limited time or even throughout their lives; these figures are said to be *zāt-mehmān*.<sup>14</sup>

SF said:

Figures like Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim were full incarnations [of God]. So were figures like Iraj, Yahyā, Siyāwash and Āli Qalandar.<sup>15</sup> They knew what they would become [in their next lives], we do not! They also knew who they had been before.

SF gave the following hierarchy of religious figures according to the degree to which they are thought to have embodied the Divine:

Soltān Sahāk, who fully embodied the divine Essence and Intellect (*zāt wa aql*)

Dāwud, Benyāmin, Pir Musi, Bābā Yādegār, Shāh Ebrāhim and Ramzbār, who embodied the *zāt*.

The *Haft Tan*.<sup>16</sup>

The *Chehel Tan*.

Sayyed Brāke, who possessed the full *zāt*.

The Thirty-Six Poets<sup>17</sup> around Sayyed Brāke, who were *zāt-mehmān*.

AAM’s words below, which are confirmed by the evidence of certain *kalām* texts,<sup>18</sup> imply that the Essence of Divine Beings such as members of the *Haft Tan* can also become manifest in humans:<sup>19</sup>

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branches of Islam, notably Shi’ism and Ismai’ilism, equally recognise the distinction between *bāten* and *zāher*.

14 See also Hamzeh’ee 1990:91, 92.

15 What is meant here is that the *zāt* of Bābā Yādegār was in all these figures, who are all said to have been killed. Iraj and Siyāwash are figures belonging to the *Shāhnāme* tradition (i.e. the national epic of Iran, a version of which was committed to writing by Abu ’l-Qāsem Ferdowsi around 1000 CE, and which also survives in the Gurani literary tradition). The Yāresān regard several of these figures as incarnations of divine Beings. Yahyā, i.e. St John the Baptist, is regarded as a prophet in Islam.

16 This group of course largely consists of figures listed immediately above this entry; it would seem from SF’s account that they are even more highly regarded individually than as a group.

17 SF called them ‘the Thirty-Six Darwishes’ here.

18 See e.g. Van Bruinessen 2014:23.

19 In a lecture on Yāri history delivered in Göttingen in May 2011. Translated from the Persian original by PK.

There is another way in which Divine Beings can become manifest in humans, namely through their *zāt*, inasmuch as the energy or *zāt* of one of the *Haft Tan* can become immanent in a person for a longer or shorter period. For instance, they say that Rostam, the great hero,<sup>20</sup> was *Dāwud-mehmān* [i.e. he had incorporated the Essence of Dāwud as his ‘guest’].

In some rare cases the *zāt* of Divine Beings is believed to have become manifest in animals or objects. Thus Ali’s sword, *Zu’l-Feqār*, is said to have been an incarnation of a member of the *Haft Tan*. SW wrote:

The Mostafā who is mentioned among the *Haft Tan*<sup>21</sup> is a manifestation of Ezrā’il.<sup>22</sup> During the period of Ali, he was *Zu’l-Feqār*, which was in the hand of Ali. [The poet] Shams says:<sup>23</sup> *‘He became a sword and was successful in the hand of the Impetuous One.’*<sup>24</sup>

### *Reincarnation*

Recurrence also characterises the progress of the soul, which incarnates again and again (*dunāduni*).<sup>25</sup> It is often said that death is like a duck diving: one becomes invisible for a while but re-emerges later on. An incarnation is also likened to a garment (*jāme* or *dun*), which is removed when it is time to put on another. SF explained these matters as follows:

We don’t see these things the same way others do. We think it all takes place in terms of reincarnation. We believe that the soul moves on from one incarnation (*dun*) to another. The ultimate goal is for us to become pure (*pāk*) in the presence of *Haqq* (Truth, God). It is like attar of roses, you start out with buckets full of rose petals and eventually after a lot of boiling and distillation perhaps one drop of the pure Essence (*zāt*) remains, but this one drop has all the (good) qualities of the roses.

In SF’s view, the history of the universe is intended to help man reach perfection:

All beings have a tendency towards perfection. The Period of *Shari’at* was necessary, for men were still at a low level. Truth (*Haqiqat*) existed, but it

20 A well-known figure from the *Shāhnāme* tradition.

21 Two Mostafās are mentioned as members of the Heptads, one belonging to the *Haft Tan*, the other to the *Haftawāne* (see below).

22 The Angel of Death.

23 Here translations of poetry are in italics.

24 An epithet of Ali b. Abi Tālib.

25 As Crone (2012) has shown, a belief in cyclical history and reincarnation was also characteristic of several Khorrāmi groups in the Kurdish region that predated the origin of Yāri. Reincarnation also forms part of the belief system of Yezidism and, earlier, Manichaeism. There is a strong similarity to Hindu beliefs, but a link with the Indo-Iranian past cannot be proved.

was not perceived. Sheykh Amir<sup>26</sup> says Truth [or God] was a Pearl. Existence was like a glove, and we think the glove was a particle (*zarre*) of *Hazrat-e Haqq* (the Lord God) Then *Hazrat-e Haqq* produced four Angels, and the four elements, earth, fire, water and wind, came from the Essence of those four angels. The four elements are the material signs of the appearance of the four angels on earth. We have *Haqq*, *Hazrat-e Haqq* or *Hazrat-e Soltān*, who reached the status of the divine, and we have the four angels, who are light and spirituality. They are represented in the material world through earth, water, fire and wind. All creatures consist of those elements. [Here SF quotes at length from Gurāni texts]. [The poet] Hazrat-e Nowruz says that *Hazrat-e Haqq* lent humanity his *ma'refat* (esoteric knowledge). He gave of this knowledge to Man, so that he could live.

As the above passage shows, the Yāri belief is that the ultimate goal of these many births is the development of the soul. As in the case of the ‘Periods’ of history – which, as we saw earlier, are cyclical but at the same time show a ‘linear’ trend towards greater perfection – human rebirth follows the principle of recurrence but is tinged with a ‘linear’ element.

#### *Good and Evil, Monism and Dualism*

As in Yezidism, in Yāri religious discourse one often hears that good and evil have no objective existence, being no more than products of human perception. SF said:

We don't believe that *sharr* (evil) is negative. We don't believe that *Sheytān* (Satan) rebelled against God. We believe God needed *Sheytān*, that is, Dāwud,<sup>27</sup> for His Creation.

It should be stressed that such statements belong to the sphere of theology and do not imply a lack of awareness of the difference between good and evil, or indeed a condonation of wickedness in the Yāresān community.

Whilst Zoroastrianism stresses the opposition between good and evil and can therefore be said to be have a strongly ‘dualist’ worldview, predominantly ‘monist’ religious systems, like Yāri and Yezidism, teach the essential unity of existence and do not prominently see the world in terms of good and evil.

Yāri is not exclusively monist, however. As will be shown below, different opinions can be heard among its followers about the place of ‘Satan’ (*Sheytān*) in the scheme of things, and about the ontological status of the second Heptad, the *Haftawāne*, which some regard as less than good and existing in opposition to the good *Haft Tan*. The coexistence of, and in many cases the synthesis between monist and dualist elements is a recurring theme in the study of Yāri.

26 One of the later religious poets of the Yāresān.

27 On the relationship between Dāwud and *Sheytān* see also pp. 61, 86, 88, 91, 92, 134.

## Creation

### *The Creation Myth: a summary*

Although there are many variants of the Yāri myth of Creation,<sup>28</sup> the following is a summary of the events that occur in most accounts:<sup>29</sup>

In the Beginning only God existed.

From his own pure light, God created a Pearl<sup>30</sup> in the Primeval Ocean. He came to dwell in the Pearl.

In the Pearl, God first created Jebrā'il, and later the other six members of the original Heptad (*Haft Tan*).<sup>31</sup> Four of these figures (the *Chahār Tan*, or Four Persons) are particularly important.

God made a Pact (*Bayāwbas*)<sup>32</sup> with the leader of the Heptad, leaving the rule of the world to the Seven.

A Bull or Deer then materialised and was sacrificed.

The material creations emerged from the Pearl, i.e. in a sense from God himself.<sup>33</sup>

The Pearl dissolved into the Primeval Ocean. Under the Ocean God created the *Sāj-e Nār* (Baking Plate of Fire). Through the heat of the *Sāj*, the water of the ocean came to the boil and produced clouds. Wind also came into being.

Eventually the earth was created, and the earth and the seven heavens became as we know them today. Each of the Four Archangels has a special connection with one of the elements from which the earth was created: Fire, Wind, Water and Earth.

Adam, the First Man, was created.

A second *Bayāwbas* was concluded in the *Sāj-e Nār*, presumably with Adam.

The world became as we know it.

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28 For some of these see Hamzeh'ee 1990:262–265. Another is found in Ivanow 1953:102–110.

29 For a detailed account of the Yāresān Cosmogony see Kreyenbroek 1992:68–71.

30 On the Pearl in Yāri see Mokri 1960. For the corresponding myth of the Yezidis see Kreyenbroek 1995:55–59.

31 Hamzeh'ee 1990:70–71.

32 SF pronounced this word as Bayāwbas, elsewhere one often finds Bayābas, see also below, fn. 54.

33 So Hamzeh'ee 1990:71. This can be taken to imply that the prototypes of all creations already existed in the Pearl, cf. below under *Accounts of Creation*.

This cosmogony has no parallels in Islam, but resembles the Yezidi myth of creation so closely that they must undoubtedly go back to the same original myth,<sup>34</sup> which will here be referred to as the ‘ancient’ cosmogony. This ancient cosmogony – including the belief in seven guardians of the world, some or all of whom have a special link with the elements of creation – shows clear parallels to the Zoroastrian creation myth. Both the Zoroastrian and the ‘ancient’ myth imply that the genesis of the world took place in two stages, divided by the killing of a Bull. First there is a limited and motionless stage; this is followed by a dynamic stage in which the world became as we know it. A key difference is that Zoroastrianism regards the first stage as God-given and ideal and the second one as a fall from grace. However, as was discussed in Ch. 1, in the hypothetical Indo-Iranian myth, as in Yāri and Yezidism, the first stage is ‘embryonic’, limited, and motionless; the bull sacrifice brings about the dynamic state of our world as a positive result.

### *Accounts of Creation*

As is usual in cultures where oral transmission plays an important role, there are many versions of the creation myth, which give different details. For instance, while most accounts state that God first created a Pearl and then evoked the *Haft Tan*, Ivanow<sup>35</sup> records a version stating that after creating a first Pearl, God created a second Pearl in which he saw himself reflected as Seven Persons (*Haft Tan*); later as twelve; and then as fourteen Persons.

SW refers to Creation as follows:

It has been mentioned earlier that the Lord *Haqq* existed in the state of Unity, in the location of the Pearl. As has been shown, He became manifest in order to be discovered by the esteemed readers.<sup>36</sup>

Khawāje al-Din,<sup>37</sup> a Muslim whose information on Yāri is based on extensive reading, offers the following version of the Yāresān cosmogony:

At a time when there was neither Earth nor Sky, the King of the World<sup>38</sup> was a jewel (*jowhar*)<sup>39</sup> inside a shell. Then, with his Hand of Power, he poured a drop of his essence (*gowhar*) into the shell, and the essence came to dwell inside the jewel. He uttered a cry,<sup>40</sup> and it became water; the heavens rose up because of the vapour arising from it, and the earth (rose up) from the foam of that water.

34 See Kreyenbroek 1995:52–61, and above, Ch. 1.

35 Ivanow 1953:103–104, cited by Hamzeh’ee 1990:264.

36 A polite way of saying ‘by human beings’.

37 Khawāje al-Din n.d.:39.

38 I.e. God.

39 Pers. *jowhar*. The word, which clearly refers to the Pearl, is used here because it rhymes with *gowhar* ‘essence’.

40 On the possible implications of this reference to a cry, see Kreyenbroek 1992:68 with fn. 34.

Suri<sup>41</sup> gives the following account:

The water of the sea was an ocean. For a time the Pearl was in the ocean, there was no (difference between) land and sea. The Soltān of the World<sup>42</sup> kept on pounding the stone,<sup>43</sup> the stone exploded, and from its fragments clouds rose up in the air.

He hurled one fragment of that stone into the air, and it became the sky. He also fashioned the stars. A number of his servants from that time are called the Angels. And he made the moon and the sun from that stone by infusing His own light into them, and hurled them [into orbit]. And he also established the sky, night and day, and the four seasons; the changing of the [seasons of] the year he left to the Four Angels: sometimes (to) the Four Persons (*Chahār Tan*) and sometimes (to) the Seven Persons (*Haft Tan*).<sup>44</sup>

The reference to a stone that explodes and from whose parts the world is made, is reminiscent of the hypothetical Indo-Iranian cosmogony discussed in Ch. 1, where the elements of the world were first contained in a cave in the stone sky. Whilst the Yāresān texts usually speak of a Pearl from which the world emerged, this passage shows that a tradition about a stone continued to be transmitted among the Yāresān.

AAM said:<sup>45</sup>

In the Yāresān texts, Yāri is considered to be the first religion, and it is discussed there how Being took shape. In the Yāri tradition it is said that all was dark at that time, and that the Lord of Grandeur, i.e. God the Creator, together with three of his close Companions (Benyāmin, Dāwud and Pir Musi) dwelt in a place called ‘the Pearl’; later there was a tremendous explosion in the Pearl, and the darkness disappeared, and all the celestial bodies, the earth, etc., came into being.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, De Gobineau<sup>46</sup> was told the following elements of the myth:<sup>47</sup>

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41 Suri1965:22–24. Suri’s material appears to reflect a popular tradition of the core teachings of the Yāresān (so SF, verbal communication Göttingen, June 2008). The form of his (prose) texts differs fundamentally from that of the *kalāms*.

42 I.e. God.

43 In the hypothetical Indo-Iranian Cosmogony discussed in Chapter 1, the elements of the world were first contained in a cave in the stone sky. Although the Yāresān myth usually speaks of a pearl from which the world emerged, here we find a reference to a stone.

44 The speaker was presumably puzzled by the fact that the number of the Holy Beings at the time of creation is generally said to be seven, while at the same time the most significant role is played by the Four Persons.

45 Lecture Göttingen, 6.7.2011. Translation by PK.

46 Gobineau 1922.II:77–83.

47 This is a summary of Gobineau’s words.



At first, God existed alone, without movement. This was the condition of *Serr* (the Secret). God is known by various names, including *Pādshāhim* (My King), Khoshin (Shāh Khoshin); *Khāwandegār* (the Lord),<sup>48</sup> and Soltān Sahāk.

God created the material universe; there are seven climes. The earth rests on the horn of a bull, which stands on a fish<sup>49</sup>... At the time of Creation a bull became manifest and was sacrificed. After this, a communal meal was held. This was at once recorded by Pir Musi.

Sayyed Wali described the period of creation as follows:

By Divine Command the spiritual bodies (*hey'at*) were accepted into the mundane worlds, and were minded (to come) into the world.

The Four Angels, who were mentioned earlier, also form part of the Six Beings.<sup>50</sup> From the beginning of the creation of this world until now, a hundred thousand years have passed... As was mentioned earlier, it goes back a hundred thousand years; it is very ancient. Except for God, no one was present at the beginning. Each of the spiritual bodies has its own status and rank; (they are) celestial beings. The orbits of the planets, the movement of the spheres, unusual phenomena, and the education of the beings (and?)<sup>51</sup> acts of beneficence, truthfulness and purity is their responsibility.

Four out of those Six Persons are the Lords and Originators of the four elements, Earth, Wind, Water and Fire. After the creation of the World of Reality, the constitution of the first Human was (made up of these elements):

*One brought earth and one brought wind,  
one was made the master of the measure of water  
One of them brought a bit of fire into being  
those four elements entered [the world?]  
A thimbleful of the light of Guran [?]  
was kneaded into the dust of ephemeral man...*

The first stage was that of the essence and the particles of sides<sup>52</sup> of the existence of Adam, and the physical attributes. After Adam, there has been a

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48 Another, more usual form of the word is *Khāwankār*.

49 Versions of this aspect of the myth, whose origin is unknown, are told throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. For the Yezidi version see Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005:25.

50 In Sayyed Wali's view, God himself is represented by one member of the original Heptad, so that the number of the others was six. 'The Six' here refers to the Heptad apart from God; 'the Four' to *Jabrā'il*, *Mikā'il*, *Esrāfil* and *Ezrā'il*.

51 The text here is not clear.

52 I.e. both spiritual and material aspects.

Manifestation in every epoch in one form in a number of ways. [The poet] Shams<sup>53</sup> says:

*Every moment that Friend came up with a different garment, at times he was young and (at other times) old.*

*Bayāwbas*<sup>54</sup>

The concept of *Bayāwbas* is of key importance in the Yāri worldview. The term is probably connected with Pers. *bey'at bastan*, which was used in Sufi terminology for the oath of allegiance that formalised the bond between Sufi master and disciple.<sup>55</sup> In Yāri usage it denotes the conclusion of a 'Pact' between God and Creation. The first *Bayāwbas*, which evidently laid down the fundamental laws of the universe, took place at the beginning of the process of creation. A second 'Pact', perhaps particularly with Man (Adam), was concluded in the *Sāj-e Nār* after the creation of Man.<sup>56</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, only cycles of history during which all the *Haft Tan* are incarnate and which begin with a *Bayāwbas* are regarded as true *dowres*. The Yāresān are agreed that the third *Bayāwbas* took place when Soltān Sahāk was at Perdiwar, and many regard this *Bayāwbas-e Perdiwari* as the final Pact between God and Man that is valid until the Day of Resurrection.<sup>57</sup> In Guran, however, many Yāresān believe that a new *Bayāwbas* was concluded with Sayyed Brāke. SF gave the following information:<sup>58</sup>

First (there was) the *dowre-ye Bayāwbas*, i.e. the [initial] period of the 'Pact and Covenant' (*ahd wa peymān*). This *dowre* is divided into two periods: before *Bayāwbas*, when only God and the Four Angels existed, and after *Bayāwbas*.

This Pact comprised the fundamental Laws, and the constitution of the group of Holy Beings who were to supervise them. It must be concluded again at the beginning of each major new *dowre*.

It has been concluded four times:

1. Before the formation of earth, sun and creatures.
2. After creation of earth and sun, at the time of the creation of Man.
3. At the time of Soltān Sahāk.

53 The author of *kalām* poetry.

54 Variants of the word are *Bayābast* and *Bayābas*, see also above, fn. 32.

55 Schimmel 1975:234.

56 See above. Hamzeh'ee (1990:196) assigns this *Bayāwbas* to the period of Khoshin.

57 Hamzeh'ee 1990:196 with fn. 150.

58 Verbal communication to PK, Tehran, 8.4.2008.

4. According to the Yāresān of Guran, the *Bayāwbas* was concluded again about 300 years ago, during the period of Sayyed Heydar, who is known as Sayyed Brāke of Tutshami. Other Yāresān do not accept this.

### *Shart-o Eqrār*

The corpus of laws, regulations and institutions that are sanctioned by religious authority, and which was presumably established by the first Pact, is referred to as *Shart-o Eqrār* (Conditions and Regulations), a term that often occurs in religious discourse.<sup>59</sup>

## Divine and Great Beings

### The Four and the Seven

Four of the seven members of the first Heptad, the ‘Four Archangels’ (*Chahār Malak* or *Chahār Tan*), are particularly important in Yāri mythology. During the first cycle, at the time of Creation, their names were Jebrā’il, Mikā’il, Esrāfil and Ezrā’il, (corresponding to Benyāmin, Dāwud, Pir Musi and Mostafā respectively).<sup>60</sup> The three others are usually said to have comprised one female (cf. Ramzbār), and twin Beings (different names are given, one of them often being Eywat). In some accounts, God himself is said to be represented in this group in the form of *Khāwankār*.<sup>61</sup> Among the Yāresān of Guran, Bābā Yādegār is usually listed as a member of the *Haft Tan* at the time of Soltān. SF, who belongs to this branch, states that the Seven Persons who incorporated the Divine Essence at the time of Soltān were Dāwud, Benyāmin, Pir Musi, Bābā Yādegār, Shāh Ebrāhim, and Ramzbār. Describing the events of Creation, SW wrote:

The names of the *Haft Tan* in the world of ‘Atoms and Kingdom’<sup>62</sup> are given below, for the period when *Ramz*<sup>63</sup> and *Rezā* had not become separate from God and were part of God’s Essence; together with God himself they were three [sic] beloved Persons.

Jebrā’il was a manifestation of Benyāmin<sup>64</sup>

Mikā’il was a manifestation of Dāwud

Esrāfil was a manifestation of Pir Musi

59 In religious discourse the term *shart* is often used together with *bayāwbas*.

60 In Guran Bābā Yādegār is usually listed as a member of the *Haft Tan* at the time of Soltān.

61 Another word for ‘God’ or ‘Lord’. On God’s place among the Seven, see also above, fn. 50.

62 I.e. at an early stage of the Creation.

63 Ramz(bār) is the female member of the *Haft Tan*, and Rezā the remaining member of the group in SW’s list, given that in his view God himself was also one of the Seven (see above, fn. 50).

64 Most Yāresān would put this the other way around, describing Benyāmin as a manifestation of Jebrā’il, etc.

Ezrā'il was a manifestation of Mostafā.

As has been shown elsewhere,<sup>65</sup> certain members of the *Haft Tan* bear a remarkable resemblance to divinities of the pre-Islamic Iranians.

*Benyāmin*, with whom God concluded the Pact, who is associated with the ritual sacrifice of an animal, and who is called the Leader of the Creatures,<sup>66</sup> resembles Mithra, the Bull-slayer, Lord of the Pact, and the Demiurge in the hypothetical Indo-Iranian myth of Creation (see Ch. 1).

*Dāwud*, who might be called Benyamin's second-in-command, is called 'guide' (*rahbar*) and 'problem-solver' (*moshkel-goshā*), and is associated with the wild boar. He may be connected with the ancient Verethaghna or Bahrām, the guide and problem-solver, who could show himself in the form of a wild boar<sup>67</sup> and is often described in the Avesta as part of Mithra's entourage. Originally Benyamin's second-in-command or helper,<sup>68</sup> Dāwud, is now widely regarded as the Being who intervenes most directly in human affairs. This may be the reason why the role of the *fons et origo* of all terrestrial events (positive and negative), and hence the role of *Sheytān*, is now often attributed to him rather than to the Mithra-like Benyāmin,<sup>69</sup> as may originally have been the case. In the sources studied by Geranpayeh,<sup>70</sup> Dāwud is said to have been the founder of the *jamkhāne* and the leader of the *Chehel Tan*, who formed the first Yāri community. He is the great protector of the community, and is responsible for the process of reincarnation. On many occasions, such as the beginning of a journey, many Yāresān invoke Dāwud, just as Zoroastrians invoke Bahrām.

*Pir Musi*, whose characteristic epithet is *qalam-zan*, 'the one who wields a pen', is similar in some ways to the ancient divinity Tiri. As Pir Musi writes an account of man's deeds on earth, his concept may also owe something to that of Rashnu, the Zoroastrian Lord of Justice.

*Pir Mostafā* breathed life into Adam,<sup>71</sup> but is better known for taking life away as the Angel of Death. He is strikingly similar to ancient Iranian Vāyu,

65 Kreyenbroek 1992:68–71.

66 Hamzeh'ee 1990:262, citing Jeyhunābādi.

67 Yt. 14.15.

68 So Sayyed Khalil Āghābāb Kāka'i, see App. 2.

69 On this see above, p. 61 with fn. 97, 98. The Perdiwari Kāka'is, however, identify Benyāmin with *Sheytān*, *ibid.*

70 Geranpayeh 2007:28–30.

71 Kreyenbroek 1992:70.

the Lord of the Wind, ‘who as lord of the breath of life is also, through it extinction, lord of death.’<sup>72</sup>

*Ramzbār*, whose chief characteristic appears to be her gender, may be connected with the ancient Western Iranian goddess Anāhitā.

In Zoroastrianism each of the seven *Amesha Spentas* is believed to be in charge of one of the seven Creations. Similarly we find that in Yāri, the four ‘elements’ of nature are said to belong to a Holy Being: Earth to Jebrā’il/Benyāmin; Wind to Mikā’il/Dāwud; Water to Esrāfil/Pir Musi; Fire to Ezrā’il/Mostafā.<sup>73</sup>

Likewise, just as in Zoroastrianism each day of the month belongs to a particular divine Being, Yāri associates each of the Seven Beings<sup>74</sup> with a day of the week: Saturday belongs to Ramzbār; Sunday to Dāwud; Monday to Benyāmin; Tuesday to Pir Musi; Wednesday to Mostafā; Thursday to Soltān; Friday to Bābā Yādegār or Shāh Ebrāhim.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, Spring belongs to Dāwud; Summer to Benyāmin; Autumn to Mostafā; Winter to Pir Musi.<sup>76</sup>

### The Haftawāne

Beside the *Haft Tan*, the Seven Beings with whom God made the original Pact and who belong to the *bāten* world, Yāri also recognises a second Heptad, the *Haftawāne*, who are like the *Haft Tan* in many respects. However, the way they are described by many Yāresān in Guran and elsewhere shows that, unlike the ‘spiritual’ *Haft Tan*, they essentially belong to *zāher* reality, and will cease to exist at the End of Time. The Kāka’i Sayyed Khalil Āghābāb Kāka’i explains the difference as follows (App. 2):

In the Yārī system we have the *Haft Tan* and the *Haftawāne*. The *Haft Tan* accomplish the primordial (*kevn*) matters. The *Haftawāne* are for the affairs of this world.

Sayyed Khalil associates the contrast between the two groups with that between good and evil, listing the *Haft Tan* as the good angels:

We have seven good and seven evil ones. We don’t mention the names of the evil ones, so that other people won’t have problems with us. The seven good ones are: Dāwud, Benyāmin, Pir Musi, Mostafā, Eywat and Yādegār.

On the *Haftawāne*, Sayyed Wali wrote:

72 Boyce 1982:238.

73 See Kreyenbroek 1992:69 with fn. 41.

74 All seven are often described as members of the *Haft Tan*.

75 Verbal communication by SF, Göttingen, June 2008.

76 The first day of winter is said to belong to Bohlul; *āsh-e gandom* (barley pottage) is prepared on that day.

The names of the *Haftawāne*, as they were commonly known in the Period of Soltān are: 1 Sayyed Mohammad;<sup>77</sup> 2 Sayyed Bu 'l-Wafā; 3 Ebrāhim;<sup>78</sup> 4 Mostafā; 5 Sheykh Shahāb al-Din; 6 Sheykh Habib Shāh; 7 Hājji Bāweysi.

The Mostafā who is mentioned among the *Haftawāne* belongs to the *Haftawāne*.<sup>79</sup>

Sayyed Wali taught his son, Sayyed Fereidoun Hosseini, that the *Haft Tan* and the *Haftawāne* are complementary and that both are needed in this world. His written account of Yāri beliefs, on the other hand, suggests a degree of opposition between the two groups, and the hint of an association of the *Haftawāne* with evil. In Yāri discourse both of these views occur. SF said:

Another seven Beings who have been brought forth from darkness and belong to anger and evil and deeds of wickedness, who move and act against the side of the light, have been, and are, perpetrators of obscene acts and even of the murder of the Men of God (*Haqq*). The six Spiritual Persons together with *Haqq* himself are known as Seven Persons (*Haft Tan*). Thus the two Heptads are constituted. ...The side of darkness moves against the side of light. Both are victorious and defeated, sometimes the one [is victorious] over the other, and sometimes the other way round. On the Last Day the side of darkness will receive its retribution and will be destroyed.

Sayyed Khalil Āghābāb Kāka'i, representing the Kāka'i tradition, said (App. 2):

Q. In Iran they say that Dāwud is the Devil? What is your opinion?

A. That is not correct. The Devil is Benyāmin himself! He finally submitted his head to Adam. We don't believe that any force outside the self can influence human beings and lead them on to the path of evil. The philosophy of Yāri tells us that, in the case of all those to whom God gave a human body, the Seven Good Ones (*Haft Tan*) have entered that body. That body could not become human with those good qualities only; bad qualities had to enter it together with them. For example, God has given Man a nose, which is a good thing, but bad things also come into the nose. Those two only have meaning in combination. Yāri philosophy says that good and bad are found inside man. We also call this 'greed' and 'the lower soul' (*nafs*). Greed and the lower soul exist alongside the good things. For instance we have good feeling, but alongside those we also have greed. Greed also plays a role in ques-

77 On this figure, also known as Sayyed Mohammad Gewre-Sewar, see Safizade 1387:152–154, and below, p. 137 with fn. 11, p. 142 with fn. 2.

78 I.e. Shāh Ebrāhim. The Gurani Yādegāri thinker Sayyed Wali regarded Shāh Ebrāhim as a member of the terrestrial Heptad, the *Haftawāne*. The members of the Shāh-Ebrāhimi *khāndāns* believe he belonged to the *Haft Tan*.

79 The reference is to the fact that the name Mostafā occurs in both Heptads.

tions of sex, which may lead us astray, but they are all parts of our programming, which we have inherited from the First Man,

In the *kalāms* the origin, and thus the nature, of the *Haftawāne* is associated with the imperfections of the *zāher* world; they have an intimate connection with the earthly lives of men. A text which Safizāde gives the title *Dowre-ye Haftawāne*<sup>80</sup> begins with a discussion among various divine Beings about the fact that imperfections characterise the life and character of all humans in the *zāher* world. The discussion then moves on to the plight of Mir Khosrow, the prince of Lorestan, who has been imprisoned. It is stated that Mir Khosrow is constituted like, or perhaps ‘embodies’<sup>81</sup> the *Haftawāne*. Benyāmin implores Soltān to save him, saying:

*ixtiyār wētān šāy šāheb-nigīn*

*amrit ijrā bī na aw čāy sijīn*

Oh King, Lord of the Signet Ring, it was your own choice

He is imprisoned in this pit because of your command.

Soltān agrees and orders that Khosrow shall be rescued, saying:

*Xosrawim na haft wālāy mandīlan*

*wālām Haftawān kēši maftūlan*

Khosrow represents the Seven of high rank

The *Haftawāne* are indeed [bound to man] like the woven cord.<sup>82</sup>

This could be taken to mean that the plight of Mir Khosrow, who somehow reflects the being of the *Haftawāne*, represents the human condition in the *zāher* world. Sayyed Wali also states that both Heptads are, or can be, immanent in human beings:

There was no one in existence but Adam [at the time of Creation], and the only two-sided abode [i.e. the only places where both sides could dwell] was the house of Adam. There is no other explanation, for there was one existence, and one incarnation [i.e. Adam]. They all became indwelling in the existence of Adam and in the form of Adam.

80 Safizāde 1996:206–310. SF points out that this text does not form part of the Perdiwari *Kalāms* and does not necessarily have the same authority as those ancient texts.

81 Gur. *sarnāzm haft pūy...an*. The passage likens the *Haftawāne* to the weft, and the *Haft Tan* to the warp of a woven fabric.

82 In Yezidi usage the word *meful* is used for the sacred cord that the Yāresān still wear when taking part in rituals. It seems likely that the word has the same meaning here.

## Ali

As was shown in the previous chapter, Ali is regarded as a full manifestation of the Divine but does not have his own *dowre*. As to the allegation that all Yāresān are *Ali-Ellāhi*, regarding Ali as God, Sayyed Khalil Āghābāb Kāka’i from Khaneqin said (App. 2):

There are Ali-Ellāhi in the region of Tarane.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps elsewhere too, I don’t know. They are different from the Kāka’is. They have no connection with the Kāka’is at all. They believe that Ali is God. Of course I have no precise information, but we don’t regard them as Kāka’i and they don’t consider themselves to be Kāka’i! The main difference being that they say that Ali is God. They are a sect.

In the Guran area one now does not hear many references to Ali in religious discourse. It may be that it is because of recent pressures by the Jeyhunābādīst group<sup>84</sup> and the authorities of the Islamic Republic to make the Gurani Yāresān accept that their faith is a branch of Shi’ite Islam, that any connection with Shi’ite symbols has become suspect in the eyes of the community. There is evidence to suggest that this may not have been the case before the Iranian Revolution.<sup>85</sup> Unlike the modern Gurani, Sayyed Khalil Ālinezhād, the well-known musician and religious leader from Sahne, emphasises the central role of Ali in Yāri religious life.<sup>86</sup>

## Sheytān in Yāri discourse

There are great differences among the Yāresān communities as to their beliefs about the figure of *Sheytān*. Many deny that such a figure is worshipped in their religion, while others claim that they do worship a figure known as *Sheytān*, who is also known as *Malak Tāwus*, or the Peacock Angel.<sup>87</sup> It should be stressed, however, that the concepts of the Christian/Islamic and the Yāri ‘*Sheytān*’ are fundamentally different, as the Yāri figure is in no way thought of as evil. Rather, he is associated with the rule of this world and the various good and bad experiences humans have there. As was argued in Ch. 1, it would seem plausible to associate this figure with that of ancient Iranian Mithra, the demiurge who is said in the Avesta to be ‘both

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<sup>83</sup> This locality could not be identified.

<sup>84</sup> See Mir-Hosseini 1994b; 1996.

<sup>85</sup> In an interview with PK in Amsterdam in March 2011, Mrs Zarrin Zarrinpour informed me that on a bus trip in the 1960s, she had met a group of Yāresān from Kerend who kept invoking Ali. As Mrs Zarrinpour had no knowledge of the current tensions in the Yāresān community, nor any further connection with that community, this testimony must be accepted as impartial and therefore reliable. During a Symposium in Göttingen in April 2014 Prof. Martin van Bruinessen, who visited the Gurani Yāresān community in the 1970s, likewise stated that they regularly invoked Ali. All this suggests that the community largely stopped invoking Ali after the 1970s.

<sup>86</sup> See App. 3, Q. 38 with fn. 64.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. the Yezidi term *Tāwusi Malak*.



wicked and very good to the countries... both wicked and very good to men.<sup>88</sup> As was shown earlier, when the ancient Western Iranian religion lost its dominance, this ‘ambiguous’ god came to be associated by outsiders with the power of evil, a state of affairs that gave rise to the belief in a ‘good Satan’ among the Yezidis and some Yāresān communities. In more recent times, under Islamic influence, the account of Satan refusing to bow down to Adam at God’s command has acquired a certain currency among Yāresān, who believe that Satan repented, was forgiven by God, and is now one of his dearest angels.<sup>89</sup>

Given the correspondence between ancient Iranian and Yāri divinities, one would expect Mithra’s *Sheytān*-like aspects to be reflected by those of Benyāmin and, as was shown earlier, this identification of Benyāmin with *Sheytān* survives in certain communities in Iraqi Kurdistan such as the Perdiwari Kāka’is and others (see App. 2). In Iran, however, the name *Sheytān* is now generally associated with Benyāmin’s second-in-command, Dāwud.

Sayyed Wali writes:

It will be argued below that [the stories of] Satan’s prompting of Adam, and Satan’s refusal to obey God’s Command are baseless fantasies,<sup>90</sup> for Malak Tāwus is of Light, and he is an angel who is close to God’s court...

Malak Tāwus consists of light, he is obedient and devoted to God, he is pure and without sin, he is above... and free of any bad actions. The actions they attribute to him are developments that result from the side of darkness. Thus they have seen him in darkness and perceived him [wrongly] in that way. During the Stage of *Shari’at*, Malak Tāwus is given the name of *Sheytān*; in *Haqiqat* he is called Dāwud.

### Other groups of Holy Figures

A group of ‘Forty Persons’ (*Chehel Tan*, *Chel Tan*) is often referred to in Yāri mythology.<sup>91</sup> The *Chel Tan* are said to hold a spiritual rank that is just below that of the *Haft Tan*. SF offered the following information:

We have two groups of *Chel Tan*: Under Soltān they consisted of thirty-six people and four angels. We have this number-symbolism in the Ahl-e Haqq religion: four, seven, forty. These beings appeared during several *dowres*. First during the *dowre-ye Bayāwbās*, i.e. the period of the Pact [between God and the world]. There are two periods: one before *Bayāwbās*, when only God and the Four Angels existed, and one after *Bayāwbās*. Another incarnation of

88 Yt.10. 29.

89 So e.g. Sayyed Khalil Ālinezhad (App. 3, Q. 25), but see SW’s rejection of this idea.

90 The reference is to the belief that Sheytān led Adam astray, and that he fell from grace because he refused to worship Adam at God’s behest.

91 The number forty plays a significant role in Iranian and Turkic cultures, see Schimmel 1993: 245–253.

the *Chel Tan* was during the period of *Haqiqat*, at the time of Soltān, in the Hawraman area. When they appeared, they spoke about their previous incarnations: 'I was this; I was that, etc.' Even 'I was Shāh Jamshid' and 'I was Key Kāwus'.<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore one finds references to the 'Seven Khalifes' (*Haft Khalife*), from whom the Dalil families are said to be descended;<sup>93</sup> the 'Seven Khādem' (*Haft Khādem*), the 'angelic' representatives of the *Khalife* and *Khādem*, who are said to have officiated at the first *jam* ceremony;<sup>94</sup> the 'Seven Friends of Qawaltās';<sup>95</sup> the 'Nine Pirs of Mt Shahu' (*Noh Pir-e Shāhu*),<sup>96</sup> who presumably played a role before the migration of the Yāresān from the Hawraman region to Zarde;<sup>97</sup> a group of 'Sixty-six servants with golden cummerbunds' (*Shast-o shesh Bande-ye kamar-zarrin*);<sup>98</sup> the 'Seventy-two Pirs' (*Haftād o Do Pir*), who serve Soltān Sahāk; the 'Seventy-two Persons' (*Haftād-o Do Tan*), who are said to be waiting for the return of the Divine Essence, and to the 'Ten thousand Servants' (*Biwar Gholām*).<sup>99</sup>

## The Dowres

The presence of the *Haft Tan* in human form at its inception is a key criterion for regarding a period as a *dowre* in the true sense of the word.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the period of Soltān Sahāk is recognised as a true *dowre*, and in Guran the same is claimed for the period of Sayyed Brāke (see below). There have been other, minor cycles both before and after the time of Soltān, during which an important leader appeared but not all the *Haft Tan* were incarnate and there was no *Bayāwbas*.

The Seven Angels who were present at the time of Creation included Jebrā'il, Mikā'il, Esrāfil, Ezrā'il and, according to some accounts, God himself in the form of *Khāwankār*. During the *dowre* of Soltān these beings had other names (see above), which are the ones best known to the community now. There is no unanimity as to the names of the Seven during most periods, and various lists of identifications can be found.<sup>101</sup> Sayyed Wali gives the following identifications:

Names that were famous in the period of *Shari'at* and *Haqiqat* are as follows:

92 I.e. heroic figures from the Iranian epic tradition, whom the Yāresān regard as incarnations of divine Beings.

93 Van Bruinessen 2017:76.

94 Safizāde 1996:199. On the *Khalife* and the *Khādem* see further below, p. 98.

95 Safizāde 1996:199–200. On the Qawaltās see below, pp. 111–112.

96 <http://ya-dooost.blogfa.com/>

97 See above, Ch. 3.

98 Safizāde 1996:200.

99 Hamzeh'ee 1990:101

100 See above, p. 44.

101 For a survey of names associated with the different cycles see Hamzeh'ee 1990:99–101.

During the stage of *Haqiqat*: 1 Soltān Sahāk; 2 Ramzbār; 3 Yādegār; 4 Dāwud; 5 Benyāmin; 6 Pir Musi; 7. Mostafā.

During *Shari'at*:<sup>102</sup> 1 Ali; 2 Fāteme; 3 Hoseyn; 4 \*Qanbar;<sup>103</sup> 5 Salmān-e Fārsi;<sup>104</sup> 6 Noseyr;<sup>105</sup> 7 Zu'l-Feqār.<sup>106</sup>

During *Tariqat*:<sup>107</sup> 1 Shāh Khoshin; 2 Mīrzād; 3 Bābā Tāher-e Hamadāni;<sup>108</sup> 4 Cnwy (?); 5 Kāka Reyā; 6 Shahriyār;<sup>109</sup> 7 Jalāle.<sup>110</sup>

During *Ma'refat*:<sup>111</sup> 1 Shāh Fazl;<sup>112</sup> 2 Eyne; 3 *Barre* (the lamb); 4 Nasimi;<sup>113</sup> 5 Mansur;<sup>114</sup> 6 Zakariyā; 7 Tork.

102 This stage clearly represents the period of early Islam.

103 The text has *qnr*. A Pir Qanbar is said to have been the father and one of the companions of the 17/18<sup>th</sup> century figure Shāh Weys-Qoli, whose appearance later resulted in the foundation of the Hayāsi and Ātashbegi *khāndāns* (Hamzeh'ee 1990:208), on which see also above, p. 41.

104 A Companion of the Prophet Mohammad who was of Iranian descent.

105 Abu Sho'eyb Mohammad b. Nuseyr (d. ca. 863 CE), whose followers (also known as Alawids, and probably connected with the Turkish Alevis) are often called Nusayris. It seems likely that there were historical links between this group and the Yāresān, though we have no specific data.

106 Ali's sword, see above.

107 Most of these incarnations are associated with Shah Khoshin. SW evidently regards the *dowre* of Shāh Khoshin as the quintessential stage of *Tariqat*.

108 Bābā Tāher Oryān was a poet from Hamadan or Lorestan who wrote quatrains in a local dialect (see Rypka 1959:217–218). His poetry is thought to have preserved pre-Islamic characteristics, and many Yāresān believe that he belonged to their religion.

109 Pir Shahriyār was a contemporary of Shah Khoshin and is believed to have been a Zoroastrian. He lived in Hawraman, where he is said to have spread the teachings of Yāri in the name of Shāh Khoshin. A festival is still held there in his name (Pir-e Shalyār), which is mostly attended by Muslims. He is reported to have written a book entitled *Ma'refat-e Pir Shahriyār*, 'The Gnosis of Pir Shahriyār', see Hamzeh'ee 1990:51–52.

110 Shāh Khoshin's mother.

111 The Heptad associated with *Ma'refat* is connected with Fazlollāh Astarābādi (d. 1398 CE), the founder of the Hurufi sect (Schimmel 1975:339, 412; on his role in Yāri mythology see Van Bruinessen 1995). Van Bruinessen (1995 online:11) writes: 'Shāh Fazl appeared into the world with six companions, together the *haft tan*. The four archangels assumed the personalities of Mansur (al-Hallāj), Nasimi, Zakariyā and Turka; the one female spirit of the heptad (the primordial virgin mother) that of Eyna, while the sixth companion, the one who suffered beheading in many of his manifestations, appeared as a lamb, called Barra. These companions followed the shah on his peregrinations through often wild and deserted lands. At times when they were completely without food, Shāh Fazl would tell his human companions to slaughter and eat Barra, taking care not to break any of his bones. After their meal, the bones were carefully placed in front of Shāh Fazl, who then struck the ground with his magical staff, bringing Barra back to life.'

112 On Fazlollāh Astarābādi see previous note, and Schimmel 1975:339, 412. On his role in Yāri mythology see Van Bruinessen 1995, *passim*.

113 The greatest Hurufi poet, who was executed in Aleppo in 1417 CE (Schimmel 1975:339).

114 Hoseyn b. Mansur al-Hallāj, a prominent Sufi leader, who was executed in 922 CE (Schimmel 1995:62–77).

SW's information about the identification of members of the Heptad during various 'minor' periods which predate the *dowre* of Soltān is given above, pp. 46-47.

### *The dowre of Sayyed Brāke*

In an enumeration of spiritual ranks recognised by the Yāresān of Guran (see above), SF gave the name of Sayyed Brāke as ranking immediately below the *Chehel Tan*. Many Gurani Yāresān believe that Sayyed Brāke was a full manifestation of the Divine (*sāheb-e zāt*), during whose time the final *Bayāwbās* was concluded. This veneration of Sayyed Brāke seems to exist exclusively in the Gurani milieu. As we saw in Ch. 2, some Yāresān now believe his descendant and current successor, Sayyed Nasreddin Heydari, to be a full manifestation of the Divine in his own right.

In SF's enumeration Sayyed Brāke is followed by the 'Thirty-Six Poets', who formed part of Sayyed Brāke's entourage and were the authors of many popular *kalāms*. SF said:

Then came the *dowre* of Brāke. The people of Guran, who are the original Ahl-e Haqq, mostly accept him, but in Azerbaijan, Tehran and such places they don't accept this. They believe that the last time the *zāt* became manifest was in Soltān and never again. In Tehran they mostly accept the Perdiwari *kalāms* but not the Thirty-Six Poets. The Guranis, who are mostly Bābā Yādegāri or Shah Ebrāhimi, accept the Thirty-Six Poets. They believe that all secrets were revealed at the time of Soltān, but in a mysterious, cryptic way. Therefore the Thirty-Six Poets expressed the secrets anew. The best of them was Nowruz-e Surāni.

[Later comment by SF]: In the last decades there has been so much contact between the groups that some people outside Guran have become familiar with the Thirty-Six Poets.

### **The history of religions**

In Sayyed Wali's account of Yāri beliefs about the cycles, and the history of religions (App. 1), we learn that all religions were sent to communicate God's Will to humanity, but that their respective stages of development, and the spiritual maturity of its followers differed. Each religion has its own task to fulfil on earth. Yāri, in other words, is a religion that is only suitable for a select few; it is independent of other religions, but does not dispute that they contain Truth and were inspired by the Divine.

In all religions of the world there has been the attention of God and the manifestation of the Essence, and in each one He has become manifest. The *Daftar* explains these things very well, it expounds [concepts] such as reincarnation, transmigration, wandering and movements [of the soul]. The Prophets who are 'bound to obey God's Will' (i.e. officially: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Mohammad) from Noah up to Moses and the Children of Israel [appeared] in the Western lands and Jerusalem; in the Iranian lands, Zarathustra and several

figures appeared who had their ([own] epochs and who have all established religions, They all have two sides, but their actions and their precepts clearly demonstrate which side they were on. Secretly or openly, God was aware of all; each one fulfilled its own essential destiny, as one can understand from the Commandments of Moses and the words of Jesus. Their words, actions and deeds have all been for the sake of truth and righteousness, creating spirituality and physical purity, and for the common good. Truly they spent the time of their stewardship seeking to satisfy God. The Prophets of the Zoroastrian faith, who were the authors and revealers of religious principles, founders of the religion, and stewards of the epoch in which they appeared, belong to the group possessing the Essence (*hey'at-e zāti*). Their commandments and words made the distinction between the two sides and the actions of each one very clear. In the outer world, there are their very words and explanations in the Avesta, the Book of the Zoroastrians, and on the esoteric level it is explained well and precisely by the *Daftar-e Haqiqat*. Besides the bringers of Commandments and founders of religions who are known by the epoch of their manifestation [i.e. because an epoch is named for them], there were other good men in that religious group, such as kings, heroes and righteous people and able persons from Hushang down to Jamāsp. One can say that they were among the righteous of the world and the just of the earth. The *Daftar-e Haqiqat* discusses them fully and in detail. In all epochs of Manifestation, the attention and care of God, like the rays of the sun which shine upon all creatures without distinction, makes manifest all things according to their own essential disposition... and fundamental nature. The sun of Truth sent down its magnificent rays and turned them towards all. Nevertheless, it is possible to see which level and stage the [various] religions of the world have attained, and to which side each one belongs.

According to Yāresān beliefs, the Truth of Yāri and the *Shari'a* of Mohammad are two [distinct] religions and two fully developed phenomena. The Truth was accepted and established in the World of Particles before the Creation of the world of *Bayābast* and of the *Shart* (Covenant) of Truth. This will be explained fully in due course.

[In] the *Shari'a* of Mohammad, the appearance of the Prophet among the Arabs, and his greatness, power and knowledge are well known; the *Daftar's* explanation of this will be discussed later. The Commands of the *Shari'a* and the formation of the Islamic religion reached its full form through the indispensable manifestation of Mohammad. Its commandments, its established religious principles and customs became manifest through the agency of Mohammad. Mostafā Ali,<sup>115</sup> whom the Ahl-e Haqq regard as [a manifestation

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115 I.e. Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad. In Islamic sources, Mostafā is a name of Mohammad, Ali being referred to as Mortazā.

of] the Essence of God, took steps to propagate the right form of the Islamic religion with the utmost seriousness; he made Islam popular and established it, as was said earlier. God was manifest and present in all religions. He caused the development of the epochs of the world, step by step, epoch by epoch, and incarnation by incarnation. The common people, collectively and individually, are likewise always in a state of change through the transmigration of the soul, from stage to stage until the end.

## Eschatology

In Yāresān culture narratives about creation, cycles of history, and the end of time, are all perceived as aspects of the history of the world. While a fundamentally cyclical view of history might be thought unlikely to give rise to beliefs about the end of time, such beliefs are nevertheless found in both Yezidism and Yāri. As Hamzeh'ee has shown,<sup>116</sup> Yāresān accounts of the events that are expected to take place at this stage vary considerably. A belief common to all such narratives is that the end of time will come when the last cycle has run its course and each individual soul has been incarnated a sufficient number of times.<sup>117</sup> At that time, the Saviour (*Mahdi*) will appear, who is the final manifestation of the Divine Essence. Most Yāresān believe that the Mahdi will be an incarnation of Soltān. The Mahdi will right all wrongs and bring about an ideal existence. Many accounts state that the advent of the *Mahdi* will be preceded by a number of 'precursors'.

Geranpayeh<sup>118</sup> offers an interesting description of the beliefs of the Turkic-speaking branch of Yāri. According to his account many Yāresān believe that the end of the world is near, and that the Yāresān will play a prominent role at that time because, after a series of incarnations, many Yāresān will have become perfect and thus one with God. It is this group that will save the world. Before Soltān Sahāk returns as the Saviour, evil will be rife in the world for a number of years; the Yāresān will become one another's foes; honour will disappear; and Truth will be regarded as a lie. There will be a World War in which there will only be losers. Then Truth will finally show its full power, the *Haft Tan* will appear, cannon will no longer be able to shoot, and the Miraculous Age will begin. For the Yāresān, the world will become a Paradise.

Certain poets such as Ilbegi Jāf, Khan Almās and Darwish Ojāq Kalhori, are believed to have predicted the future.<sup>119</sup>

116 Hamzeh'ee 1990:136–145.

117 Saeed Khan (1927:33) speaks of 'a thousand times'.

118 Geranpayeh 2007:57–60.

119 Zahedi Moghaddam 2019. See also p. 130 with fn. 39.

## Chapter Five: Ritual and Observance

### Music

When discussing ritual, mention must be made of the central role of music in the religious life of the community, which will be discussed further in Part II. To some extent Yāri resembles Yezidism and certain Sufi traditions in this respect, and music and a sacred instrument play a very similar role among Alevi groups, but nevertheless the way in which religious knowledge and emotion are bound up with music among the Yāresān, and the elaborate symbolism surrounding their sacred instrument, the *tanbur*, appear to be exceptional. In most cases music is indispensable to the creation of a desired, coherent ritual atmosphere, indicating and establishing the passage to a holy communal experience. Although partly inseparable from text, this music is felt by some members of the community, particularly those who have little theoretical knowledge about their religion, to have an even higher emotional impact and significance than the sacred texts.

### The Jam

The *jam*, which is also referred to as *zeker*, is the central communal ritual of the Yāresān. It is performed regularly.<sup>1</sup> It combines singing religious texts (*nazm*) with the blessing and ritual consumption of small quantities of food and drink, and sometimes with ecstatic elements. The ritual can take place at a religious centre known as *jamkhāne*, but may also be celebrated in private houses. For this ritual at least seven<sup>2</sup> initiated, male members must sit in a circle, which they may not leave while the ritual is going on. Those inside the circle are the actual participants in the *jam*. Others – men, women and children – may attend the ceremony while standing around the circle, but are regarded as onlookers, not participants. Gurani Yāresān generally sit in the circle cross-legged, other communities sit in a kneeling position. During the ceremony all participants should cover their head and tie a cummerbund

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1 Safizāde (1996:565) states that the ceremony should be performed every week.

2 Safizāde (ibid.) speaks of a minimum of three participants. Our informants always spoke of seven.

around their waist.<sup>3</sup> Sayyeds usually wear a broad, green cummerbund; lay people a simple white cord. Several figures have a special role in the ritual:<sup>4</sup>

- A Sayyed must be present to take on the role of leader of the ritual<sup>5</sup>.
- The *Khalife* or ‘lieutenant’ sits next to the Sayyed on his left;<sup>6</sup> if a *Khalife* is present,<sup>6</sup> he is in charge of distributing the offerings among the participants, unless the Sayyed does this himself. Whilst the role of the *Khalife* does not appear to be regarded as particularly important among most Iranian communities, many Kāka’is regard it as vital.<sup>7</sup>
- The *Kalāmkhwān* (the ‘*kalām*-reciter’, who plays the *tanbur*<sup>8</sup> and is an expert performer of ritual texts) leads the musical and liturgical part of the performance. He normally sits next to the Sayyed on the right.
- The Dalil or *Khādem*. As was said earlier,<sup>9</sup> in most communities the role of *Khādem* or Dalil is open to all male members of the Yāresān who have been initiated.<sup>10</sup> The *Khādem* is the only participant who remains standing inside the circle throughout the ritual and is allowed to move about carrying out various tasks, while the other participants must remain seated throughout the ceremony.

When the participants have sat down, a tablecloth is spread in the centre of the circle and a bowl of water and some food (e.g. sweets and apples or pomegranates) are handed from outside the circle to the *Khādem*, who places them on the tablecloth. The *Khādem* then washes the hands of the participants. After this, the ceremony largely consists of rhythmic music, singing, and clapping in an ever-increasing

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3 This is known as ‘being ‘bound’ (*baste*). On Zoroastrian and Yezidi parallels see Kreyenbroek 1995:134 with 115.

4 Among the Sārli (cf. p. 32 fn.5, 34 with fn. 19), the leader of the *jam* is known as *Sarjam*, and cannot act as a *kalāmkhwān*. Their community is divided into three ‘castes’ named *Pir*, *Mām* and *Ām* (cf. Ar. ‘*ām*, ‘common’), which may correspond to the *Sayyed*, *Dalil* and *Morid* of other Yāresān groups (verbal communication to PK by a member of the Sārli community in the village of Zangal near Mosul, on 18.11.2009). The Perdiwari community in the surroundings of Hawar (see pp. 61, 146) distinguish between the offices of *Sayyed*, *Farrāsh* and *Khalife*. However, the task normally associated with the *Khalife* is there performed by the *Farrāsh*, while the *Khalife*’s task is to ‘offer explanations’ (verbal communication to PK, Hāwār, 21.11.2009).

5 Hamzeh’ee 1990: 157–158. This information was confirmed by several Yārān from Iraqī Kurdistan.

6 In the ceremonies I witnessed there was no *Khalife* present, and the tasks associated with this office were performed by the Sayyed.

7 Sayyed Khalil Āghābāb Kāka’i (App. 2), said: ‘The Sayyed is the head of the *jam*. He is responsible for the entire correct procedure at the *jam*. But without the presence of a *Khalife* his work is vitiated. Unfortunately this is not the case in Iran’.

8 The sacred instrument of the Yāresān.

9 See above, p. 36.

10 But on modern practice see *ibid*.



tempo. Towards the climax this may induce an ecstatic state of consciousness. Towards the end of the ceremony the music slows down again. When the singing stops, small quantities of food (which have then been consecrated by the ritual) are partaken of by participants. The following is a description of the *jam* ceremony based on cinematographic recordings of two such ceremonies made by the authors in Gahware and Zarde in April 2008:

- Before the actual start of the ceremony the *Kalāmkhwān* consults his *daftar* (a notebook containing a list of texts (*nazm*)<sup>11</sup> that may be performed during the ritual), and talks to other participants, to decide which texts to perform. Parts of the *kalāms* may also be recited or referred to.
- The ritual begins when the *Khādem* cries: *Hu! Awwal o Ākher Yār* (He! [God] The First and the Last is the Friend).<sup>12</sup>
- The public outside the circle now has to stand up, with hands palms-upward in ‘praying’ attitude.
- The *Khādem* prostrates himself, takes the bowl of water and washes the participants’ hands.
- The *Khādem* finishes this stage of the ceremony by washing his own hands. He then kisses the water bowl and puts it away.
- The *Kalāmkhwān* meanwhile has begun to strum the *tanbur*.
- The playing then begins in earnest; all fall silent.
- A tablecloth is spread spread in the centre of the circle.
- Apples are brought in and put on the tablecloth.
- A bowl of water is brought in and put on the tablecloth.
- The *Khādem* prostrates himself and exclaims: *Hu! Awwal o Ākher Yār*.
- The *Khādem* then stands up with the upper half of his body bowed.
- The *Kalāmkhwān* plays the *tanbur*.
- The *Khādem* exclaims: *Hu! Awwal o Ākher Yār*.
- The *Kalāmkhwān* begins his formal recitation. At first he sings solo (*tak-khwāni*).
- Then something in the music and the recitation changes, and the participants respond by repeating the last line sung by the *Kalāmkhwān* (this joint performance is known as *ham-khwāni*).
- The *nazms* are sung slowly, while sweets are poured onto plates.

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11 Some of these *nazm* texts contain references to the longer ‘hymns’ that are here called *kalām*, cf. p. 119 with fn. 9.

12 This exclamation is heard repeatedly at the beginning and the end of the ceremony. The cry seems to mark the transition between phases of the ritual, but further research is needed.

- Another exclamation of *Hu! Awwal o Ākher Yār*.
- Instrumental interlude on the *tanbur*.
- The same *nazm* text is repeated several times in solo performance.
- Then *hamkhwāni* begins again. Lines from a *nazm* text are sung in turn several times, the speed of the singing increases with every transition.
- As the rhythm picks up some older participants begin to move or shake their heads. Many younger ones sit motionless.
- Rhythmic clapping begins and the session approaches the climax, when the music is very fast, the singing very loud, and all appear to be in an exalted state. Part of the recitation consists of short phrases, which at this stage are almost shouted: *Haqq, Haqq; Hu, Hu* (Truth, Truth, He, He);<sup>13</sup> *Haqqan Haqqan, Ay*<sup>14</sup> *Haqqan; Shām Haqqan; Mowlām Haqqan* (He is Truth, He is Truth, Oh He is Truth; My King is Truth; My Lord is Truth). Most members of the audience participate in the singing and clapping.<sup>15</sup>
- Gradually the singing becomes slower (this is done consciously, so as to allow those present to regain their ordinary state of consciousness).
- Then the singing ceases altogether and only instrumental music is heard. Occasionally ones hears a murmured *Yār, Yār* (Friend, Friend).<sup>16</sup>
- The *Khādem* begins to cut the apples into quarters.
- The participants sit with heads bowed. The *Kalāmkhwān* recites solo, with occasional chorus of *Yār, Yār*.
- The Sayyed briefly addresses the meeting.
- Participants respond by exclaiming: *Āh* (or *Ey*) *Yār*.
- The *Khādem* distributes pieces of apple.
- *Hu! Awwal o Ākher Yār* is heard repeatedly.
- The *Khādem* takes the bowl of water around, offering it to participants.
- The *Khādem* prostrates himself. *Hu! Awwal o Ākher Yār*.
- The *Khādem* kisses the hands of all the participants.
- This ends the ritual. *Kalāmkhwān* and *Khādem* sit back and rest, the participants eat the pieces of apple.

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13 Both words denote God.

14 This exclamation sounds rather like '*Ali Haqqan* (Ali is God), which may possibly have been the original form.

15 Cf. Hooshmandrad 2004:309.

16 I.e. God.

## The Nazr

The *nazr*<sup>17</sup> ceremony is usually held to honour a vow. It is the most elaborate of Yāri rituals, consisting of a blood sacrifice<sup>18</sup> and a ritual meal, followed by a *jam*.<sup>19</sup> The ceremony can take place at a *jamkhāne* or in a private house. Like every Yāri ritual, the *nazr* must be attended by a Sayyed who acts as *Pir*, and someone who acts a *Dalil* or *Khādem*. The sacrificial meal is ritually partaken of by at least seven initiated male community members, who sit in a circle; when the participants have eaten, the food is also distributed to the women, men and children who attend the ritual as spectators. Before the ritual begins one or more male animals (ram, goat, or cockerel) are killed, and the meat is cooked in water and salt (nothing further may be added). The sequence of actions, as witnessed and filmed by the authors, is as follows:

- The participants cover their heads and tie a girdle or cummerbund around their waist.<sup>20</sup>
- The *Khādem* checks that the attire of the participants is correct.
- The participants sit in a circle, cross-legged. The Sayyed gives instructions.
- The *Khādem* gives instructions.
- A bowl of water is brought in from outside the circle and handed to the *Khādem*.
- The *Khādem* bows and washes the participants' hands.
- The *Khādem* finishes this stage of the ceremony by washing his own hands. He then kisses the water bowl and puts it away.
- Cloths are spread in the centre of the circle. Thin slabs of bread (*lawāsh*) are brought in and distributed among the participants. They kiss the *lawāsh* when they receive it.
- The sacrificial meat is brought in in large bowls. The meat is still on the bone, and some of the participants take it off the bone so that it can be put

17 The word means 'votive offering'.

18 For a detailed description of the sacrifice see Hamzeh'ee 1990: 168–170.

19 A *nazr* ceremony was held on 10.4.2008 in the village of Zarde in the presence of the authors, who filmed the proceedings. The account offered here is based on the resulting cinematographic material. In this case, the *nazr* was offered by the wife of the Sayyed, who was not present. The Sayyed, as his wife's representative, therefore acted both as the Sayyed whose presence is required for the ceremony, and as the 'host of the ritual' (*Sāheb Nazr*). In this ceremony he also recited and sung the sacred texts and performed the tasks associated with the *Khalife*. On this occasion, therefore, the same person fulfilled four distinct ritual roles: (1) that of Sayyed, (2) *Kalāmkhwān*, (3), *Khalife* and (4) *Sāheb Nazr*. The ceremony took place in the house of one of the Sayyed's Morids. The owner of the house, who remained outside the circle, handed the bowls of water and the food to the *Khādem* inside the circle.

20 See above with fn. 3.

into wraps of meat and rice enfolded in *lawāsh*, which are distributed among both participants and spectators.

- The *Kalāmkhwān* tunes his *tanbur* and begins to play and sing alone.
- Boiled rice is put on the boundary of the circle, to be brought in by the *Khādem* when required.
- Meanwhile, participants and spectators listen intently to the *Kalāmkhwān*'s singing.
- The host brings in more food from the kitchen; he places this on the boundary of the circle or hands it directly to the *Khādem*.
- The bread, meat and rice are handed to the Sayyed<sup>21</sup> to make into wraps.
- The *Khādem* distributes the first wraps among participants inside the circle, who receive them solemnly and start eating.
- Broth from the sacrificial meat is brought in.
- A short address by the Sayyed: 'We receive this offering, may it be blessed' Murmured response from participants: 'Amen'.
- After this, the Sayyed continues to make wraps for the spectators.
- More broth is brought in for the spectators.
- Cloths are spread for the spectators' meal; men and women sit in separate groups.
- The spectators receive the sacrificial food that has been handed by the *Khādem* inside the circle to the host outside, so that the food that was blessed in the circle can be consumed by, and the blessing conveyed to all present. The wraps are placed on pieces of *lawāsh*, which function as plates.
- Then the wraps are distributed to those who cooked the food in the kitchen.
- When the spectators have finished eating, the *Khādem* removes the tablecloth and the remaining food and utensils from the circle.
- The participants sit in a reverent altitude. The cry *Huwa 'llāh* ('He is God') is heard repeatedly.
- The Sayyed finishes making wraps (the last ones are to be distributed to those who could not attend the ceremony); the participants' hands are washed by the *Khādem*.
- The participants sit in 'praying' attitude, with hands palms-upward.
- After this the *jam* ritual (see above) begins.

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21 In Kāka'i practice this is the sole responsibility of the *Khalife* (information from Mrs Prshng Kāka'i, verbal communication to PK, May 2013), but at the ceremonies that we witnessed in Iran no *Khalife* was present.

## The Niyāz or Shokrāne

The term *niyāz* is used generally for the offerings the Yāresān bring to the *jam* to be blessed by the ritual and consumed by the congregation. It is often said that the Yāresān offer *niyāz* instead of *namāz* (the Islamic prayer ritual). Among the Gurani Yāresān the term *niyāz* is also used, however, for a short ritual that may be performed by a Sayyed and someone who acts as a *Khādem*, without a ritual circle of participants. The celebrants essentially praise the divine Beings with prayer-like formulas and bless some food (often sweets or almonds), which is then distributed among bystanders. The *niyāz* is a minor ritual of thanksgiving or celebration, and is frequently performed. This ritual also referred to as *shokrāne*.<sup>22</sup>

## Sar Sepordan

Further distinctive rituals include the ceremony of *sar sepordan* (lit. ‘submitting one’s head’),<sup>23</sup> in which a person is formally affiliated to the two men who are to be his or her Pir and Dalil.<sup>24</sup> The Pir, who is always a Sayyed, represents the spiritual authority of his *khāndān*, which in turn derives its authority from Soltān Sahāk, who was a full incarnation of the Divine. The Pir is regarded as a representative of the ‘Eternal Pir’.<sup>25</sup> At the time of Soltān Sahāk, the Eternal Pir was Benyāmin, while the Eternal Dalil’ is epitomised by Dāwud. All members of the community must ‘submit their head’ to a Sayyed, normally one of the lineage to which their family belongs. He or she thus becomes a Morid of this Sayyed, a relationship that is usually for life. As in Yezidism,<sup>26</sup> ‘priestly’ families are not exempt from the obligation to have a spiritual director, so that Sayyeds must be the Morid of another Sayyed.<sup>27</sup>

Initiates who are old enough to make their own decisions are expected to attend the ceremony in person.<sup>28</sup> Normally, however, the ceremony is performed when a child is still young,<sup>29</sup> in which case it should be represented by a ‘deputy’ (*wakil*), usually the father. The initiate or the *wakil* should provide several items, including a nutmeg,<sup>30</sup> a coin, a piece of white cloth, a knife, non-animal sacrificial offerings, a

22 See e.g. Hamzeh’ee 1990:165–166.

23 I.e. pledging one’s life to the Divine as symbolised by the Pir. The rite is also known as *jowz-e sar shekastan* ‘breaking the nutmeg (symbolising) the head’.

24 On the Dalil see above, p. 36.

25 See Hamzeh’ee, 1990:202.

26 See e.g. Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005:6–7.

27 Hamzeh’ee 1990:210.

28 Ibid.

29 Khwāje al-Din (n.d.:60) states that the child’s *wakil* should collect all the attributes needed for the ceremony during the first seven days after the birth. In practice it is not unusual to hear of *sar sepordan* ceremonies of children who are a few years old.

30 It is interesting to find that a key element in this Yāresān ceremony is a nutmeg, which

cockerel, a maund of rice, salt, fat, a tablecloth and a tray.<sup>31</sup> Attending the ceremony are the initiate or the deputy, the Pir, a *Khalife* if there is one,<sup>32</sup> the Dalil, and other community members. Pir, Dalil and participants sit in a circle, as for an ordinary *jam*. A detailed account of the ritual<sup>33</sup> lists the following stages of the ceremony.

- At the start the ceremony the Pir describes the conditions (*shart*) of belonging to Yāri, and the initiate or deputy (hereafter: ‘the initiate’) agrees to keep these.
- The white cloth is then tied around the neck of the initiate.
- The Dalil appoints one of those present as his ‘representative’ for a short while.
- The initiate now holds on to the clothing of the representative with his left hand, and the representative holds on to the clothing of the Dalil.
- Still holding on to each other’s clothes, the Dalil, his representative, and the initiate go round the circle and kiss the hands of all the participants.
- They continue to hold on to each other’s clothes while the ‘Prayer of Permission’ is recited, which accepts the initiate into the fold.
- After this prayer, the representative removes the white cloth from the neck of the initiate and presents it to the Pir and the Dalil.
- The Dalil’s representative now asks to be relieved of his function and this is accepted. The Dalil resumes his role.
- The ‘Prayer of the Nutmeg’ (see below) is recited, followed by the ‘Prayer of the Knife’
- After this, with the consent of the participants, the Pir cuts the top off the nutmeg.
- The sacrificial offerings are distributed among the participants by the Sayyed or his *Khalife*.
- The Pir enumerates the conditions (*hojjat*), which are accepted by the initiate.

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originates in India and East Asia and has to be imported to Iran. It seems legitimate to wonder whether a similar rite existed before nutmegs were imported and, if so, what equivalent was used then. The fact that the word *jowz*, which is used by the Yāresān and by speakers of modern Persian for ‘nutmeg’, can mean ‘nut, walnut’ in Arabic (the Perdiwari Yāresān use the cognate *gōez* for ‘walnut’) suggests that this equivalent may have been a walnut. Both nutmeg and walnut are round objects that can be broken up, perhaps referring to the breaking-up of the original Pearl to form the world.

31 Hamzeh’ee 1990:210.

32 Cf. above with fn. 6.

33 Hamzeh’ee 1990:200–202 with variants given on p. 203; essentially the same description is found in Safizāde 1396: 555–559.

- The Pir addresses the initiate, stating that, in essence, the King is Soltān Sahāk, the Pir is Benyāmin, and the Dalil is Dāwud. He mentions the name of his *khāndān* as the representative of Benyāmin; the name of the Pir as representative of the *khāndān*; and of the Dalil as the representative of the ‘Seventy-Two Pirs’, who ultimately represent Dāwud.
- The nutmeg is cut up into small pieces that are distributed among the participants.
- With permission from the Sayyed, the participants eat the nutmeg.
- The *Khādem* kisses the hands of the participants in the circle.

It is interesting to note that, until the initiate has been accepted into the fold, the Dalil avoids direct contact with him. If one accepts the possibility of an ancient Iranian background to Yāri observance, this custom may be based on the premise that until the initiate has been accepted, his purity is insufficient to be directly in touch with the very pure Dalil.

### The Prayer of the Nutmeg

The text of the Prayer of the Nutmeg, which is attributed to Soltān Sahāk, is as follows:<sup>34</sup>

<i>Mērdānim āmīn</i>	Let all my men recite
<i>karān yak qalam</i>	‘Amen’ together
<i>Bē kifr o kīna</i>	Let them sit together without
<i>bišīnān wa ham</i>	unbelief and anger
<i>Biwāndē lāla</i>	Pray for humility in the shadow of
<i>ney sāye-y ‘alam</i>	[God’s] banner
<i>Ī šart-o šūn-mān</i>	We have here established this strong
<i>īna bast muḥkam</i>	<i>Shart-o Eqrār</i> <sup>35</sup>

34 The text given here is based on a comparison between the variants given by Safizāde (1997: 556–559) and Tāheri (2007: 278–279).

35 See above, p. 85.

<i>Pey šart-o biyā-y</i>	According to the <i>Shart</i> and the vow
<i>asrār-e aqdam</i>	of allegiance to the ancient secrets
<i>Rā-y sājnārim</i>	I have made the Path of <i>Sāj-e Nār</i> <sup>36</sup>
<i>āwirdanī war čam</i>	visible to the eye
<i>Ney war čam āmā</i>	They have become visible to the eye
<i>ā bazm-o sirrī</i>	now, that Banquet and Secret
<i>Sirr-e azalī</i>	The Primordial Secret,
<i>ā šart wa durrī</i>	that <i>Shart</i> in the Pearl
<i>Ī sikka pā sikka</i>	This coin represents
<i>azalī hūrī</i>	the small [?] Primordial Coin
<i>Ī jowz pā jowz-ī</i>	This nutmeg represents the luminous
<i>nūr-e zarrī</i>	golden Nutmeg
<i>Ī tīg pā niyat</i>	This knife represents the vow of
<i>mawdāy key birrī</i>	intention at the time when I cut
<i>Aw nām-e rāga-y</i>	That name of the Path of the <i>Shart</i>
<i>šart yārān hurrī</i>	of the <i>Yārān</i> is the best of all
<i>Ī jowza ney jam</i>	At this <i>jam</i> I cut the skin off this
<i>post-iš madirrī</i>	nutmeg
<i>*Parē<sup>37</sup> sikka-y šart</i>	On account of the role [?] <sup>38</sup> of the
<i>sar-iš mawirrī</i>	coin of the <i>Shart</i> , I cut off its head

36 The 'Baking Plate of Fire', on which see above, p. 80.

37 Both Safizāde and Tāheri have *parē*, in similar contexts one often finds *pey*.

38 So Safizāde 1997:558.



<i>Sar-iš mawirri</i>	I cut off its head for the Famous
<i>pey nāmāwarān</i>	Ones
<i>Yārānim wa šart</i>	My Yārān, for the sake of the <i>Shart</i> ,
<i>rāy jowz *binyarān</i>	break the nutmeg
<i>Na jam wey arkān</i>	Let them say ‘Amen’ to these pillars
<i>āmīn bikarān</i>	of the faith at the <i>jam</i>
<i>Wa sidq pey pey šart</i>	Let them always submit their heads
<i>sar-šān bispārān</i>	in sincerity to the <i>Shart</i>
<i>Dil-garm o zeyl-pāk</i>	Let them tread this path, full of
<i>jey rā biwyarān</i>	enthusiasm and purity of heart
<i>Biwyarān ney gird</i>	Let them all tread it in unity,
<i>wa tarka-y tuīl</i>	maintaining discipline <sup>39</sup>
<i>Šart-e raga-y jowz</i>	Deeply accept he conditions ( <i>shart</i> )
<i>bikardī quīl</i>	of the Path of the Nutmeg
<i>Sar na sujda-y Pīr</i>	Prostrate yourselves
<i>pā lāya-w nazdīl</i>	with humility and devotion [?] <sup>40</sup>
<i>Maškandē qewlī</i>	Do not break the command of the
<i>haft wālā-y mandīl</i>	Seven High Ones of the kerchief
<i>Qāyim bigērdī</i>	Hold fast to the hem of the Dalil’s
<i>dāmān-e dalīl</i>	robe

39 Lit. ‘(by the threat of punishment) with the thin twig of a branch’.

40 The meaning of the word *nazdīl* is uncertain.

<i>Dāūd, Benyāmīn, Mūsī kamāndār</i>	Dāwud, Benyāmin, and Musi who holds a bow
<i>Mohr-e panj tanim hā Pīr-e Ramzbār</i>	The seal of my Five Persons is Pir Ramzbār
<i>Yār-e Zardebām šart-e Rūčyār</i>	The Friend Yādegār, the <i>Shart</i> of Shāh Ebrāhim <sup>41</sup>
<i>Hā haft-tanānim wa haft pūrim yār</i>	These are my Seven Persons ( <i>Haft Tan</i> ), the friends of my seven sons [the <i>Haftawāne</i> ]
<i>Šart-e haft pūrim na jam bo āškār</i>	The <i>Shart</i> of my seven sons has been revealed at the <i>jam</i>
<i>Wa šāhdī Benyām, qawl-e Xāwandkār</i>	With Benyāmin as a witness, and [according to] the Word of the Lord [God]
<i>Pey šo 'la-y Haft Pūr peyjūr bā bēdār</i>	They should be active in seeking the flame of the Seven Sons
<i>Na žēr-e beydāg haft nūr-e nāzdār</i>	Under the banner of the Seven Beloved Lights
<i>Mayān wa huzūr azim karamdār</i>	They come to the Presence, I am the Bountiful One

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41 The verse uses the names 'Zardebām' and 'Ruchyār', which are thought to refer to Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim respectively, see Safizāde 1997:559.

<i>Rūm hā wa karam</i> <i>mērdānī qetār</i>	My face is turned toward Grace, [to] the men queuing up
<i>Pey sikka-e haft pūr</i> <i>yārān maw risgār</i>	Because of the coin offered to the Seven Sons, the Yārān are free
<i>Şaf-e tālebān</i> <i>malān aw war bār</i>	A line of disciples proceeds towards the Audience
<i>Sāya-y haft firzan</i> <i>jaw sar maw izhār</i>	The shadow of the Seven Children is revealed at this gathering
<i>Binyām mawāzo</i> <i>şafā-y gonāhkār</i>	Benyāmin announces (his) intercession for the sinner
<i>Az-iş mawaxşī</i> <i>yār-e şart tayyār</i>	And I too forgive the Yār who is prepared to observe the <i>Şart</i>

## Feasts and Fasts

### **The fast of Marnow and Eyd-e Khāwankār**

The Yāresān fasts have no parallel either in Islam or Zoroastrianism. The former observes the fast during the month of Ramazān, while the latter disapproves of fasting altogether. Yezidism, on the other hand, also knows a three-day winter fast followed by a festival celebrating the birth of the founder of the religion,<sup>42</sup> which corresponds closely to the Yāri observance of Marnow. A link with an original Iranian festival celebrating the rebirth of the Sun, and thus perhaps of Mithra, cannot be

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42 See Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005:17.

excluded, but is equally incapable of absolute proof. SF describes the legend explaining the origin of the Marnow fast as follows:<sup>43</sup>

Sheikh Isi [Soltān Sahāk's father] loved his new-born son very much, and his other sons were jealous. After Isi's death there was a conflict and Soltān left the region. Of all his father's great wealth he only took one pan, one small carpet, and one tablecloth. He went to Hawraman and settled in a cave called Marnow in order to write down matters of religion. His half-brothers, led by Hushang-e Chichek, came after him and found him. They attacked him, as is explained in the Perdiwari texts. According to the Perdiwari *kalām*, Dāwud had told Soltān not to worry. Dāwud ordered Soltān to take his small carpet and pour some dust on it. [He did] and this produced an enormous amount of dust, so that one could not tell friend from foe. In this way the enemies were annihilated. Everything was dark and the battle continued for three days. They had not eaten anything during those three days. After the three days an old woman came by and brought one maund<sup>44</sup> of rice, a cockerel, and some water. Then they prayed [i.e. performed a *jam*]. Hazrat-e Dāwud was *Khādem*, they sacrificed the cockerel and cooked it together with some rice.

From then on people should fast for three days. We used not to have *eftār*,<sup>45</sup> i.e. we didn't break our fast at night [but fasted without interruption]. Now, under Islamic influence, this [breaking of the fast] is accepted, but it is not the original custom. It falls in the Iranian month of Ābān,<sup>46</sup> at the beginning of winter. It has to be on the 12<sup>th</sup> of the lunar month. The fast of Marnow is obligatory. [At the end] they sacrifice a cockerel and cook it with rice. A Sayyed prays over it. The next day people go to visit each other. This is the feast of Eyd-e Khāwankār.

A significant parallel seems to exist between this sacrificial meal and the Yāri myth of creation (see Ch. 1). In both cases, there is darkness and confinement at first, while the creatures are motionless and do not eat. Then the ritual sacrifice of an animal ensues, after which the world becomes spacious and light, and movement and eating are possible. SF continued:

43 For the earlier part of the account see pp. 53–54.

44 Kurd. *man*, i.e. an Asian measure of weight.

45 I.e. a meal to break the fast after sundown, as is usual in Islam.

46 The Iranian month of Ābān coincides with the sun's passage through Scorpio (ca. 20 October - 20 November). This is indeed the period when the Gurani and several Iraqi Yāresān communities celebrate the Marnow fast (in 2011 the Feast of Khāwankār fell on 12 November; in 2012 on 30 October). According to Hamzeh'ee (1990:186), 'The Gurān and some other groups fast on the twelfth day of any lunar month that falls on any part of the first forty days of the winter season ... (Cheleh-ye bozorg).' In practice the precise date of the fast is determined each year by religious authorities.

As to the Feast of Khāwankār and the fast of Marnow, it was the custom in Gahware – and happily it still is – that when the days of the fast begin, on the first night, called *shab-e raftan be khāne-ye Sayyed* (the night for visiting the house of the Sayyed), people go to visit their Sayyed at his home. In the house of the Sayyed they prepare a pottage called *āsh-e māst*, which consists of yoghurt and rice. They mix this, cook it, pray over it, and offer to the Morids who come as guests. Everyone must bring his *niyāz* (offering).

In our religion a person cannot fast just like that, a fast has to begin with a formal vow of intention. In the afternoon you go to the bathhouse, have a bath and formulate the intention to observe the three days of the Yāri fast, i.e. the intention of observing Marnow. Even if a person takes a shower [at home], he must formulate this intention. Then he comes out, buys his offering – e.g. a kilo of apples or some chocolates – and takes it to the house of his Sayyed. The Sayyed gives him *āsh-e māst* in a bowl with a piece of bread, [and he eats] until all are assembled. When they are all there, they distribute the offerings and recite *kalāms* together. Then, around 10.30 or 11 p.m. they get up and the Sayyed and his Morids go to visit another Sayyed. They recite one *kalām* there and then go on to another Sayyed. This goes on till dawn. At dawn they are tired and go home to sleep.

This happens for three nights. During those three nights, apart from reciting the *kalāms* with *tanbur* and all that, they [the Sayyeds] also give explanations of the *kalāms*. They recite the *kalāms* – the Perdiwari *kalāms* and those of Nowruz<sup>47</sup> – and explain them. They explain each one to the young ones and then they explain the religious customs [rituals] of the Yāresān. On those three nights, fortunately, people learn a great deal about the melodies<sup>48</sup> and about the texts. In this way religious knowledge is transmitted orally.

### The Qawaltās Fast

Another fast, which is observed by some as the only or main fast while others regard it as voluntary, is the fast of Qawaltās. The legend that is told to explain its origin is structurally similar to the Marnow legend in that it postulates a period of immobility and darkness followed by a delivery, but there is no trace there of a sacrifice. There is considerable confusion in the sources concerning the time of the celebration of the two fasts. The reason for this appears to be that different *khāndāns* celebrate the fast at different times.<sup>49</sup> Whereas SF states that the Marnow fast takes place in November and Qawaltās in January, Hamzeh'ee<sup>50</sup> describes the two fasts as consecutive, falling in the lunar month that corresponds to the Iranian solar month of Āzar (20

47 A popular religious poet.

48 I.e. presumably about the melody with which *nazms* are to be recited.

49 See <http://www.ahle-haqq.com/fasting.html>, consulted on 15 November 2011.

50 Hamzeh'ee 1990:185–186.

November-20 December),<sup>51</sup> the 12<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> day being called Marnow, and the 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> Qawaltās. Kāka’is from Iraqī Kurdistan say that their Pirs determine the dates of the feasts as they see fit within certain parameters. SF, whose community regards the Qawaltās as less important than Marnow, gave the following explanation of its background.

We also have another fast, that of Qawaltās. The story is that the *Yārān-e Qawaltās* (Companions of Qawaltās) went to visit Soltān on Mt Shahu.<sup>52</sup> When they were half-way there, they said, ‘Why can’t Soltān come to us?’ Soltān was angry and caused them to be covered with snow. They were frozen and nearly dead for three days. Then Dāwud the Mediator intervened and they were released. Since that time, [the fast] is observed among the Yāresān as a non-obligatory fast. If you do it, it is OK; if you don’t, it doesn’t matter.

As for the time, it is held in the first month of the Persian winter, in the month of Dey [*ca.* 21 December–20 January]; there are some other places where Yāresān do it in the month of Bahman [*ca.* 21 January–20 February]. In any case, it is in winter. They sometimes say that 25 days must have passed of the first *Chelle*, *Chelle-ye Bozorg* (the first 40 days of winter).

They fast and then they kill a cockerel, but the celebration is not as elaborate as that of Marnow. Of course the Yāresān of Tehran regard it as an obligatory fast; they celebrate Marnow as well, but for them the Qawaltās fast is more important.

They fast for three days and hold *nazrs* and rituals for three nights; they make a loaf that is called *gerde* and take it to the *jamkhāne*. Tehran has four *jamkhānes*, which are run in secret; it is very secret in Tehran! They hold a *jam* there and perform the religious rituals.

### Seasonal Festivals

Geranpayeh<sup>53</sup> describes several seasonal festivals that are celebrated by the Yāresān of Hamadan and surroundings. These include three observances in spring known as *Khedmat-e Bahārā* (Spring Service); three in Summer (*Khedmat-e Tabestānā* or Summer Service); one feast in September known as *Kharman-Tozi* (Dust of the Harvest); and two festivals known as *Āybāshi* (New Moon), celebrated on the days of the new moon before and after the Qawaltās fast. SF gives the following account of the seasonal festivals as they are celebrated in the Guran area:

Apart from the Qawaltās days they also have the seasonal feasts. They hold *nazrs* on the first day of spring and the first day of winter, for as I said every

51 As we saw earlier, SF gives the month of Ābān as the proper time for the Marnow fast.

52 The sacred mountain near Perdiwar.

53 Geranpayeh 2007:81–83.

season has one of the Great Beings of the Yāresān as its 'lord' (*sāheb*):<sup>54</sup> Spring belongs to Hazrat-e Dāwud; summer to Benyāmin; autumn to Mostafā, for he is Ezrā'il [the Angel of Death], and things slowly move towards death. Winter actually belongs to Pir Musi, but the first day of winter belongs to Hazrat-e Bohlul, they call it *Māll Balūl*.

On that day people prepare a *nazri* (ritual or traditional) stew, *āsh-e gandom* (wheat stew), they prepare that, and call it *dāne kollāne*. They pray over the stew for the first day of winter. They also prepare it for the first day of spring. They mix wheat, peas and pulses, and make *āsh-e gandom*. People hold religious ceremonies on Fridays, i.e. Thursday evenings. They go to the house of the Sayyed, take their offerings, and perform *rāz o niyāz*<sup>55</sup> with the *tanbur*. The ceremonies take place in the *jamkhāne*.

Because of the link of the days of the week with a *Sāheb* (guardian, lord),<sup>56</sup> Sunday, which is connected with Pir Dāwud, is regarded as very auspicious. People go to ask for the hand of a girl for their son on Sundays. On Sundays they should give salt to their flocks; you have to give the animals salt once a week and they used to do it on Sundays.

Then there are traditions that are based on Ahl-e Haqq religious beliefs. For instance, it is bad to have a wedding on a Saturday. They say: 'Saturday is for work, Saturday is for carrying loads, but don't bring the bride to the house on a Saturday.'

There are a lot of folkloric customs that are not really religious but are based on popular beliefs. For instance, Wednesdays belong to Mostafā (i.e. Ezrā'il), who seizes the souls [of the dying], and they believe that someone who died on a Wednesday will take four people with him, i.e. four other people will die after him. So they were afraid if anyone died on a Wednesday. This belongs to the sphere of folklore, these are not religious beliefs.

## Funerary observances

While tradition has it that funerals should be performed quietly, as they mark nothing more serious than the transition from one incarnation to another, the Shi'ite custom of having large funerals marked by emotional lamentations has now been widely adopted. Nevertheless SF maintains that, as in Zoroastrianism, excessive mourning is forbidden in Yāri. He gives the following description of the development of Yāresān funeral customs:

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<sup>54</sup> See also p. 87.

<sup>55</sup> I.e. religious ceremonies.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. above with fn. 54.

We do not put up headstones [as the Muslims do] and do not wear black [for mourning]. But now it has come to us. In Sahne<sup>57</sup> people wear black and perform the [Shi'ite] mourning rites. My father never cried when his eldest son died,<sup>58</sup> and did not wear black. He just recited religious texts. We should know what belongs to our religion and what doesn't. Our religion has nothing to do with heaven and hell. Our religion does not reward and punish, it is automatic: if you have been good you automatically go on to a higher level.

As a phrase of condolence one may say: 'May his hand not be cut off from touching his Pir's robe'<sup>59</sup> (*dasteş az dāmān-e Pīr borride naşawad*), or: 'His hand remains hidden in the robe of the Pir' (*dast be dāmān-e Pīr maxfi mānde*). This illustrates the link between Pir and Morid, which is felt to transcend the boundary of life and death.

## Other observances

### *The Circle of Dāwud*

When someone is leaving, people may invoke the protection of Dāwud by saying *kirr-e Dāwu* i.e. 'the circle of Dāwud [may protect you]'. It is worth mentioning that the circle also has particular religious significance in Yezidism.

### *Weddings*

Yāresān weddings in the Guran region are generally celebrated in much the same way as those of other Kurdish communities in the area.

### *Pilgrimages and Shrines*

Visits to the shrines dedicated to Yāri religious figures play an important role in the religious lives of the Yāresān. A shrine may be the tomb of a holy figure, such as Soltān Sahāk<sup>60</sup> or Bābā Yādegār,<sup>61</sup> or another place of religious significance such as Tutshami and the Ghoslān Spring at Sarāne, which is believed to have been miraculously created by Bābā Yādegār.

Families often hold picnics at such places and pay homage to the holy figure to whom the shrine is dedicated. On arrival many people kiss a doorpost or a threshold of the building. If the shrine contains the remains of a religious figure, believers walk around the coffin, and kiss the cloth that covers it. Such pilgrimages are gener-

57 SF forbears to mention that the same type of obsequies are now widely held in Guran also.

58 SF's elder brother was executed, reportedly because his father had refused to acknowledge publicly that the Yāresān are Muslims.

59 Lit. 'the hem of the robe'.

60 This shrine, which lies on the road from Pave to the Iraḡi border, is usually referred to as 'Soltān Sahāk'.

61 At Sarane on Mt Dalahu.



ally felt to be 'visits' to the figure to whom the shrine is dedicated; many people stay near the shrine for several days. If a Sayyed is present, a *niyāz* ceremony may be held in the vicinity of the shrine.

## Yāri Observances and Twelver Shi'ite influences

As we saw earlier, profound differences of opinion exist in the Yāresān community as to their relationship to Islam, and in particular to the Twelver Shi'a, the official creed of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The majority of Yāresān in Guran believe that theirs is the authentic form of Yāri, and that it is a religion in its own right with no roots in Islam. After describing how Islamic influences become stronger as one gets farther away from Guran, SF described the way in which observances of Shi'ite provenance are accepted by members of certain Yāresān communities, especially those whose regions of origin are remote from Guran.

All the way from Hamadan to Tehran and Erdebil you'll find Yāri villages, but they pray *namāz*<sup>62</sup> just like Muslims. You can find all sorts of Muslim customs there. You see it in Teheran too, people who wear a moustache [an emblem of Yāresān identity], but go on *hajj*,<sup>63</sup> visit *emānzādes*,<sup>64</sup> and pray *namāz*. In the Sahne region they tell people you can be Yāresān and pray *namāz* as well. As you move away from the centre you get more admixture.

People have been under terrible pressure. Even in Guran they perform *Eyd-e Qorbān*<sup>65</sup> now. We [Yāresān] don't have that! Of course we sacrifice sheep, but we do it as part of our own rituals. Still, in Gahware there is now a custom known as *Khōn Rejān* (spilling blood). At *Eyd-e Qorbān* some twenty families band together to buy a sheep. They then perform a *nazr*<sup>66</sup> ceremony in the *jamkhāne* that is called *Khōn Rejān*. So you see, nobody told them not to do it. Nobody said, 'We don't have *Eyd-e Qorbān*.' They let them do it! Now people no longer accept it if you say this doesn't belong to our religion. Another instance is *eftār*.<sup>67</sup> *Eftār*, *qorbān* and *shīwan o muye*<sup>68</sup> do not exist in our religion.

The character of religious music, which plays a key role in Yāri observance, also changes as one moves away from Guran. SF said further:

62 I.e. the Islamic *salāt* prayer.

63 The Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

64 Islamic shrines dedicated to saints or other holy figures.

65 I.e. they sacrifice an animal on the Islamic Feast of the Sacrifice.

66 I.e. a proper Yāri ritual, see above.

67 Cf. above with fn. 45.

68 The custom of weeping and wailing loudly for the dead, particularly during the funeral.

As you get farther away from Guran, the religious music becomes faster and more rhythmic. In Sahne the music is much quicker and livelier. You get many references to Ali, because they are surrounded by Shi'ites. The Pediwari *kalāms* should be recited very slowly. They call [religious sessions] *Zekr-e Ali*.<sup>69</sup> In Sahne they have a special connection with Ali, which is why they are called Ali-Elāhi.<sup>70</sup>

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69 I.e. 'sessions to remember Ali'. The term *zeker* derives from Sufi usage and means 'remembering', i.e. remembering God by repeating certain formulae, moving rhythmically and/or listening to music.

70 I.e. 'people who call Ali God', cf. above, Introduction. See also the testimony of Sayyed Khalil Ālinezhād, App. 3, Q. 38.

## Chapter Six: Religious Narratives and Sacred Texts

As was said under ‘Terminology and Transcription’, this book will adopt the terminology that is most widely used in Western academic publications. Thus, the term *kalām* will be used for a long religious poem or hymn.<sup>1</sup>

### Texts and storylines

Next to music, the sacred poetry of the Yāresān and the religious knowledge to which many of these texts refer play the most significant role in informing the religious life of the community. As in Yezidism,<sup>2</sup> the sacred lore of Yāri consists largely of myths or storylines, which can be expressed in many forms and understood on several levels. The myths are referred to in many of the group’s sacred texts, the *kalāms*, but these texts are allusive in character and cannot be understood without prior knowledge of the relevant storylines. Most community members are familiar with the ‘external’ form of the stories, i.e. the storylines of the myths and legends that play such a key role in their religion. The deeper meaning of both myths and *kalāms*, however, constitutes the community’s esoteric knowledge. It is thought to be understood only by those who are especially qualified, either because they have studied the *kalāms* in depth and are *daftardān* or ‘knowers of the sacred books’, or because they are *didedār* ‘possessing the Sight’, which means that they have acquired esoteric knowledge directly. In recent decades collections of Yāri *kalāms* were published in book form for the first time. As all these compilations tend to include variants of the same texts (see App. 5), it can be assumed that their contents represent those parts of the tradition that are currently held to be the most important.

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1 Among Gurani Yāresān the word *kalām* is sometimes associated with the songs that are performed during the *jam* ritual, which are here called *nazm* cf. above p. xiii. What is here called a *kalām* is sometimes referred to as a *daftar*, which is also used for a collection of such texts. In written collections of texts, based on manuscripts that may reflect older usage, both *daftar* and *kalām* are used to refer to a ‘hymn’ (cf. the titles in App. 5).

2 On Yezidi religious literature see Omarkhali 2017.

## The Form of the Kalāms

### Languages

Yāri *kalāms* exist in various languages, notably Literary Gurāni,<sup>3</sup> Persian, Jāfi Kurdish and Turkic (see above, pp. 31-33).

### Structure

The Perdiwari texts<sup>4</sup> typically consist of verses ascribed to speakers who were present during the *dowre* to which the text belongs. The speaker is often indicated by the formula: *X maramo* (*X* says). Often the speakers are the King (i.e. God) and His Companions, as they may have spoken at the great gathering (*jam*) that initiated a new *dowre*. The structure of the following lines from a well-known prayer<sup>5</sup> is typical of many Perdiwari texts, consisting of verses with two hemistichs:

*Soltān Saḥāk maramo*<sup>6</sup>

*Bē gāwān gāwē, bē gāwān gāwē – gāwē bē gāwān, bē gāwān gāwē*

*Tā sar naspārin kirde wa lāwē Ctā Ḥaqq našnāsin dūr na gišt bāwē*

*Har sarē nalo wa huzūr-e jam – nasanjo wa dast xalife-w xādem*

*Bē šakk aw sare wa ṭomār niyan– na roz-e hesāw wa šimār niyan*

Soltān Saḥāk says:

A cow without cowherd, a cow without cowherd – a cowherdless cow, a cow without cowherd

Until you (pl.) submit your head, your actions are incomplete – until you know the Truth, you will be far from all [that is right]

Each head that does not go to attend the *jam* – is not held by the hands of the *Khalife* and the *Khādem*

Undoubtedly those heads will not be on the List – they will not be counted on the Day of Judgement

The texts in Gurāni generally have a syllabic metre. The metre of the above text is (5+5) + (5+5) syllables. The hemistichs have end-rhyme. The first hemistich con-

3 On Literary Gurani see pp. 31–32, and Kreyenbroek and Chaman-Ara 2013.

4 On Perdiwari texts see p. 2 with fn. 4.

5 Safizāde (1996:566–568) calls the prayer ‘Soltān’s *kalām* about the jam and the *jamkhāne*’.

6 So *Diwān-e Gewre*, (Anon. 1, 2008:215). Safizāde 1996:566: *Soltān Eshāq maramo*. Safizāde calls this text *Kalām-e Soltān* and associates it with the *jam*. SF noted in the margin of PK’s copy of the *Diwān-e Gewre* that the prayer is connected to the *Sar Sepordan* ceremony, on which see above, pp. 103–105.

sists of a repeated five-syllabic phrase, and the text of the two hemistichs differs somewhat. This text thus has: 1: 5+5.a; 2: 5+5.a.<sup>7</sup>

A variant of the same text, but attributed to Dāwud, occurs in Anon 1<sup>8</sup> with the following opening verses:

*Dāwud maramo*

*Bē gāwān gāwē – gāwē bē gāwān, bē gāwān gāwē*

*Tā sar naspārī kirde wa-lāwī – tā Ḥaqq našnāsī dūr na gišt bāwī*

Dāwud says:

A cow without cowherd – a cowherdless cow, a cow without cowherd

Until you (sg.) submit your head, you are incomplete of action – Until you know the Truth you will be far from all [that is right]

Here we see an opening hemistich of only 5 syllables, which are repeated in the second hemistich, which has 5+5 syllables, as do all the following verses. Such 5-syllable opening verses are frequently found in the Perdiwari *kalāms*. The first line is thus: 1: 5.a; 2: 5+5.a. All other lines have: 1: 5+5.a; 2: 5+5.a. Although a syllabic metre of 5+5 syllables is the norm, there are many exceptions, and more research is needed to arrive at a precise definition of the metrical rules of this type of poetry.

Many longer compositions have stanzas (i.e. groups of lines that form a unit within a poem), which generally consist of two, three or four hemistichs, but in some cases have many more. The stanza is either marked by the same end-rhyme (aa; ba; ca, etc), by a rhyme pattern of aa, bb, cc, or by a combination of these. Rhyme may consist in correspondence between the final sound, or of one or more syllables. Occasionally, lines attributed to different speakers form a single unit.

## Texts and Performance

Contrary to what appears to be widely assumed, and in contrast to Yezidi practice, where the full texts of sacred hymns are recited during rituals, the *kalāms* are not, or rarely, sung in their entirety during the ritual of the *jam*. The song-like texts that are typically performed there (*nazm*)<sup>9</sup> may contain references to a *kalām* and remind the participants of a storyline that is also alluded to in the *kalāms*.

7 The code used here is: hemistich (1 or 2): number of syllables (5), rhyme (a, b). So: 1: 5+5.a refers to the first hemistich, which has a metre of 5+5 syllables and a rhyming final syllable represented by a.

8 Anon. 1, 2008:215.

9 On this usage see Hooshmandrad 2004:96–98. SF stated that the *kalāms* may be recited in their entirety at certain festivals. This seems to refer, however, to teaching sessions where the texts are recited and discussed, not to recitation during a *jam*.

This means that we have a remarkable phenomenon here: a sizeable and complex body of texts that have been preserved by a traditionally poor and partly illiterate community, not because the texts as such are needed for ritual purposes but for other reasons that were evidently considered to be of great importance. Memorising these texts is generally regarded as the province of Sayyeds. However, not all Sayyeds have a great interest in the *kalāms*, and non-Sayyeds may also study these texts if they choose.<sup>10</sup> Unlike Yezidism,<sup>11</sup> Yāri has no distinct social group whose task it is to memorise and perform the sacred texts.

Texts that are felt to belong to the Yāresān tradition are divided into three categories: *haqqāni* or ‘religious’, *majāzi* or ‘semi-religious’, and *majlesi* or ‘worldly’. AAM said:<sup>12</sup>

There are three categories of songs, *kalām-e Perdiwari* [which are *haqqāni*],<sup>13</sup> *majāzi*, and *majlesi*.

The *kalām-e Perdiwari* are purely religious. They are recited when one wishes to be in touch with higher things. Recitation of these texts is typically accompanied by the *tanbur*, and there is a typical way of singing the Perdiwari texts: it begins slowly and gradually gets more lively, finally bringing people into a spiritual state. This is performed during the *jam*, where people believe God is also present.

*Majāzi* music sounds very much like *kalām* music ... but its connection is with physical and earthly things, such as weddings, love, tribal wars and dancing. They are not connected with the soul. They are performed in a different manner from the Perdiwari music. The instruments employed are typically the *kamānche* [a string instrument] and the *shamshāl* [a flute]. They are worldly compositions with a non-religious rhythm. The *tanbur* is not normally used, although this is sometimes seen nowadays.

*Majlesi* music is for when people wish to relax and are not paying special attention to the music. It is *āwāzi* (voice-based), i.e. the main factor is the singing, not the rhythm.

Certain heroes of the Iranian heroic tradition,<sup>14</sup> such as Rostam, are regarded by the Yāresān as incarnations of the great Beings and are the subject of semi-religious (*majāzi*) Yāri texts. As SF put it:

10 Witness the case of Hājj Neʿmatollāh, on which see above, pp. 64–66..

11 On the Yezidi *Qewwals* see Kreyenbroek 1995:132–133.

12 Verbal communication, Göttingen 3.5.2011.

13 The reference appears to be to the sung texts that are here called *nazm*, which are apparently felt to represent the Perdiwari *kalāms*.

14 These heroic tales are laid down in Persian in Abu Qāsem Ferdowsi’s famous *Shāhnāme*, but an independent heroic tradition in Gurāni continued to exist in oral form in the Kurdish-speaking regions of Iran.

Some poems are religious but they are not Perdiwari. Others are *majāzi*, they are for social purposes, e.g. *Tarz-e Rostam*. It describes Rostam and such topics. When you read it, and even when we ourselves read it, there is a feeling that it belongs to the religious tradition; it is connected with it, but it is not in itself religious. Still, our belief is that Siyāwash for example, who in the *Shāhnāme* is a symbol of the fight for freedom and for the oppressed, was an incarnation of the Essence (*zāt*) or soul (*ruh*) of Bābā Yādegār. Iraj<sup>15</sup> was the same. And when we recite the love story of Shirin and Farhād it is the same thing, We believe it represents the love between Hazrat-e Soltān and Bābā Yādegār. So for that reason the Yāresān have a close connection with the *Shāhnāme*.

In the following pages, the emphasis will be on the storylines reflected by the *kalāms*, as they form the core of what most Yāresān regard as their religious knowledge. Nevertheless, figures belonging to the ‘*Shāhnāme*’ tradition are very popular indeed in many Yāresān communities. They are portrayed in a well-developed epic tradition in Literary Gurani,<sup>16</sup> as well as in the Persian *Shāhnāme*, and legends about them clearly play a role in the Yāri worldview.

## Texts and Religious Knowledge

The storylines that form a large part of Yāri religious knowledge can be expressed in many forms, from bedtime stories, *via* frequent references in Yāresān discourse and the *nazm* that are sung during the *jam*, to the formal poetry of the *kalāms*. The latter are believed to have been transmitted as they were originally composed in the distant past. AAM defined the Perdiwari *kalāms* as ‘religious poetry that has existed for a long time and to which no additions or deletions were ever made.’<sup>17</sup>

For the most part, the religious knowledge reflected by the oldest group of *kalāms*, those of Perdiwar, comprises the sacred history of the community. Many of the great Yāri myths are concerned with the life and times of holy figures during the early Periods of Yāri sacred history. Some other well-known *kalāms*, however, are not explicitly connected with a particular *dowre*, but represent some other aspect of religious knowledge. In this, the Yāri tradition is not too different from that of the Old Testament, a large part of which is concerned with the history of the People of Israel, while other texts reflect different aspects of religious life.

Although few Yāri texts have so far been studied in depth by academics and much research still remains to be done, it is probably safe to agree with SF’s state-

15 Another figure from the Iranian epic tradition.

16 See Chaman-Ara 2015.

17 Verbal communication, Göttingen, 3 5.2011.

ment<sup>18</sup> that the post-Perdiwari *kalāms* generally focus more strongly on mystical knowledge and show greater influence of Sufi thought and Shi'ite symbolism.

An account of Yāresān views on the origin and history of the compilation of Perdiwari *kalāms* (here referred to as *Daftar-e Haqiqat*), is found in the Introduction to the *Daftar-e Diwān-e Gewre-ye Perdiwari*:<sup>19</sup>

As is well known, the *Daftar-e Haqiqat* was renewed and explained during the *dowre* of Soltān Sahāk. For the fullest manifestation and the greatest of all *dowres* of *Haqiqat* was that of Soltān, because the essences of the *Haft Tan* and the *Chehel Tan* were present in their visible (*zāher*) form. The other groups, each one in their natural form and original condition, also reached perfection at Perdiwar [i.e. at the time of Soltān Sahāk]. [They are] visible mirrors, like the sun facing [us]; each one has had its own reflection [on earth] from the Beginning till the End of the world, objectively, in connection with the *jam*. In the words of the *Daftar*, the well-known groups [of Holy Beings] continued and repeated the previous *dowres* in their original state. Pir Musi, the *Daftar*-keeper of *Haqiqat*,<sup>20</sup> committed a record of this to writing with his Pen, in *bāten* and *zāher* form, in the *Daftarkhāne-ye Haqiqat* (Archive of Truth) ...

From the appearance of Soltān till the end of the *dowre* of Bābā Yādegār, perhaps, as is laid down in this *Daftar*, the Ahl-e Haqq had the *Daftar-e Haqiqat*<sup>21</sup> at their disposal in visible, written form, noble and beautiful.

Later, as a result of the appearance of a period of hardship, for a time there were no buyers and it [the *Daftar*] was passed from hand to hand secretly, until *Hazrat-e Haqq* [God] arranged for there to be the means and purveyors of teaching, and those who picked the grapes of Truth were successful in their endeavours, so that some of the treasures of the *Daftar* –valuable items and priceless texts – are now at the disposal of each individual according to their [i.e. those individuals'] subtlety and suitability to receive this grace...

The conditions of each *dowre* are set out in the *Daftar*, and the explanations are in the language of the *Daftar*.

In other words, during the Period of Soltān the *kalāms* that existed then were committed to writing by one of the *Haft Tan*, Pir-Musi, at Perdiwar. These texts were available to the early community in written form. Later, as a result of the many hardships the Yāresān had to endure, there were at most a few written copies, which were kept hidden. Through the grace of Providence, several of these texts are now

18 SF, interviews Göttingen, June 2008.

19 Anon. 1:1.

20 I.e. the Being who keeps account of aspects of Truth.

21 I.e. a copy of the collection of the sacred *kalāms*.



once more available to the faithful in writing. The brief summary of the contents of the *Daftar* implies that the work is mainly thought of as a collection of texts related to the various *dowres*. SF offers the following explanation:

It is not the case, as most people think, that the texts were all created at once. Texts were created from the time of Shāh Khoshin and Bohlul onwards, and they remained. Then Pir Musi, who is known as the Account-keeper (*daftardār*), collected all the texts in written form.

Since the Revolution things have become much better, there are lots of texts available now. Before the Revolution there were no written copies of the texts. If you wanted a copy of a text you had to go to a family who had an original copy and specialised in writing them. They were written in very beautiful handwriting. If you wanted to have a copy you had to order it and pay the scribe for writing it. There may have been *darwishes*, one or two persons, in the region who could do this, a special family. People believed that Soltān Sahāk gave them a special grace so they could do this. For instance, my father wanted to have a copy of the *Ketāb-e Perdiwar* and he went there and got it. But a copy of the Thirty-Six Poets was very expensive, my father said it would have cost him as much as several hectares of land... So it was restricted. As it was very expensive and people were illiterate anyway, this [copying of sacred texts] wasn't done very often. Only Sayyeds generally had written copies, they called them *daftar*. If people wanted to swear, they swore on those copies. Another reason for this scarcity was that there was very little paper available, whereas now, after the Revolution there are all these Xerox machines and things, so it is easier to make copies.

## Collections of Kalāms

We have no exact information as to the historical development of the textual tradition of the Yāresān, but it seems clear that the corpus of *kalāms* was traditionally subdivided into, and memorised as 'cycles' (*dowre*). These textual cycles are associated with the period (*dowre*) of a manifestation of the Divine. As was shown in Ch. 3, the difference between a 'period' of history and the 'cycle' of texts connected with it has now become blurred in the minds of most Yāresān. A cyclical literary tradition is often found in cultures where writing does not play a dominant role, but it would go too far to deduce from this that the Yāri tradition was originally a purely oral one.

A series of collections of *kalāms* have been published in the past decades. These are now widely available to Yāresān and non-Yāresān alike. It can be assumed that the cumulative effect of these publications will be that a 'canon' of key Yāri texts will emerge in the future, although no such well-defined collection of sacred texts existed previously.

The first of the publications in question was S. Safizāde (1996), *Nāme-ye Saranjām yā Kalām-e Khazāne*, which comprise a collection of texts there called *Kalām-e Khazāne* or *Saranjām*. The work includes the *kalāms* known as *Bārgah Bārgah*, *Dowre-ye Haftawāne*, *Gelim wa Kul*, *Dowre-ye Chehelan*, *Dowre-ye Ābedin*, and a collection of shorter texts, which are here called *Khorde Saranjām*.<sup>22</sup> The author mentions the existence of a number of other texts.<sup>23</sup>

This work was followed by the publication of Sayyed M. Hoseyni's (2003), *Dīwān-e Gewre*, which claims to include the entire Perdiwari tradition: 'The true *kalāms* of the Ahl-e Haqq, i.e. the *Dīwān-e Gewre*, the only written *Dīwān* belonging to the period of Soltān Sahāk...'.<sup>24</sup>

Tāheri (2007), *Saranjām* (Vol. 1), is the result of a long and painstaking comparison between different manuscripts; it comprises a greater number of texts than Hoseyni's work (see App. 5).

The *Daftar-e Dīwān-e Gewre-ye Perdiwari* (Anon. 1), and certain other collections of *kalāms* were produced locally, and are evidently intended for a more restricted, Yāresān readership. SF, who regards Perdiwari texts as far more authoritative than others, considers the *Daftar-e Dīwān-e Gewre-ye Perdiwari* as the only trustworthy written source on Perdiwari texts.

These collections, although based upon roughly the same corpus of manuscripts, are the result of independent efforts to publish the sacred texts of Yāri in a structured manner. There are significant differences regarding the sequence of the texts, and some variations as to which texts are included. Nevertheless, the commonalities exceed the differences. All this means that a body of texts is now emerging, upon whose status as authentic religious texts the community seems to be agreed.

After studying some of the publications mentioned here, SF made the following comment:

You have just shown me some of the publications, I had already seen some of them, others not. I'd seen Safizāde and Mokri's translation of *Kalām-e Dāmyāri*.<sup>25</sup> As far as the representation of the *kalāms*, they have all copied it from the manuscripts made by certain scribe families from the Gahware region, the Kāka'i family, e.g. Haqqmorād Kāka'i, and the Heydaris, who are relatives of Sayyed Nasreddin.<sup>26</sup> So the texts are all right, the problem is with the introductions, when they say that the Yāresān are really Muslims and so forth, that is wrong!

22 The term, meaning 'Little Saranjām', which does not appear to be attested elsewhere, may derive from the Zoroastrian expression *Khorde Avestā* 'Little Avesta' for a collection of prayers and shorter texts.

23 Safizāde 1996:20. For a survey of the contents of the various publications, see App. 5.

24 Hoseyni 2003:3.

25 I.e. Mokri 1967, which publishes and discusses this one text only.

26 I.e. the leader of the Gurani Yāresān community.

## The Perdiwari Kalāms

Perdiwari texts that are referred to in all or most of the works published to date are:<sup>27</sup> *Dowre-ye Bābā Khoshin*; *Dowre-ye Bābā Nā'us*; *Dowre-ye Bohlul*; *Dowre-ye Bābā Jalil*; *Bābā Sarhang*; *Dowre-ye Soltān Sahāk*; *Kalām-e Ābedin*; *Kalām-e Ahmad*; *Daftar-e Dāmyāri*; *Šandarwi maramo (Kelīm wa Duš)*; *Bārgah Bārgah*; *Dowre-ye Cheltan*; *Kamākanān*; *Zolāl Zolāl*.

### The contents of the Perdiwari Kalāms

SF summarised his understanding of the contents of the oldest *kalām* texts in the following statement: 'The Perdiwari texts are mostly concerned with who was who in previous incarnations.' This confirms that the corpus of Perdiwari *kalāms* is felt to consist mainly of texts that allude to periods of history (cf. Ch. 3). There are a number of compositions, however, that deal mainly with other themes.

#### *The Chehel Tan*

Some texts speak of a *dowre* of the *Chehel Tan* or Forty Persons,<sup>28</sup> but the word *dowre* is to be understood here as a cycle or group of poems, rather than a distinct period of mythical history. SF said:

We have two groups of Forty Person. At the time of Soltān, they consisted of thirty-six humans and four angels. We have this number symbolism in the Yāri religion: four, seven, forty... These beings appeared during several *dowres*. First during the *dowre-ye Bayāwbas*, i.e. the period of the Covenant (*ahd o peymān*). There are two periods: one before *Bayāwbas*, when only God and the Four Angels existed, and one after *Bayāwbas*. Another incarnation of the *Chehel Tan* was during the stage of *Haqiqat*, at the time of Soltān, in the Hawraman region. When they appeared they spoke about their previous incarnations, 'I was this, I was that, etc.' Even, 'I was Shāh Jamshid, I was Key Kāwus...'<sup>29</sup>

#### *Gelim wa Kul*

Several of the great myths belong to the period of Soltān, notably a myth usually referred to as *Gelim wa Kul* (the one with a rug on his shoulder). SF described the contents of the myth as follows:

It is about the time when Benyāmin had gone to Egypt. Dāwud, Benyāmin and Pir Musi [had gone there]. When he [Benyāmin] wanted to return, he was with a merchant. In typical Yāresān fashion, he did not make himself known.

27 See also App. 5.

28 E.g. Anon. 1 2008:2.

29 I.e. heroic figures from the epic tradition cf. above, p. 77 with fn. 15.

Benyāmin had thrown a cheap rug (*gelim*) over himself and travelled on the boat like a poor man. There was a storm on the Nile and the boat was very full. They nearly drowned. There was an old belief that misfortunes were usually the fault of someone whose ‘eye was salty’ [i.e. who brought misfortune]. They thought it was all the fault of this beggar dressed in a rug. They wanted to throw Benyāmin overboard.

Someone who knew the truth, one of the Yārān, stood up and said that they should not do this, because he was a holy man and they should ask him to pray for help. They accepted. Benyāmin said he would pray. Benyamin then prayed. He called upon Soltān and Soltān sent *Dāwud-e kew-sawār*, ‘Dāwud, the rider of the dark-blue horse’. Soltān told Dāwud to save Benyāmin...

When they were saved they wanted to reward Dāwud, to give him gold and silver. Dāwud refused, saying, ‘I came at the request of Soltān’. At that time they wore kerchiefs on their head. So Dāwud comes to Soltān. He says that all has gone well, and that he has not accepted any money. Soltān says, ‘You’re lying. Look into your kerchief.’ It turned out that one *do-shāhi* coin<sup>30</sup> had become stuck in the folds of the kerchief. Soltān said, ‘We shall offer this coin as a *nazr*, so that whenever an Ahl-e Haqq is in trouble he shall offer a *do-shāhi* coin, and he will receive help.’ They asked who the rider was, and *Gelim wa Kul* said, ‘that was Dāwud, he is one of the two and five [the *Haft Tan*].’

It is interesting to note that, while it is unclear why members of the entourage of Soltān Sahāk would have gone to Egypt, the storyline is reminiscent of one that forms part of the legend of Hasan-e Sabbāh, the ‘Old Man of the Mountain’, who was the leader of the ‘Assassins’, the Isma’ili community in the eastern Islamic regions. An Isma’ili source quoted in Rashid al-Din Fazlo’llāh’s (d. 1318 CE) *Jāme’ al-Tawārikh* describes how a ship in which Hasan travelled on his way from Cairo to Morocco ran into a huge storm that damaged the ship so that all other passengers were very much afraid. Hasan, however, remained calm because the Fatimid al-Mostanser had predicted the storm and told him he would be safe.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Kalām-e Zolāl Zolāl*

This text deals with the interactions between Bābā Yādegār and Shāh Ebrāhim.

#### *Kalām-e Kalle Zarde*

This *kalām* alludes to the sacrifice of a yellow gazelle, which was presumably a repetition of the Primeval Sacrifice. Here it is said to have been Bābā Yādegār who sacrificed the animal.

30 A small coin, which is still offered in the *jam* ceremony.

31 Dabir-Siyāqi 1958:7–8.

*Kalām-e Ābedin Jāf*

Ābedin Jāf was once an opponent of Soltān, but later became an ardent follower. SF said:

Another subject we need to understand is the story of Hazrat-e Ābedin Jāf. Jāf belonged to a prominent Sunni family who came to the Hawraman region, and the tradition says that he had a very bad relationship with Soltān Sahāk. He had played many dirty tricks on Soltān Sahāk, like calling him an unbeliever, throwing thorns and filth at him – they had many ways to persecute him. But Soltān never said anything bad to them. Whenever he came [to Soltān Sahāk], Soltān said, ‘Come, let us go somewhere and solve this.’ When it was suggested to Soltān that he should have Ābedin killed, he said, ‘No, he belongs to us! Some day he will come to us.’ It took a long time, you see, we have this concept of *didedār*. Those who have not yet come to us, they say that their [spiritual] eye has not opened yet...

Then after long discussions and a great many favours by Soltān, Hazrat-e Ābedin found the faith. Of course some of our leaders in Guran believe that this was not Ābedin’s doing, but that it was due to a miracle of Hazrat-e Soltān, that Soltān sent Hazrat-e Pir Musi... First he sent Dāwud, then he sent Benyāmin, and then finally he sent Hazrat-e Pir Musi, who set his [Ābedin’s] soul on fire, who made him see clearly, awakened him. They believe that Hazrat-e Haqq can convert anyone he wants, any noble Christian or Muslim he could bring into the Yāresān fold. That is what they believe in Guran, all these stories have certain points in common, but they also differ on some points. In Guran they believe that, when Ābedin was always provoking Soltān, Soltān sent Pir Musi to him the way you send a young trainee falcon after a prey. He said, ‘So you keep calling me names, Ābedin. How far do you think you can resist me?’ He sent Pir Musi after him – of course in the *bāten* sphere, not the *zāher* one, as *zāt*. That is why they say that Hazrat-e Ābedin is *Pir-e Musi-mehmān*.<sup>32</sup> So Ābedin’s companions were waiting for him, and he didn’t come. In the morning they went to look for him and found him, very happy and singing *kalāms*. So they took him to Hazrat-e Soltān. Soltān asked, ‘What has happened to you, Ābedin?’ Of course Soltān knew that he had changed. In Gurani this process of awakening is called *cāmeš biyawa*, ‘his eye has become awake’; he had become *didedār*, his inner eye had become sighted. So he said to Ābedin ‘What happened to you?’ We have the *kalām* of Ābedin [SF sings], where he says that his eye has become sighted. Soltān did not boast of course, he didn’t say, ‘I told you so, are you ashamed now?’ And Ābedin said, ‘I’ve realised that you are God! And Soltān said, ‘Ābedin, a God who had a father, a God who had a mother, a God who listened to lullabies, how can that be?’ And Ābedin answered him in his own

32 On the concept of having a spiritual Being as a *mehmān* see above, p. 77.

language, in Jāfi, saying, ‘If you’d had a hundred fathers and a hundred mothers, and listened to a hundred lullabies, I still believe that you are God!’ He said, ‘I shan’t go to the mosque again.’ He had become a follower of Hazrat-e Soltān.

### *Dāmyāri*

The *Kalām* of *Dāmyāri* probably belongs to the Period of Soltān. SF described the contents as follows.

We have two groups, the *Haft Tan* and the *Haftawāne*. They came into the world at the time of Soltān and [in this text] they testify what and who they had been in previous incarnations. The difference between these great figures and ourselves is that they know who they have been before and we don’t.

This *kalām* of *Dāmyār* describes how Hazrat-e Haqq has set his trap. Hazrat-e Haqq says, ‘During the period of *Shari’at*, I set my trap and I came [into the world] in the form of Hazrat-e Mohammad, or in the form of Zarathustra, or some others.’ So this *kalām-e Dāmyāri* is a small part of the *Perdiwari Daftar*.

One of the Sacred Texts of the Yezidis resembles this *kalām* in that it describes how the protagonist set traps for the ‘Falcon’, i.e. a manifestation of the Divine.<sup>33</sup>

### *Kalām-e Āli Qalandar*

On this figure see above, p. 39.

### *Bārgah Bārgah*

Although this text does not appear to be associated with any particular *dowre*, it is generally regarded as part of the *Perdiwari Kalāms*. SF said:

*Bārgah* means ‘place’. When it gets hot, people move to the summer pastures, they have their *bārgah* there. It is about the different periods of the appearance of our religion. For instance, during the period of *Shari’at* God also appeared in the form of Christ. Under Soltān our religion reached the stage of *Haqiqat*. Before that it went through other stages. Here they [the protagonists of this *kalām*] bear witness. During the different periods they came in different guises, in the context of various religions. Even the phase of idol temples belongs to God, it is also a *bārgah*, one of the stages of the manifestation of God. An idol is not just a stone, people worship the Divine in it.

<sup>33</sup> See Kreyenbroek 2010a.

*Dowre-ye Seykhāmush*<sup>34</sup>.

SF said:

This text largely consists of advice and guidance. Khāmush is a *muchyār*, a counsellor, offering advice like, for instance, ‘When you see someone who is evil, stay away from them.’ In our religion we don’t have *Nahy ‘an al-Munkar* [the Islamic obligation to make someone desist from a forbidden act]. We cannot tell someone not to do something, we can only distance ourselves. Soltān will be kind to anyone who distances himself from evil. We don’t believe that advice has any effect. Every individual must take their own decisions.

### Non-Perdiwari Kalāms

SF explained the differences between the Perdiwari and post-Perdiwari texts as follows:

Later, after the period of Perdiwar, there were new texts. The Thirty-Six Poets and others. Their language is much simpler than that of Perdiwari texts. [The contents too show differences:] in the works of Sheikh Amir, for instance there are references to heaven and hell. In one of our texts it says, ‘We have nothing to do with heaven or hell, the important thing is that You are with us.’ Otherwise it is like rewarding a child with a piece of chocolate. If one is looking for reward it is the wrong motive.

Widely known non-Perdiwari texts are:<sup>35</sup> *Daftar-e Sheykh Amir* (which is very popular);<sup>36</sup> *Daftar-e Khān Almās*; *Daftar-e Ābedin Jāf*;<sup>37</sup> *Daftar-e Ilbegi*; the *Daftar* of *Qushchioghli* and *Daftars* of other members of the group of ‘Twenty-Four Poets’, in Turkic;<sup>38</sup> *Daftar-e Zu’l-Feqār*; the *Daftar* of the Thirty-Six Poets of the Period of Sayyed Brāke. Among these the *Daftar* of Nowruz is particularly popular and well-known.

*Sayyed Brāke and other later Dowres*

On this subject, SF said:

We have had a lot of people with poetic talents, who either composed religious texts or *Shāhnāme* texts. Sayyed Brāke had thirty-six poets. The *zāt* of God became manifest in Sayyed Brāke, and he inspired the Thirty-Six. They were inspired by the *zāt* that was incarnated in Sayyed Brāke; they said that it wasn’t they who wrote the texts, it came to them through inspiration.

34 This text is not included in most collections of Perdiwari *kalāms*, see App. 5.

35 Hooshmandrad 2004:91–92.

36 Verbal communication by AAM, Göttingen, 2.5.2011.

37 As opposed to the *kalām* of Ābedin Jāf, see above.

38 Hooshmandrad 2004:91–92. On the Turkic tradition see Geranpayeh 2007.

There was also Darwish Qoli – a good man, but not inspired like the Thirty-Six; he did not have the *zāt*. Such poets explained the same things as the Pediwari texts, but much more simply. Sheykh Amir is much easier to understand than the Perdiwari texts. He clearly explains the teachings about reincarnation, while you wouldn't understand this from the Perdiwari texts [which merely allude to reincarnation]. In the Pediwari texts you need to know the story, you cannot learn it from the text, you cannot understand the text unless you already know!

The *dowre* of Sayyed Brāke can be divided into several *dowres* [cycles of texts], such as the *Kalām-e Warzāwar* and *Asrār-e Yāri*. People believe that all secrets were revealed at the time of Soltān, but in a mysterious, cryptic way. Therefore the Thirty-Six Poets expressed the secrets anew. The best of these was Nowruz-e Surāni.

They call this [i.e. such collections of texts] a *Daftar* [lit. 'notebook'] because most of these people had much knowledge but they were illiterate. They used to bring blank writing books and use the services of a scribe.

Apart from the Thirty-Six Poets there are other texts, such as that of Khān Almās, who could foresee the future. He belonged to the *dowre* of Khān Ātash, who is also known as Ātashbegi. Ilbegi Jāf could also predict the future.<sup>39</sup> He was a powerful Sunni, and traversed all the stages and became a Yāresān *darwish* (see above). He could predict what was to be. He talked about airplanes. He said that girls would become shameless, and that men and women would marry without their parents' permission.

We believe that the Thirty-Six Poets, Khān Almās and Ilbegi Jāf were inspired by Divine Knowledge. They themselves said it did not come from them.

## The role of the kalāms in religious life

In a discussion on this subject, SF gave the following account of the way in which the *kalāms* are used in the religious life of the community.

We have two categories of texts, religious (*haqqāni*) and semi-religious (*majāzi*). The religious texts can be divided into Perdiwari and non-Perdiwari texts. Those *kalāms* are both religious; Perdiwari texts should be recited to-

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<sup>39</sup> On these predictions, which include that of a 'horse of iron' or train, a revolution, the emancipation of women, and a major war, see Safizāde 1990 and Zahedi Moghaddam 2019. Another poet who foresaw the future was Darwish Ojāq Kalhori.



gether with other Perdiwari texts... In religious ceremonies, where up to twenty religious melodies may be sung, the first are always Perdiwari.<sup>40</sup>

They use these texts in two different ways. One is that they recite them during the *jam*, the other is that each Yāresān must know all the different *dowres*, before or after Perdiwar. This [Shāh Khoshin] is one of the early periods, but they must come and learn it, for it is referred to in later texts. Here it says that Hazrat-e Shāh Khoshin is God. [Recites:] ‘I am God and no one knows it.’<sup>41</sup> When [the *kalāmkhwān*] recites this, he explains that Shāh Khoshin said that he was God and no one believed him. [Recites.] Then ([he people] said, ‘If this is so, let Mount Yāftekuh speak’. And Mount Yāftekuh spoke, and said that it was really so. In later Yāresān periods, this notion that man can indeed become divine is repeatedly alluded to, so in order to understand later texts you must know this philosophy.

Q. Now you said that there are some religious occasions when these texts are recited in their entirety. Which occasions are those?

A. Well, you know that Yāri religious ceremonies are collective, not individual. On Friday eve, i.e. Thursday evening, they gather at the *jamkhāne* or in the house of the Sayyed. Seven people, at least seven people have to be there; they bring the *tanbur* and they perform the religious ceremony [*jam*]. These ceremonies take place every week. But the true occasion for performing and really concentrating on these texts is the Fast of Khāwankār, or Marnow. The texts are also recited on other occasions, but especially during the Fast of Khāwankār.

Those who know Gurani can understand what is being said. But to understand the *kalām* it is not enough just to know Gurani. You need to know the history and geography of the region too. E.g. the location of Mount Yāftekuh; you must know the geography of the Hawraman regions of Iran and Iraq. That is why they say that it is secret, the secret is that there is a code you must know. Say someone knows Gurani well, when he hears those texts he says, ‘It is poetry, it is beautiful’, but he misses most of the point. What he hears is only the outside (*zāher*). In reality there is a philosophy, and if people are not familiar with the philosophy, they won’t understand he meaning.

Interesting though this description is, lay people’s visits to their Sayyeds during the annual fast of Marnow are hardly sufficient to account for the community’s common familiarity with the contents of the texts and their religious implications. Given the custom that Sayyeds should pay regular visits to their Morids, who in turn may visit their Sayyed whenever they need advice, it seems likely that Yāresān of all groups

40 I.e. *nazms* derived from those *kalāms*.

41 A passage from the *Dowre-ye Shāh Khoshin*.

were traditionally regularly exposed to Sayyeds' explanations of religious matters and probably to their recitation of relevant texts. S. Hosseini<sup>42</sup> states that, 'After the children have grown up... they can participate in Yārsāni Kalām classes. In these classes elders and religion experts read and interpret the Kalām and then lead a discussion with the adolescents.' Whilst most Yāresān are presumably familiar with the outlines of the great Yāri myths and of religious history because they heard these narratives in various forms, the Sayyeds function as the channels through which the deeper religious knowledge and wisdom that are contained in the *kalāms* are made accessible to the community at large.

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42 Hosseini 2017:29.

## APPENDIX 1: Extracts from the ‘Exegesis’ of Sayyed Wali

Sayyed Wali Hosseini (1910–1998) was a greatly respected and very learned leader of the Yāresān of Guran. He was a famous *tanbur*-player and an authority on the *kalāms*. Towards the end of his life he wrote a detailed exposé of his views on religious questions, entitled *Tafsir* (Exegesis).

A number of pages of the manuscript of this work are now in the hands of his son, Sayyed Fereidun Hosseini. Sayyed Fereidun kindly allowed us to publish this valuable document, which reflects the religious knowledge and learning of a traditional religious leader of the Yāresān.

It was decided to publish in translation those parts of the manuscript that were likely to be of interest to the reader. Many references to texts from various *kalāms* and other poems have been omitted, as have a few illegible and repetitive passages. Omissions are marked with three dots. Headings that are not found in the manuscript but are thought to be helpful are given in square brackets.

### [On Creation]

By divine command the spiritual bodies were introduced to the mundane worlds, and prepared to come to the world. The four angels who were mentioned earlier belong to these Six Beings.<sup>1</sup> From the beginning of the creation of this world until now, 100,000 years have passed...

Except for God no one was present at its beginning. Each of the spiritual groups has its own status and rank... The orbits of the planets, the movement of the spheres, unusual phenomena, the education of the beings, deeds of beneficence, truthfulness and purity – those are their responsibilities.

Four of those six Persons are lords and originators of the four elements, i.e. earth, wind, water and fire. After the creation of the World of Reality, the first human is so constituted. As to the aforementioned four persons:

*One brought Earth and one brought Wind, one was made the master of the measure of Water*

*One of them brought an atom of Fire into being, those four elements entered....*

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<sup>1</sup> The Six Beings who, together with God himself, form the *Haft Tan* or Seven Beings. Other learned Yāresān believe there were Seven Beings besides God.

He combined accidental and physical qualities and created a being.

### [The Holy Beings]

Another (group of) Seven Beings, who were brought forth from darkness and belong to anger and evil and deeds of wickedness, and move and act against the side of the Light, have been and are perpetrators of obscene acts and even of murder of the Men of God (*Haqq*).<sup>2</sup>

The six spiritual persons together with God (*Haqq*) himself are known as Seven Bodies (*Haft Tan*). Thus, the two Heptads were constituted....

The side of darkness moves against the side of light. Both are victorious and defeated, sometimes one [is victorious] over the other, and sometimes the other way round. On the Last Day the side of darkness will receive its recompense and be destroyed....

### [The Creation of Adam]

As was shown earlier, the first human, and the first physical body that was created, may have been the physical Adam, who is known to have been the first physical creation. However, there are few statements about the date of the creation of the physical [world]. In any case, an Adam was certainly created and he existed. It will be argued below that [the stories about] Satan's misleading Adam, and Satan's refusal to obey God's Command are baseless fantasies, for Malak Tāwus is of Light, and he is an angel who is close to God's court.

In themselves, Adam's earthy constitution and physical form possess no light, except that, according to what is needed, occasionally the Essence has moved into it to enlighten it; if there is no enlightenment, it is [merely] an earthy form, like a<sup>3</sup> coffin.

Malak Tāwus consists of light, he is obedient and devoted to God, he is pure and without sin, he is above... and free of any bad actions. The actions they attribute to him are developments that result from the side of darkness. Therefore they have perceived him [as being] in darkness, and regarded him in a false manner.

In the phase of *Shari'at*, Malak Tāwus is given the name of Sheytān, In *Haqīqat* he is called Dāwud....

After the creation of the physical properties, God made the physical body manifest in Man with all spiritual attachments....

Khawāja says:

*He wished to see His own face in the world: He pitched his tent [i.e. came to dwell] in the flesh and blood [lit. water and mud] of Adam...*

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2 The reference is to the *Haftawāne*.

3 Lit. 'and a coffin'.

The first stage was that of the Essence, and the Particles of both aspects of the being of Adam, and the physical attributes. After Adam, there has been a Manifestation in every epoch in one form, in a number of ways.

Shams says:

*Every moment that Friend came up with a different garment, at times he was young and [at other times] old.*

## [The History of Religions]

Sometimes secretly, sometimes openly they have manifested themselves in the religions of the world. In all periods of Manifestation, among each [religious] group – idol-worshippers, Cow-worshippers, Zoroastrians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, *Haqiqat*, *Shari'at*, etc. – Prophets and Saints have brought about a manifestation of the Law and the Customs appointed for each one, for each in turn, in a number of ways. ...

After this, the *Daftar* gives information about all the other periods. In all religions of the world God's attention [to the world] and the manifestation of the Essence have been mentioned, and in each one He has become manifest. The *Daftar* explains these things very well, it expounds [concepts] such as reincarnation, transmigration, wandering and movement [of souls]. The Prophets who are 'bound to obey God's Will' [in Islam: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Mohammad], from Noah up to Moses and the Children of Israel [lived] in the Western lands and Jerusalem, and in the Iranian lands Zarathustra and several figures who had their [own] epochs and have all founded religions, have become manifest in Iran. They all have two natures<sup>4</sup> but their actions and their precepts clearly establish which side they were on. Secretly or openly God has been aware of all, each one has fulfilled his own essential destiny as one can understand from the Commandments of Moses and the Injunctions of Jesus. Their words, actions and deeds were all for the sake of truth and righteousness, creating spirituality and physical purity, and for the common good. Truly they have spent the time of their stewardship aiming to satisfy God. The Prophets of the Zoroastrian faith, who were the authors and revealers<sup>5</sup> of religious principles, founders of the religion and stewards of the epoch in which they were manifest, belong to the group [of humans] that possesses the Essence (*hey'at-e zāti*). Their commandments and words distinguished clearly between the two sides and [their influence on] the actions of each one. In the outer world [there are] their very words and explanations in the Avesta, the Book of the Zoroastrians, and on the esoteric level it is explained well and precisely by the *Daftar-e Haqiqat*. Besides the Lords of Commandments and founders of religions who are known by the epoch of their manifes-

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4 Lit. 'sides'.

5 Lit. 'the origin and root'.

tation [i.e. because an epoch is named for them], there have been other good men in those religious groups [i.e. during those *dowres*], such as kings, heroes and righteous people and able persons, from Hushang down to Jāmāsp. One can say that they have been among the righteous of the world and the just of the earth. The *Daftar-e Haqīqat* discusses them in detail.

### [The Dowres]

During each *dowre* of Manifestation, God's attention and protection – like the rays of the sun which shine on all creatures indiscriminately and reveal the place where all things belong according to the essence of their nature<sup>6</sup> – similarly the magnificent rays of the Sun of Truth have descended to earth and bestowed their attention on all. In this way one can discern about all religions what standing and level they have, and what the nature of each one is.

According to the beliefs of the Ahl-e Haqq, the Truth of Yāri and the *Shari'a* of Mohammad are two systems and phenomena that are complete in themselves [i.e. independent of one another].

As to Truth, it was established and accepted in the world of atoms, before creation [through] *Bayāwbās* and the Conditions (*šart*).<sup>7</sup> This will be explained fully in the appropriate place.

Then, as to the *Shari'a* of Mohammad, [i.e.] the appearance of the Prophet among the Arabs [and] his greatness and power are well known. The way in which the *Daftar* perceives this will be discussed later. The *Shari'a* and the formation of the religion of Islam reached a state of perfection in accordance with the essence of Mohammad. The principles and the established religious customs were revealed through the nature<sup>8</sup> of Mohammad.

Mortazā Ali,<sup>9</sup> whom the Ahl-e Haqq recognise as having the Essence (*zāt*) of *Haqq*, has [worked] perfectly for the spreading of a fully developed Islam. As was shown earlier, he proceeded with the utmost seriousness to spread and establish the religion of Islam.

God has been manifest and present in all religions. He has changed and moved the epochs of the world step by step, epoch by epoch, and incarnation by incarnation. The common people, collectively and individually, are also always in a state of change through the transmigration of the soul, from stage to stage until the end...

6 The meaning of the text is not clear. The text contains some letters (*šw nm'*) that cannot be interpreted with certainty, and the grammar of the sentence appears to be more complex than is usual in this text.

7 See above, p. 58 with fn. 59.

8 Lit. 'side'.

9 I.e. Ali, the Prophet Mohammad's son-in-law. In Islamic sources the name Mostafā is normally used for Mohammad, Ali being referred to as Mortazā.

The above exposition was merely given in order to make the matter clear and [for people to] become familiar with it. Nevertheless, intelligent people who have understanding will understand the beliefs of the Ahl-e Haqq.

### [Manifestations]

It was mentioned earlier that the Lord Haqq existed in the [pristine] state of Unity and in the location of the Pearl. As has been shown, he became manifest in order to become known by the esteemed readers. The names of the *Haft Tan* in the world of Atoms and of the Kingdom are given below for the period when *Ramz* [the Secret, a reference to *Ramzbār*] and *Rezā* had not become separate from God and were comprised in God's Essence; together with God himself they were three [sic] beloved persons.<sup>10</sup>

- Jebrā'il was a manifestation of Benyāmin
- Mikā'il was a manifestation of Dāwud
- Esrāfil was a manifestation of Pir-e Mūsi
- Ezrā'il was a manifestation of Mostafā.

The names of the *Haftawāne*, as they were commonly known in the Period of Soltān are: 1 Sayyed Mohammad;<sup>11</sup> 2 Sayyed Bu 'l-Wafā; 3 Ebrāhim; 4 Mostafā; 5 Sheykh Shahāb al-Din; 6 Sheykh Habib Shāh; 7 Hajji Bāweysi.

The Mostafā who is mentioned among the *Haft Tan* is a manifestation of Ezrā'il and during the period of Ali, *Zu'l-Feqār* [Ali's legendary sword] was in the hand of Ali. The Mostafā who is mentioned among the *Haftawāne* belongs to the *Haftawāne*...

The explanation of the genesis of the *Haft Tan* in essence, and the way they were equipped with the three aspects (*dāne*) that were mentioned earlier: in a physical abode; in human form; in the existence of Adam. With all the spiritual and sinister (*zolmāni*) yearnings they were inside their first abode. As there was no one in existence but Adam, and the only two-sided abode was the dwelling [i.e. physical being] of Adam, there is no other explanation, for [there was only] one existence and one incarnation. They all became indwelling through the existence of Adam and in the form of Adam. The children of Adam were Hābil and Qābil, as is explained below.

### *The Period of Noah*

Noah himself was Benyāmin, his master shipbuilder was Dawud, no other names are recorded for this period, but this Ark has been likened to the world.

<sup>10</sup> See above, p. 85 with fnn. 62, 63, 64.

<sup>11</sup> I.e. Sayyed Mohammad Gewre-Sewar, see also p. 87 with fn. 77, p.142 with fn. 2.

*Hazrat-e<sup>12</sup> Ebrāhim*

Ebrāhim himself was Shāh Ebrāhim. His son Esmā'il was Yādegār. No others existed in this period but in accounts of Esmā'il's sacrifice, Benyāmin, Dawud and Ramzbār are mentioned.

*Hazrat-e Musi*

Musi himself was Dāwud. In the presence of Haqq, at that specific time, he has displayed his noble features [i.e. those of that incarnation]: Musi had the White Hand and the stick, as is recorded in the *Daftar*. The light and brilliance that were in his hand were Benyāmin. His stick was Mostafā. He had conversations with *Haqq*. In the period of Pir Musi there is no mention of the presence of the rest of the *Haft Tan*, except that Sheykh Amir ... [speaks of] *axi yān*, which refers to the rest of the *Haft Tan*, who secretly accompanied Musi at the time of prayer.

*Hazrat-e Soleymān*

Soleymān himself was Dāwud; his Crown [was] Soltān; his signet ring Benyāmin; ...of Soleymān, Belqis [the Queen of Sheba] Ramzbar, as is explained below...

*Hazrat-e Isā*

Jesus himself was Benyāmin; apart from Jesus none of the *Haft Tan* and the rest are mentioned.

*[Prominent Iranian figures]*

On the page about Zarathustra, which offers a full account of him, Hushang, the originator of the *Gabr* [Zoroastrian] religion, is famous and renowned. In the books on Iranian history, Ferdowsi quotes Khosrow Parwiz as saying, 'I am not ashamed of the ancient religion; there is none better in the world than Hushang.' ... [About] Jamshid and Fereydun who are among those who spread the Zoroastrian religion, as is explained below, Yādegār says: ... King Cyrus was one of the Achaemenian Kings'.

**[Stages]**

Names that were famous in the stages of *Shari'at* and *Haqiqat* are the following:

*Haqiqat*: 1 Soltan Sahak; 2 Ramzbār; 3 Yādegār; 4 Dāwud; 5 Benyāmin; 6 Pir Musi; 7 Mostafā.

*Shari'at*: 1 Ali; 2 Fāṭeme; 3. Hoseyn; 4 \*Qanbar;<sup>13</sup> 5 Salmān-e Fārsi; 6 Noseyr; 7 *Zu'l-Feqār*.

<sup>12</sup> *Hazrat* is a title of respect for prophets and eminent religious leaders.

<sup>13</sup> Text: *Qnr*. Qanbar was the servant of and close companion of Ali.



*Tariqat*: 1 Shāh Khoshin; 2 Mirzād; 3. Bābā Tāher-e Hamadāni; 4 Cnwy[?]; 5 Kākā Riyā; 6 Shahriyār; 7 Jalāle.

*Ma'refat*: 1 Shāh Fazl; 2 Eyne; 3 Barre (the lamb); 4 Nasimi; 5 Mansur; 6 Zekriyā; 7 Tork.

[*Haftawāne*]

The names of the *Haftawāne* at the *Haqiqat* stage have already been noted. During the *Shari'at* stage they are as follows: 1 Sayyed Mohammad Gewre-Sewar,<sup>14</sup> was the Prophet Mohammad; 2 Shāh Ebrāhim was Imām Hasan. The rest of the *Haftawāne* were followers of the above-mentioned two figures.

The data on the above-mentioned names will all be given in [the passage on] their own stage and *dun* (incarnation).

[**The Period of Shari'at**]

The Period of *Shari'at* and its details are recorded in the Perdiwar [texts] as follows... Details of periods before this are given in the *Daftar*. There is also some documentation of the *Haqiqat* stage. In outer reality the first period in which the name of *Haqiqat* was current and the appearance of Ahl-e Haqq is attested, was the Period of Shāh Khoshin. It is true that he was a wandering *darwish* and belonged to the period of *Tariqat*, but the foundation of his behaviour was *Haqiqat*. His appearance took place in a way that will be explained. We do not have a record of the date of his birth and appearance in the narrative tradition... At the time when Shāh Khoshin himself had gone to Ban-e Zarde, which is two *farsang*<sup>15</sup> to the west of Sarpol-e Zahab, it is said: 'Oh *Pir-e morde* (Dead Pir), [you] who have been dead 360 years'. The events of *Pir-e Morde* took place when the Arabs attacked Iran; at the time of the Caliphate of Omar, his killing took place at Ban-e Zarde. Therefore, from the time of the Caliphate or the Death of the Lord [i.e. Omar's death in 644 CE, or Mohammad's death in 632 CE] till the appearance of Shāh Khoshin three hundred years had passed. His appearance took place as follows. He was a grandson of Mirzā Amāne through his mother. Mirzā Amāne was the chieftain of part of Lorestan. Shāh Khoshin had a long life and he behaved like a *darwish*, without restraint. During his wanderings with a bunch of dropouts with various musical instruments, he used to chant religious *zeks*. He did this until the end of his life.

[**Three more Periods**]

One, Baba Nā'us has spent his entire life behaving like a madman and without restraint. He is known as the Mad Fool.<sup>16</sup>

14 Cf. above, fn. 11.

15 A *farsang* approximately equals 5.4 kilometers.

16 This is usually said about Bohlul.

Another one was Baba Jalil, the third Bābā Sarhang. They both behaved without restraint, like *derwishes*. No one knew the worlds of *Haqiqat*, nor their [i.e. the early leaders'] beliefs. Some people were on that Path secretly, and people did not know it. Until the time of Soltān the realities of *Haqiqat* were secret and hidden. Apart from themselves not a single person was aware of their beliefs. Outwardly the appearance of the religion of Truth began at the time of the 'outward' (*zāher*) Soltān. Soltān Sahāk's was the most complete and the greatest of the periods of *Haqiqat*, although before it, in the World of Atoms steps had been taken towards the Command of *Bayābas* and *sar sepordan* ....

The first period in which the Law on which the Religion is based, and [also] *Bayābas*, were instituted, was the Period of Soltān Sahāk. The Perdiwari Period is the origin of all aspects of the purity of the Ocean of Truth (*Haqiqat*). It is the supreme mirror and reflector of the Whole, and the Parts of Good and Evil. The activity and the fundamental nature of each group is reflected and shown in that Mirror. The *Haft Tan* and the *Chehel Tan* were present with their pure attributes...

Full knowledge of all previous periods and incarnations of *Haqiqat*, as testified by the Word, are connected nominally and officially with the period of Soltān. The fame of each group lies in the knowledge of past and future periods...

The Words of the Kings, and the King of Words [i.e. the *Daftar*], the *Daftar* of the Heydari lineage in particular, has preserved the Perdiwari Period [i.e. retains the relevant knowledge] in the sense that it shows it in detail.

The appearance of Soltān took place as follows. Bābā Sarhang, whose period was the preceding one, is mentioned briefly. During his own period he said, 'I shall appear in the shape of Sahāk'. Three people, named Dāwud, Benyāmin and Pir Musi, unaware of each other, each from his own direction, came to a high place, to a spring located on Mt Shahu in the Hawraman region. Their eye of [mystical] sight opened, and they recognised each other. These three figures are known as the Three Bodies (*Hrē Tan*), they belong to the *Haft Tan*, who have been discussed earlier. It is said that, according to the word and the promise that had been given in the *dun* (incarnation) of Bābā Sarhang, Soltān had to appear in Perdiwar.

## APPENDIX 2: Views from Iraqi communities

This Appendix intends to throw some light on the views on religion held by communities in Iraq. The first part is a translation of a Persian summary by PM of an interview she held on 7.12.2009 with Sayyed Khalil Āghābāb Kāka’i, an educated member of the Kāka’i community, whose views are probably representative, to some extent, of the ideas held by many Kāka’is. The second part is a summary of statements made by a member of the small ‘Perdiwari’ community (on which see Ch. 3) during an interview with PM and PK in the village of Hawar on 21.11.2009.

### Interview with Sayyed Khalil Āghābāb Kāka’i, Iraqi Kurdistan

Sayyed Khalil graduated from Agricultural College in Baghdad. At the time of the interview he was a member of the Municipal Council of Khaneqin. At that time he was 51 years old.

#### Interview

Q. According to your religion, what is the role of Benyāmin and Dāwud?

A. Dāwud is the Helper in Need. He is one of the *Haft Tan*. In the Yāri system we have the *Haft Tan* and the *Haftawāne*. The *Haft Tan* deal with ‘ancient’ matters [i.e. matters concerned with the *bāten* world] and the *Haftawāne* are there for the affairs of this world. Dāwud is the Helper in Need. Benyāmin is the Prophet.

Q. Who is in control of God and Evil in the world?

A. We have the Good Seven and the Bad Seven. To avoid upsetting others [i.e. non Kāka’is] we do not mention the bad ones. The good ones are Dāwud, Benyāmin, Pir Musi, Mostafā, Ayyub and Yādegār.

Q. What ranks are there in your religion? For instance what is the role of the Pir?

A. Being a Pir is a religious duty. The task of a Sayyed is being a Pir. That means that he is responsible for guiding the people. I want to tell you a secret. Some people want to establish the office of a supreme religious authority (*gotb*) like the Shi’ites have, for the Ahl-e Haqq. In our religion we have no such thing. As I said, the *Haftawāne* take care of mundane matters. Two of the *Haftawāne* were single, the other five were married. The descendants of those five are concerned with matters of our religion (*omur-e tāyefe*).

Q. Which ones were unmarried?

A. Sayyed Shahāb al-Din and Sayyed Habib Shāh. The others, i.e. Sayyed Ahmad al-Amir, Sayyed Mostafā, Sayyed Khāmush and Sayyed Hājji Bāweysi were all married. We are descended from them. Among us there is a hierarchy of Sayyeds. The greatest of them was Sayyed Brāke Were,<sup>1</sup> who is also known as Sayyed Mohammad Gewre-Sewar<sup>2</sup> – he is the greatest and the highest of them all. He was the grandson of Soltān Sahāk. Most of his descendants now live in Iran. Two branches of his descendants are living in Iraq. One of these is my family, here in Khaneqin, and there is a group in Kerkuk who are known as Baray Adnān Āqā. That group now comprises more than 100 families, descendants of Sayyed Mohammad Qāyechi. My father was the only one living here in Khaneqin. The descendants of Sayyed Mohammad Gewre-Sewar are mostly known as Shah Ebrahimis.

Q. In Iran, Sayyed Nasreddin holds the office of religious leader. Do you also have a religious leader in Iraq?

A. Sayyed Nasreddin is a leader for worldly affairs in Iran. He is like the chief of a tribe. In Kerkuk there is someone called Adnān, who is my cousin, who has a similar role.

Q. What is the role of the *Sayyed* during the *jam*?

A. The Sayyed is the leader of the *jam*. He is responsible for the whole correct performance of the *jam*. But without the presence of a *khalife* he cannot perform his role properly. Unfortunately this is not so in Iran.

PM shows Sayyed Khalil a film about Yāresān ritual and asks questions related to this.

Q. What kind of poems are recited at the *jam*?

A, In this film that I see here,<sup>3</sup> these people sing the *kalām* of a *chāwdār*.<sup>4</sup> That is, they repeat the words of the *chāwdārs*. Because in those parts there are many Shi'ites, the words of a *chāwdār* are like Shi'ite texts. They emphasise the word Ali!

Q. What do you mean by *chāwdār*? ...

A. Yes, a *chāwdār* was someone who loved the religion a great deal and was inspired to compose poems.

Q. Are these poems not included in the *Saranjām*?<sup>5</sup>

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1 I.e. Sayyed Brāke.

2 See Safizade 1387:152-4; above, p. 87 with fn. 77, p. 137 with fn. 11.

3 In a film of a *jam* held in an Iranian community.

4 See also Ch. 4 under 'Spirituality'.

5 I.e. in the collection of officially recognised *kalāms*, now widely thought of as a holy book. On the name *Saranjām* for such collections cf. pp. 32, 124.

A. What is included in the *Saranjām* are *kalāms*, not [mere] poems; they are concerned (*mota'alleg*) with the Lord and the *Mirmardān*, i.e. God and the Angels

Q. What is the connection between Ali Ellāhis and Kāka'is?

A. They have nothing to do with the Kāka'is. They believe that Ali is God. Of course I have no precise information but we don't recognise them as Kāka'is and they do not regard themselves as such. The main difference is that they say that Ali is God. They are a sect.

According to the *Saranjām*, during the first *dowre*, when heaven and earth were created, a promise was made to the Kāka'is. For instance, our beliefs about *Sheytān* (the Devil), are different. And the question of heaven and hell is [seen] differently. God first created heaven and earth, then He created the *Haftawān*.<sup>6</sup> Benyāmin is one of the angels who are closest to God, he is Gabriel. God said to Gabriel, 'I should "offer my head"<sup>7</sup> to you. I will "offer my head" to you and you shall be my Pir. But you cannot be a Pir unless you yourself have "offered your head."<sup>8</sup> He said, 'To whom shall I offer my head?' [God] said, 'You must offer your head to Sayyed Mohammad, i.e. to Adam'. The first prophet was Adam, he was Mohammad Gewre-Sewar [see above], and he was also the last prophet.<sup>9</sup> That is why we say 'The Friend (*Yār*) First and Last'. Benyāmin refused to offer his head to Sayyed Mohammad [and so disobeyed God, thus becoming *Sheytān*; eventually he did obey, see below].<sup>10</sup>

We still perform the ritual of *sar-sepordegi* ('offering one's head') for our children even now.

Q. At what age do you perform *sar sepordan*?

A. There are different views on that. Some do it during the first forty days, others think that the child itself must be able to grasp the clothing of the Pir (see Ch. 5), and do it at such a time.

Q. In Iran they say that Dāwud is Sheytān, what is your view?

A. That is not correct. Sheytān is Benyāmin. He eventually 'offered his head' to Adam. We do not believe that a force outside a person can influence that person and put them on the road of evil. Ahl-e Haqq philosophy tells us that, when God created the body of Adam the Seven Good Ones entered that body. That body could not

6 The reference is probably to the group known elsewhere as *Haft Tan*.

7 I.e. promise absolute allegiance. On this ritual (*sar sepordan*) see above, pp. 103–105.

8 Here it is assumed that a negative is missing in PM's Persian translation of the interview. As it stands the texts means: 'You cannot be a Pir because you have "offered your head"', which makes no sense in the context.

9 In this informant's view, incarnations of Sayyed Mohammad Gewre Sewar included Adam, the first Prophet, and Sayyed Brāke, who is described as the last prophet. The name Mohammad may perhaps implicitly connect both with the prophet of Islam.

10 On beliefs about *Sheytān* see above, pp. 90–91.

become human with only goodness, but the bad also had to enter the body. For instance, God has given man a nose, which is a good thing, but at the same time there are also bad things inside the nose. These two have meaning together.<sup>11</sup> Yāri philosophy teaches that Good and Evil exist within the human being itself. We also call this ‘greed’ or ‘ego’ (*nafs*). Beside good things, greed and ego also exist. For example we have good feelings but beside these there is also greed. ‘Ego’ also has to do with sex, which can lead us astray, but all these things are in our make-up and have come to us from the first Adam.<sup>12</sup>

Q. Do you believe in the philosophy of the creation of Adam and Eve?

A. No, not as others understand it. To lower the status of women, the others regard her [Eve] as part of the body of Adam. Our belief is that they were two independent archetypes (*keyān*).

Q. I have a question about the transmigration of souls (*dunāduni*). Do a person’s actions affect his next incarnation? I mean, can our actions determine the quality of our next life?

A. What you say is correct. The way God looks at you is crucial. God is not obliged to offer reincarnation to each soul. We do not believe in heaven and hell. In our view a human being is free to commit good or bad actions. If you do good, goodness will be found on your future path, and if you do evil, you will suffer evil.

Q. Doesn’t a person eventually reach Godhead?<sup>13</sup>

A. One of the positive points of our way is that our God has himself been human. In every *dowre* God has co-existed with His creatures [in human form].

Some say that we are Arabs, because we come from Barzinja. Barzinja is one of the sons of Sheykh Isā, the son of Bābā Ali. Bābā Ali was the brother of Bābā Tāher-e Hamadāni, whose ancestor twelve generations back was Imām Musā. We have the genealogical chart at home. Imām Musā is descended from Imām Ali. Outwardly this seems to be correct. But was Eshāq (Soltān Sahāk) the son of Sheykh Isā? According to the genealogy, yes. But in fact it is not so. For God cannot be anyone’s son. However, because God created a system to explain matters in the outer world, he made the event appear to have taken place in the house of Sheykh Isā. Sheykh Isā himself was over eighty years old when he married Dāyerāk. Dāyerāk ist the daughter of Mir Hoseyn Jalad Jāf. She was a young girl. Dāwud, Benyāmin, Pir Musi and Ra(m)zbār came to her. It is a long story and I won’t tell it all. Sheykh Isā himself was suspicious of his wife. Eshāq in fact does not figure in the genealogical chart of Barzinja. Even his brothers were suspicious of him. A

11 Meaning presumably that in this world, ‘goodness’ acquires meaning because its opposite also exists.

12 There is a belief that there have been several Adams.

13 Lit. ‘doesn’t a human eventually change into God?’

major battle broke out between them, which is known as the battle of Chichek. In Iran they call it the battle of Marnow.<sup>14</sup> After that battle Soltān left Barzinja<sup>15</sup> and went to Sheykhān. The difference between ourselves and the Yāri tradition in Iran is that they fast because of their love of those three days of the Battle of Marnow. We on the other hand observe the fast of Qawaltās, which occurs in the same month.<sup>16</sup> The origin [of that fast] was that some of the people had problems, and when their problems were solved they vowed always to hold a fast on those three days.

## Beliefs of the Perdiwari Community, near Halabja

This text contains the main points about religion made by a leader of the ‘Perdiwari’ community during an interview in the remote village of Hawar, near the Iraqi-Iranian border, on 21 November 2009. The interview, which was mainly conducted by PM in my presence, was recorded on tape. The informant spoke his own local form of Central Kurdish, which was not fully intelligible to me. I am indebted to Dr Behrooz Chaman Ara for translating all passages that were relevant to questions of religion into Persian, which I then translated into English. As the interview was too long to be reproduced in its entirety, the information is presented as a series of statements.

- The Kāka’i faith existed before the Creation of humanity.
- According to the religious books, God dwelt in a Pearl in the middle of the Ocean.
- The word *derwish* consists of *durr*, ‘pearl’ and *wēsh*, ‘self’, so it means ‘I myself am the Pearl’.
- Our religion has become manifest in various milieus and at different stages.
- Our religion has been subject to many attacks, and has disappeared several times, but then afterwards another leader appeared and guided it [so that it could reappear]. The reason for this is the belief in reincarnation.
- God was Spirit, and in the second century [A.H.] he entered the body of Bohlul.
- From the 2<sup>nd</sup> till the 5<sup>th</sup> century [A.H.] Bohlul said, ‘I shall bring those Kurds [back] to life’. This means that, before this, the religion of the Kurds had been attacked and destroyed.

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14 On the fast of Marnow and the related legend see above, p. 110.

15 Note that the name Barzinja, which was used earlier as if it denoted a person, is here used for the place where, according to the tradition, Soltān was born (see e.g. Hamze’ee 1990:57).

16 On the Fast of Qawaltās see above, pp. 111–112.

- Our Holy Book is in the Macho language. The Kāka'is of Mosul, Kerkuk, Khanaqin and Erbil [speak this. We in this community do not.]
- There are about 1500 [of our] people left in Halabja [i.e. in the district of Halabja, in the villages of Hawar, Hawara Kon, and Dere Tuy Mate]. Formerly there was not a Kurd who was not Kāka'i, but after the attack of Obeyde,<sup>17</sup> people have converted to Sunni Islam.
- Abd Allah Qasih Qasr [a member of a political party who collaborated with the Sunni *Ansār Jund al-Islām*]<sup>18</sup> told us, 'You have four options: you convert to Islam, you move away from here for this is the land of Islam, you pay the tax on unbelievers (*jezye*), or you have your throats cut.'
- There is no difference between ourselves and the Ahl-e Haqq of Iran.
- In our religion we have four fundamental things: *Shari'at*, *Tariqat*, *Ma'refat*, and *Haqiqat*.
- The Kāka'is have passed beyond the earlier stages and reached *Haqiqat*, whilst Islam is still in the phase of *Shari'at*.
- The Path of the Kāka'i has four key teachings: Truth, Non-existence, Purity, and Forgiveness.<sup>19</sup> [Also important are] speaking the Truth, inner and outer purity, spending money on *niyāz* and *nazr*, and to forgive others.
- Our place of pilgrimage is Sheykhān, which is known as Perdiwar, where Soltān Eshāq is.
- [Also] the spring of Teshār:<sup>20</sup> just as you churn milk to change it to yoghurt, so you should churn water to make it pure.
- Perdiwar lies in the heart of Sheykhān. In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries [A.H.], Soltān Eshāq had students there. Because God has been in Perdiwar, it is holy.
- As we believe in the spirit, it makes no difference whether the spirit becomes incarnate in the shape of a man or a woman. So there is no difference [in human value] between men and women.
- Our religion and Yezidism are the same but we have some differences in our customs. For instance, both for us and for the Yezidis cutting or trimming the moustache is a sin.
- In our religion the Devil was Benyāmin. But in Islam he is frowned upon because he rebelled in the presence of God. Dāwud is the Guide (*rahbar*).

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17 The reference is not clear.

18 A Sunni fundamentalist movement in Northern Iraq.

19 Cf. pp. 74-75.

20 A holy spring near Perdiwar.



- The seven Attributes of God are: Sight, Power, Knowledge, Reason, Will, and Life. God does not have them and He has them all.<sup>21</sup>
- The Devil, whom Islam execrates, is part of God. We call him Melek Tāwus, the Yezidis use the same name. Benyāmin is the Guide (*rahbar*),<sup>22</sup> Dāwud is the Dalil.
- In the other world, at the Resurrection, when the Prophet [Mohammad] intercedes for forgiveness for God’s servants [the Muslims], Dāwud will intercede for us.
- Of course we do not call Benyāmin *Sheytān*, we never use that word.
- Soltān is God. Benyāmin and Dāwud are not God, they are the *Haftawāne*. The *Haft Tan* are identical with the *Haftawāne*.
- The *Haftawāne* are Dāwud, Benyāmin, Pir Musi, Shāh Khoshin, Ramzbār.
- Pir Musi is the one who writes down charities. When we have a *nazr* performed, it is Pir Musi who writes it down [i.e. who takes note of the resulting merit]. Razbār is the mother of Soltān Eshāq.<sup>23</sup>
- When we offer charity, it has to be with the authority (*dastur*) of the King (*Shāh*) (the King is Benyāmin himself), according to the Pact (*shart*) of Benyāmin, with the guidance of Dāwud, [written down] by the Golden Pen of Pir Musi, with the purity of Ra(m)zbār, and supported by the sword of the *Haftawāne*. Then it becomes a meritorious deed and is confirmed as such.
- We cannot accept anyone belonging to another religion into our religion. Neither Muslims nor Christians or others. The tale about the Hindu who requested to become part of the King’s circle is not attested in the old *Saranjām*,<sup>24</sup> it is recent.
- Our moustaches are very important to us
- No marriages should take place between Kāka’is and Muslims. But nowadays the youngsters cut their moustaches short and I myself have married two of my daughters to Muslims.
- Ilbeg Jāf predicted the future;<sup>25</sup> he spoke a long time ago about airplanes and cannons.

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21 I.e. God has no attributes and at the same time all possible attributes are His.

22 Note that there seems to be a contradiction here with the earlier statement that the Guide is Dāwud. Both statements, however, represent Dāwud as a second-in-command to Benyāmin.

23 The name of Soltān’s mother is usually given as Dāyerāk, cf. also below.

24 I.e. the corpus of traditional, Perdiwari *kalāms*.

25 See Zahedi Moghaddam 2019.

- Soltān Eshāq ruled at Perdiwar for about 50 or 60 years in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries [A.H.].
- We have three religious ‘castes’: the Sayyed [who prays and blesses the food of the offering]; the *farrāsh* [who stands up and is also called *khādem*], and the *khalife* [who divides up the food and gives it to the *khādem* to distribute]. The Sayyed is the Leader of the *jam* and the representative of God.
- We have the *kuēnkhā* or *khalife*, the *wuske* (Sayyed), and the *dumān* or *farrāsh*. The *farrāsh* can pray, kill the animals and sacrifice the cockerel. The *kuēnkhā* is the *khalife* who puts the meat into the bread and gives it to the *farrāsh*. The *wuske* are the Sayyeds who can pray and offer blessings.
- We should go into the *jam* with a pure inner self and a pure body. We should wear the girdle and keep our heads covered when we enter the presence of God.
- Pir Musi, Dāwud and the others are present at the *jam* and observe it.
- One cannot have a *jam* without *tanbur*, but we have no *tanbur* here.<sup>26</sup> If there is no *tanbur* one must make do with the *kalāms*. *Kalāms* are the verses that are sung with handclapping and with the *tanbur*. Generally short texts [*abyāt*, i.e. *nazm*] are sung and repeated with a fast rhythm, so that the session is lively and does not become boring.
- As to *khāndāns*, we follow Perdiwar, not the Shāh Ebrāhimis or the Ātashbegis and such.<sup>27</sup> Those [who do this] are in Kerkuk, Hewler and other places.
- God (*Khodāwand*) sits on an observation post and has done what was good.
- Shāh (Shāh Khoshin) sits on a stone and performs the *jam*.
- Soltān Eshāq is the son of the Lady Dāyerāk, [who] has come there and became pregnant by a ray of the sun.
- The *Saranjām* of Bābā Nāwus is the most important Scripture [*nāme*, explained by the speaker as *daftar*],<sup>28</sup> but it is not available. We also have ancient manuscripts and we act in accordance with them.
- Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and other words have found their way into the *Kalāms*, but apart from this they are fundamentally in Hawrami [i.e. Gurani]. They have become corrupted after the time of Soltān Eshāq.

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<sup>26</sup> What is meant is that this community has lost its musical tradition.

<sup>27</sup> I.e. the *khāndāns* followed by other Yāresān.

<sup>28</sup> The reference is evidently to a written sacred book which is believed to exist but is not accessible to believers.

## APPENDIX 3: Another View of Yāri. Sayyed Khalil Ālinezhād from Sahne

The late Sayyed Khalil Ālinezhād, a celebrated musician and well-known religious leader from Sahne, has provided detailed answers to questions about the Yāri religion put to him by the Office of the Revolutionary Guards, Section 2 (Najaf).<sup>1</sup> This document was published online in Persian,<sup>2</sup> with an introduction by Sayyed Khalil's father, Sayyed Shāhmorād Āli Qalandari, whom Sayyed Khalil consulted on religious matters. It offers interesting insights into this leader's views on his religion, and provides us with an account of the Yāri faith by an opponent of the Jeyhunabadist school, whose views also show marked differences from those generally found in the Guran region, notably in his deep veneration for Ali and representation of Yāri as the 'True Islam'.

Although it should of course be borne in mind that the letter is addressed to the Revolutionary Guards, known enemies of any kind of unorthodoxy, the style of the letter suggests that a great deal of thought and discussions with other members of the Āli Qalandari *khāndān* has gone into its preparation. It can therefore be taken to be a valid testimony to the beliefs of this group of Yāresān, and perhaps of the non-Jeyhunabadist Yāresān of Sahne generally.

The document consists of a long list of questions followed by Sayyed Khalil's answers. As the answers generally imply the questions, the latter have been omitted here. When the question is not clear from the context, its contents are given in footnotes.

*Oh [Thou who art] Truth, Oh [Thou who art] the One!*

To the Office of the Revolutionary Guards, Section 2 (Najaf)

With reference to a document containing 54 questions from your office, I can state that, after receiving and studying the said questions, I have undertaken to prepare and offer answers to the extent of my knowledge and awareness in the areas referred to in the questions, as follows:

Answer to Question 1:

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1 The list of questions was sent to a number of religious leaders.

2 <http://www.yaresan.com/about-yaresan/articles/221-m18>

The Ahl-e Haqq religion<sup>3</sup> derives from, and is the end-result<sup>4</sup> of all divine religions. We believe that God, the Blessed and the Highest, has ordained this religion on the First Day. However, given that humanity was at first incapable of understanding it, God's Command and His Path have been so instituted that according to humanity's capacity to understand the Essential Truth, many Prophets have come among mankind from the Lord of the World, and have taken steps to instruct Man; the ultimate task of the Great Prophets [i.e. enlightening humanity], has been fulfilled by God's saints, so that after Creation, the preparing of the way, and the necessary preliminaries, around the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.H. his Holiness Soltān became manifest and revealed the essential intention and goal [of Creation], and that which was ordained in the Covenant (*ahd-e alast*).

Answer to Question 2:

The Ahl-e Haqq are certain that there is only one Divine Religion in the world, which is the True Islam and the Worship of God. While outwardly religions show many differences, there is a Holy Tradition (*hadis qodsī*) saying that 'the paths towards God are as many as the souls of the creatures', i.e. the Divine Religion is one, [but] it has many different paths, and as was explained in the answer to the first question, Ahl-e Haqq is the Essential Religion. The rest of the religions are different manifestations, teachings and [outer] forms that have been revealed as was appropriate to the needs of various peoples at different times, which have come as introductions to the Manifestation of Ahl-e Haqq.

Answer to Question 3:

The Ahl-e Haqq believe in four principles:

- 1 Belief in God
- 2 Love for God
- 3 Service to the Creation so as to satisfy God
- 4 Personal preparation to reach God

Each of these four principles implies many [further] details, whose explanation would fall beyond the scope of this letter.

Answer to Question 4:

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3 Sayyed Khalil uses the term 'Ahl-e Haqq', which literally means 'People of Truth', and thus refers to the believers, for the religion itself; he occasionally calls the believers 'the people of Ahl-e Haqq'. As the expression 'Ahl-e Haqq' has been translated throughout this book as referring to the believers, a compromise is sought here, to the effect that wherever the words *Ahl-e Haqq* can be understood either way, a plural verb (suggesting people) is used; where it can only refer to the religion the author's usage is followed.

4 Lit. 'are the extract and result'.

As was pointed out in the previous answer, Ahl-e Haqq did not spring from any school of Islam. Rather it is the True Islam, as it was originally taught by His Holiness Ali to some special Friends (*Yārān*), and finally revealed to a greater number of people by Soltān Sahāk who, as the Ahl-e Haqq believe, is His Holiness the Lord [Ali] himself in another guise.

Answer to Question 5:

The book of principles and beliefs of the Ahl-e Haqq, which in our view contains the core and the essence of the Holy Book of Psalms, the Books [of the Prophets],<sup>5</sup> the Torah, the Bible and the Qur'an, is called *Saranjām*.

Answer to Question 6:

His Holiness Soltān Sahāk was the son of Sheykh Isā Barzanje'i, and he is the founder and revealer of the Truth of<sup>6</sup> Islam, i.e. Ahl-e Haqq.

Answer to Question 7:

The father of His Holiness Soltān was called Sheykh Isā Barzanje'i and was a Sunni.

Answer to Question 8:<sup>7</sup>

- Firm adherence to the 'Conditions and Regulations' (*Shart-o Eqrār*),<sup>8</sup> i.e. [the commitment] that each individual makes with his Lord or his Pir.
- The *Nazr* and the *Niyāz*.<sup>9</sup>
- The books revealed from Heaven, and writings concerning the saints of all divine religions.
- Sacred places, ranging from places of worship to the sanctuaries of the Prophets, Imāms and Saints of all divine religions.
- Moustaches etc. [sic] are regarded as belonging to the holy things of the Ahl-e Haqq.

Answer to Question 9:

The Ahl-e Haqq have eleven *khāndāns*.<sup>10</sup> I am unable to answer the second and third parts of the question owing to lack of information.<sup>11</sup>

5 Pers. *sohof*, 'pages, books', cf. *sohof al-anbiyā* 'Books of the Prophets'.

6 Lit. 'and', which implicitly avoids the claim that only the AH religion is true, but still suggests that the two, Islam and Truth, are synonymous.

7 The question was: 'What are the things that are holy to the Ahl-e Haqq?'

8 See above, p. 85.

9 See above, p. 103.

10 The text has *dude* 'families'.

11 The questions concerned were about the heads of each *khāndān* and the places where they live.

Answer to Question 10:<sup>12</sup>

No, the only fundamental book which all *khāndāns* are obliged to follow and adhere to is the *Saranjām*; other [religious texts] consist of the views of the leaders of each *khāndān* about the texts of the *Saranjām*.

Answer to Question 11:

As far as the Commandments of the *Saranjām* are concerned there are no differences at all between the *khāndāns*, nor will there ever be. However, at times when the passions of the ego-soul become dominant and ungodly aims and passions inspired by ignorance occur in connection with differences in [personal] tastes, a lack of unity may come into being, as is well described in the following poem: *When colourlessness is captured by colours, a Moses is at war with a Jesus*.<sup>13</sup> As to an explanation of matters of disagreement, since this has no connection with the Law of Ahl-e Haqq and concerns superficial matters, I beg to be excused [from discussing this].

Answer to Question 12:

The Morids of each *khāndān* do not have a specific region [where they live], or an area belonging to them alone that one could easily pinpoint, nor has it been practicable to carry out a survey of the numbers of Morids of each *khāndān*; an official census would be needed. However, as far the *khāndān* to which I myself belong is concerned, I can state that Morids and Sayyeds of our *khāndān* live in the regions of Jalalavand, Sanjabi, Qazwin, Kelardasht, Mazandaran, in the regions around Zanzan, Tehran and Sahne, and in many other places.

Answer to Question 13:

As was explained in the previous answer, *khāndāns* do not live in a particular territory, so that one cannot describe the conditions of such territories from a cultural or geographic point of view.

Answer to Question 14:

The true Ahl-e Haqq is a person who only treads the path of Truth and follows the road of his conscience, and also one whose existence is lit up by a spark of the love for Ali. Clearly such a person could never betray his homeland, his fellow men or his country, and in any case his fundamental orientation (*khatt*), which is the orientation towards [divine] Love, makes him so preoccupied with personal issues that he would avoid involvement in political issues or blind obedience to third parties, and prevents him from involvement in worldly affairs, treason of any kind, or any such

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<sup>12</sup> The question was whether each *khāndān* has its own holy texts.

<sup>13</sup> A line from Jalāl al-Din Rumi's *Masnawi-ye Ma'nawi*, meaning that when the ephemeral (having many colours) overcomes awareness of the absolute (which has no colour), then even the Prophets may disagree.

things. Of course it needs to be said that, as in all groups and religions, misguided and wicked individuals exist. It is to be expected that some persons of this kind may be Ahl-e Haqq, but a true Ahl-e Haqq, who knows his Lord and his religion and has found his inner self,<sup>14</sup> will never, whatever hardships and unpleasantness he may suffer, get involved with such things; any person who acts contrary to this has not understood the secrets and characteristics of the Ahl-e Haqq.

Answer to Question 15:

It is entirely true that the father of His Holiness Soltān was a Sunni, but as one's religion is a matter of choice rather than heritage or obedience, His Holiness has chosen the Ahl-e Haqq [faith]. For one thing, we believe that he is far too advanced to accept his religion from his father and family, because His Holiness Soltān is a manifestation of God (*Allāh*); we believe that the essence of Ali has become manifest in him, and that what he [Ali] taught secretly to his most special disciples (such as Salmān-e Fārsi),<sup>15</sup> his Holiness Soltān has openly put at the disposal of a larger number; the things he taught are at the very heart of the worship of God, and of Islam – we regard this as the religion of the People of Truth (*Ahl-e Haqq*).

Answer to Question 16:

Ahl-e Haqq has no connection with any of the phenomena mentioned here,<sup>16</sup> but since resemblances can be found among certain religions and religious ways of thinking, it is clear that points of similarity can be found between Ahl-e Haqq and forms of Sufism and other groups that have mystical (*erfāni*) beliefs. The existence of [such] apparent similarities is not to be attributed to Sufi or other influences on the Ahl-e Haqq.

Answer to Question 17:

The metempsychosis (*holul*) of the soul is accepted by the Ahl-e Haqq, and colloquially called *dunādun*. It consists in the incarnation<sup>17</sup> of souls in different guises and bodies 1001 times; after this progression each soul will have existed exactly 50 000 years, and then it will attain to the proximity of God, exalted is He, and return to its origin. Compare the 5<sup>th</sup> verse of the Sura *al-Ma'ārij* of the Noble Qor'an:<sup>18</sup> 'The angels and the Spirit will ascend to Him during a day the extent of which is fifty thousand years'.

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14 Lit. 'who has rediscovered himself' (*khod rā bāz yāfte bāshad*)

15 Salmān the Persian, a Companion of the Prophet Mohammad; he is said to have been the first Persian to convert to Islam.

16 The question was: 'Does AH have roots in Sufism, movements influenced by Sufism (*motasafawwiye*), mysticism (*erfān*), monasticism [and similar religions], such as Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, etc.? Please give an exact answer.'

17 Lit. 'movement' (*gardesh*).

18 Qor'an 70: 4. Translations of the Qor'an in this Appendix are based on those of the Website 'Noble Quran' (<https://quran.com/>).

However, reincarnation (*tanāsokh*) is something different, for those who believe in *tanāsokh* hold that the reincarnation of the soul will take place without beginning, from the first day till the last, and this group does not believe in the beginning and completion of transmigration and destiny.

Answer to Question 18:

We accept the words of the Holy Pure Imāms, [notably] including Imām<sup>19</sup> Ja'far Sādeq,<sup>20</sup> as explanations (*tafsir*) of the Qor'an, in the sense that we believe that the Saints of the Shi'a have interpreted and explained the Word of God in accordance with the spiritual and material needs of their followers, and that the Islamic *Shari'a* consists of the collection of their teachings. However, given that more truths and secrets have been revealed to the people of Ahl-e Haqq from the Texts descended from Heaven and in particular from the Qor'an, and since we have reached the level and stage of *Haqiqat*,<sup>21</sup> we do not feel ourselves obliged to follow some of the words of the Saints of the *Shari'a*. It is clear that these same Saints, either personally or in another manifestation, have instructed the community (*ommat*) of the Ahl-e Haqq to tread the Highroad of Worship of God, and called them to obedience to God (*'obudiyat*) in a different manner and with special words and obligations.

Answer to Question 19:

As was mentioned in the answers to some of the earlier questions, the Ahl-e Haqq recognise only one religion and that is the Worship of God, and Islam, i.e. submitting oneself to the Commands of the Creator of the World. However, because of the circumstances conditioned by different times, places and ethnicities, each time [only] a part of this Original Religion was revealed. Therefore one may say that we accept all religions and schools that have divine roots; in our view religions and schools that have no divine roots and do not guide towards the Worship of God are to be regarded as anathema.

Answer to Question 20:<sup>22</sup>

Indeed this is right. For the goal of sending Saints into the world was the guidance of humanity, and after all these efforts of Prophets and Saints, humanity must follow the true religion,<sup>23</sup> which is in fact Islam. In the Noble Word of God there are many verses about this which have the character of judgments, for instance, in verse 234

19 The text has *ammā*, which does not make sense,

20 The sixth Shi'ite Imām, who is particularly venerated by many AH.

21 I.e. the stage of ultimate spiritual understanding, see above, pp. 44–46.

22 The question is: 'Now that Islam has come, do the followers of other divine religions have to convert to Islam? If they have not become Muslims, what will the divine judgement about them be?'

23 Lit. 'the reality of religion' (*wāqe'iyat-e din*).



of the Sura *al-Baqara*, God says:<sup>24</sup> ‘Not upon you, [Oh Mohammad], is the responsibility for their guidance, but God guides whom He wills.’ [The verse] is addressed to His Holiness the Prophet, and means: ‘Proclaim my Message, and it is not your responsibility whether the people will find the way, for God shows the way to whomever He wills’. If someone, when faced with the Command of God, fails to submit, his heart is blind and the light of divine knowledge (*ma’refat*) and conscience is extinguished in his heart. One cannot awaken such a person by seeking to convince him or even by killing him, unless by the Will of God a window is opened in his heart to let in the light of divine knowledge, and truly bring faith so that he will join the Army of Truth with a degree of profound conviction, like Hurr, son of Yazid.<sup>25</sup> At that time the soldiers who stood against His Holiness Hoseyn, were outwardly Muslims but they intended to shed the blood of their Imām and the grandson of the Prophet of God. Therefore it is the faith of one’s heart that has value, not formulaic professions (*eqrār-e lafzi*) or pretending to be religious. Each group of believers has its own special way, language and views to explain and show its total obedience (*obudiyat*) in the Court of God, exalted is He. Even though the outward forms of worship are different, the essential intention and goal is the same. This is what is meant by the poem:

*Each describes his praise for you in [his own] language,  
The nightingale by singing love poems and the turtle dove with songs of  
praise.<sup>26</sup>*

Answer to Question 21:

Customs and observances are mostly matters of culture and society, and since Ahl-e Haqq does not have a specific ethnicity or nationality it is impossible to give an opinion or a definitive explanation about its customs and observances. If the question meant customs and observances regarding ritual duties, these are briefly referred to in the answers to questions 22, 26, 28, 29,30, 46, 47 and 50.

Answer to Question 22:

The fundamental principles of religion (*osul-e din*) are very similar in most religions. Ahl-e Haqq has certain variants [of these principles] in its belief system that are peculiar to itself, and these will be described here:

Fundamental beliefs:

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<sup>24</sup> Qor’an 2: 272.

<sup>25</sup> A general of the Umayyad army who was ordered to keep Hoseyn prisoner but saw the error of his ways and died fighting for Hoseyn.

<sup>26</sup> A line from a poem by the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century poet Sheykh Bahā’i.

*Oneness* [of God] (*towhid*). In the interpretation of the Ahl-e Haqq, this is connected with the question of the manifestation of the Essence of the Creator in the Created. The Noble Word of God has certain verses about this, such as verse 12 of the Sura *Taha*, where God has become resplendent as a dazzling light on a tree, and addresses Moses as follows:<sup>27</sup> ‘Indeed, I am your Lord, so remove your sandals. Indeed, you are in the sacred valley of Tuwa,’ (i.e. ‘Truly I am your Creator, so remove your shoes for you have reached the pure valley named Tuwa’),<sup>28</sup> and also the fourth verse of the Sura *Taha*: ‘Indeed, I am God. There is no god but me, so worship me and establish prayer for my remembrance’,<sup>29</sup> (i.e. ‘Truly I am God, there is no God but me, therefore worship me and institute prayer and remembrance for me’). About this there is an excellent poem:

*The words ‘I am God’ are lawful when spoken from a tree*

*Why should they not be lawful when spoken by a fortunate one?*<sup>30</sup>

His Holiness Ali also said: ‘The light that Moses beheld on Mount Sinai and the divine manifestation that occurred on the tree is now in my being.’

*Prophethood*: As was mentioned several times in the earlier answers, the Ahl-e Haqq believe absolutely in the mission of the Prophets of the Worship of God, who were sent by God to guide humanity, but ‘We make *no distinction between any of you*’, Sura *al-Baqara*, verse 130.<sup>31</sup>

*The Resurrection*:<sup>32</sup> Ahl-e Haqq has a special variant [of this belief], to the effect that, while the word ‘Resurrection’ also occurs, after death the souls are made to return a number of times to this world, and for some of their actions they will be rewarded or punished here in this world. At the final stage of this wandering [of the soul], a total, final reckoning will take place and that is when the true ‘Return/ Resurrection’ (*ma’ād*) occurs, when the soul has reached the degree of perfection and has become worthy of being close to the Compassion of God (*Haqq*), exalted is He. As Imām Ja’far has said, the full Presence (*zohur*) comes to each person at the time when (s)he becomes pure. In this respect we refer to verse 27 of the Sura *al-Imrān*:<sup>33</sup> ‘You cause the night to enter the day, and You cause the day to enter the night; and you bring the living out of the dead, and you bring the dead out of the living. And you give provision to whom you will without account’ ([i.e.] ‘You cause the

27 Qor’an 20: 12.

28 This is a Persian paraphrase of the Arabic text of the Qor’an.

29 Qor’an 20: 14.

30 This line by Shabestari implies that it can be legitimate when a human being feels the divine presence in his being.

31 In fact this is a reference to *Qor’an* 2: 285, where it says: ‘We make no distinction between any of His messengers’.

32 The Arabic word *ma’ād*, ‘resurrection’ implies a ‘return’ of the soul on the day of the Resurrection.

33 Qor’an 3: 27.

night to enter the day and the day, the night; and you bring the living out from the dead and you bring the dead out from the living, and you give provision to whom you will without account'). The reference to bringing out the dead from the living and the living from the dead proves [the existence of] a sequence of lives.

*Justice:* The Ahl-e Haqq believe with certainty, one hundred percent, and fully in the justice of the Lord of the World.

*The Imāmate:* According to the interpretation of the Ahl-e Haqq, the Imāmate consists in the manifestation of the Divine Qualities in human beings, whom we describe as the Saints of God. It is for this reason that this class has certain differences from the rest of humans; as instances of this difference one may mention the following: first, that Saints and Imāms have supernatural and seemingly miraculous powers, and secondly [they have] a degree and level of freedom from guilt... so that those in whom divine qualities are manifest will not be tainted by sin.

*Moral principles:* These are firmly based on Truthfulness, Purity, Non-existence [of the ego], and Acceptance (of God's Will),<sup>34</sup> as is explained here:

*Truthfulness:* In the general sense, which consists in refraining from lying and staying away from transgression (*xelāf*)...

*Purity:* This consists of two aspects, 'inner' and 'outer'; inner purity is pureness of soul and conscience, and outer purity consists in corporal and external cleanliness, as is implied in the word itself.

*Non-existence [of the ego]:* This is the opposite of egoism and [overly] exhibiting (*ezhār*) one's existence, in the sense that one recognises one's 'non-existence', weakness and powerlessness in the face of the greatness of the Creator and the complexity of the creation.

*Acceptance:* It is derived from the word *rād*,<sup>35</sup> which means 'forgiveness' and 'noble behaviour' (*jawānmardi*), and the word also means 'one who is patient in hardship'.

#### Principles of Behaviour:

These include the question of *sar sepordegi* ['submitting one's head'],<sup>36</sup> the theme of [the relationship between] Pir and student, i.e. the one who is sought (*morād*) and the one who seeks (*morid*),<sup>37</sup> and the matter of the true *Shart o Eqrār*.<sup>38</sup>

#### Religious laws on matters of observance (*Foru' al-Din*)

The worship of the Lord of the World, and prayer (*rāz-o niyāz*) to him in words and thoughts in any language, at any time, and from any direction; for the Great God knows every language, listens at all times and is present in all directions.

34 See above, pp. 74-75.

35 A pseudo-etymology.

36 See above, pp. 103-105.

37 The reference is to the relationship between Pir and Morid, on which see above, p. 36.

38 See above, p. 85.

To prepare oneself to control all impulses of the ego-soul in this existence, [one aspect] of which is the fast. In this respect the Ahl-e Haqq believe that the more a person can fast the better, but for the Ahl-e Haqq one three-day fast has been instituted as obligatory; in the Qor'an also there are references to the three-day fasts of His Holiness Adam, the fast of His Holiness Mohammad (peace be upon him) in the cave of Hira, and also the three[-day] fast of His Holiness the Lord [Ali], Fāteme and Hoseyn, which resulted in the revelation of the Sura *Hal Atā*.<sup>39</sup> The Ahl-e Haqq fast for three days twice a year.

Sacrifice and vows, or service and [pious] actions, which replace the *khoms* and the *zakāt*.<sup>40</sup>

They consist of the yearly vows [to pay for ceremonies] which each Ahl-e Haqq family must undertake according to its lawful income, to pay for a number of sacrifices, *nazr* and *niyāz* ceremonies, and to spend certain sums in cash in order to revive (*ehyā*) the spirit of the poor and deserving.

*Hajj* and *Jehād*<sup>41</sup>

[These] also have special counterparts among the Ahl-e Haqq, which will be discussed briefly in the answers to questions 48, 49 and 50.

Answer to Question 23:

The Ahl-e Haqq are bound and obliged to observe [the rules about] *halāl* and *harām*,<sup>42</sup> and one sees that certain matters which are frowned upon but not forbidden (*makruh*) [in Islam] are totally forbidden here. I should like to be excused from explaining further because the subject is so large. In any case, the rules about *halāl* and *harām* are derived from the Book of *Saranjām*.

Answer to Question 24:

Marriage should take place with the full agreement of both parties, and aim to propagate the human race and prevent the occurrence of wickedness (*fesād*). Divorce takes place at times when a continuation of living together is not possible in any way, and a divorce should not take place on account of the passions of the ego-soul, or for foolish (*jāhelāne*) reasons. The rules concerning these two themes are found in the Book of *Saranjām*. Meanwhile, in case the rules of the *Saranjām* cannot be ascertained it is sufficient to consult the discourses (*khotbehā*) of the *Shari'a* con-

39 Sura 76, also known as *al-Insān*, which is thought to have been revealed when Ali, his wife Fāteme and a maid vowed to fast for three days when Hasan and Hoseyn had fallen ill.

40 Islamic religious taxes.

41 I.e. great efforts for the sake of religion, e.g. profound spiritual efforts or holy war.

42 The Islamic rules about what is allowed and forbidden.

cerning marriage and divorce. The Ahl-e Haqq do not accept temporary marriage, commonly called *sighe*.<sup>43</sup>

Answer to Question 25:

The Ahl-e Haqq believe that Satan is one of the angels who are close to the Court of God, exalted is He. The outward (*zāher*) version of this matter is that he was banned from God's Court for disobedience and was given the chance to make amends by the God of the World. The 'inner' (*bāten*) version is that he came to this world as a benchmark and criterion in order to enable [the world] to distinguish right from wrong, and he has been given a mission by the God of the World to encourage people to take the spiritual path (*rāh-e bāten*) so that they may be recognised as true believers. The Ahl-e Haqq believe that, although outwardly Satan is engaged in unfitting actions and seeks to lead astray the followers of Truth and remove the faith from them, he has a mission and is excused. In fact in the spiritual realm (*bāten*) and in his own conscience, Satan is a believer in God's Unity like few others; wasn't it he who refused to accept to bow down for anyone but God, e.g. for the form of Adam? For that reason all of us Ahl-e Haqq have removed the permission to curse Satan from our natures, and the great Creator (*sāne*) of our world himself and His creation know who is fit to be cursed and<sup>44</sup> who is deserving of compassion. If some of the Ahl-e Haqq react with fanaticism and undue sensitivity in matters regarding Satan, it is because they have no knowledge of the texts of the Book of *Saranjām*.

Answer to Question 26:

The 'seal'<sup>45</sup> of the moustache is the outward sign of the men of the People of Truth, and the command for it to be a seal was first revealed to His Holiness the Lord Ali at the battle of Siffin,<sup>46</sup> according to the following *hadith*:<sup>47</sup> 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) said, "Trim your beards and grow your moustaches so that awe for you may overcome them",<sup>48</sup> and also the *hadith*, 'Taking care of the moustache is part of the ethics of the Prophets' (to keep the moustache clean and the use of perfume on it is part of the character of the Prophets). And again His Holiness the Lord [Ali] said, 'The Prophet of God had a large moustache'.<sup>49</sup> There is also a reference to the effect that when the holy head of the Lord of Martyrs [Hoseyn] was severed from his body because of his large moustache, drops<sup>50</sup> of blood collected around his moustache and dripped on the earth drop for drop, on the basis of this

43 This refers to the Shi'ite acceptance of marriages for a stipulated period of time (*sighe*).

44 Reading *yā* 'or' for *bā* 'with', which makes no sense in this context.

45 I.e. that which binds the community to its religion. The seal is sometimes said to 'seal' the lips of believers, enjoining them not to reveal secrets.

46 A battle between Ali, who was then Caliph, and his adversary Mo'āwiya, in 657 CE.

47 I.e. religious tradition.

48 The Arabic and Persian versions correspond.

49 The Arabic and Persian versions correspond.

50 Lit. 'clots', which makes poor sense in the context.

*hadith*, ‘The blood dripped from his moustache’.<sup>51</sup> Most important of all is that the Ahl-e Haqq believe that the Blessed Name of his Holiness Ali is drawn upon the face of each man, and because the moustache as a whole represents the letter ‘ī’<sup>52</sup> in the word Ali, an Ahl-e Haqq never has the right to trim his moustache, for this would make him a grave sinner, to the extent that he would have left the religion.

Answer to Question 27:

In the Holy Qur’an Muslims are [merely] ordered to stay away from alcoholic beverages, ‘Abstain from wine’,<sup>53</sup> whereas the Ahl-e Haqq regard it as wholly forbidden and damaging to the soul; according to the book of *Saranjām* its use is forbidden. On the other hand there is no [explicit] religious ban on drugs because of the commands which [already] imply this, according to which the Ahl-e Haqq are ordered to be the judges of their own conscience and refrain from actions that are known to be wicked. Given this command, and looking closely at the lives of addicts, everyone can choose the right and correct path.

Answer to Question 28:

*Sar-sepodan* (‘submitting one’s head’) means to relinquish one’s life and submit one’s head to the threshold of the Beloved, and to affix the ring<sup>54</sup> of Love to the ear of the heart, and to swear loyalty to God (*Haqq*); to accomplish this important act, instead of the heads of humans there is animal sacrifice that is performed and consumed during ritual sessions, just as God<sup>55</sup> ordained that a sheep should be sacrificed instead of the head of Esmā’il.

Answer to Question 29:

The Sayyed has the rank of a Pir, and the Morid’s relationship to the Pir is that of a student. Through the Pir, the Morid must reach God. The Pir is regarded as a spiritual father and the Morids as his children. It is for this reason that those who have ‘submitted their head’ to their Pirs have the legal status of blood relations.<sup>56</sup>

Answer to Question 30:

The *jamkhāne* is the place where the greater part of the religious obligations of the Ahl-e Haqq people are performed. The *jamkhāne* commands the same reverence and awe as does the mosque in the Shi’ite religion. It is the house of God and those who have ‘submitted their head’ and [are] Yārān pray to their Lord there.

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51 The Arabic and Persian versions correspond.

52 I.e. the Arabic letter y (the last letter in the name Ali), is represented by the moustache in a man’s face.

53 Part of a *hadith* saying ‘Abstain from wine for it is the source of all evil’.

54 The earring is a traditional symbol of slavery.

55 Lit. ‘His Holiness the Truth’ (*Hazrat-e Haqq*).

56 I.e. they may not intermarry.

Answer to Question 31:

At the beginning of the appearance of the Ahl-e Haqq [religion], the Sayyeds have been appointed as one class, and since then this will continue till the end [of time], by way of heredity and immutability, in the sense that some of the companions and friends of His Holiness Soltān Sahāk were appointed by him as his successors, and they were the heads of the lineages of the *khāndāns*, and the last of these lineages are the current Sayyeds of the Ahl-e Haqq. The lineage to which I belong is called after His Holiness Āli Qalandar, who in the system of ‘re-appearance of essences’<sup>57</sup> is regarded as an incarnation of His Holiness Imām Hoseyn (peace be upon him). I wish to be excused from answering the third part of the question or delivering [a written genealogy]<sup>58</sup> because of the lack of importance of the matter.

Answer to Question 32:

According to the view of the book of *Saranjām* the meat of the pig, or ‘swine’,<sup>59</sup> is totally forbidden. According to the *kalāms*, in case someone commits [the sin of] eating it, this is considered [to be a sin] to the extent of being banished from the religion. When one commits that action the line of annulment shall be drawn on that person’s ‘submission of the head’.<sup>60</sup> If individuals commit this [sin], it is on account of their lack of culture and information about the texts of the *Saranjām*, and the rules of Ahl-e Haqq.

Answer to Question 33:

The Ahl-e Haqq believe that each person must choose what is practicable, and form his ideas through the strength of his intelligence, his thoughts, and the dictates of his conscience, under the shadow of the faith together with investigation, for blind obedience to religious authority (*taqlid*) in the aforementioned areas has certain deficiencies. Explaining this would require a detailed discussion of the *kalāms*.

Answer to Question 34:

The Ahl-e Haqq support a government that is steady because it is based on justice and supported by God, serves the poor, and defends those who have been mistreated, [a government that] safeguards human rights and freedom of expression. A government that acts contrary to the principles mentioned here is regarded by the Ahl-e Haqq as heretical.

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57 I.e. transmigration of the soul, cf. above.

58 This is what was required by the letter of the Revolutionary Guards.

59 The last word is in Arabic, probably referring to the prohibitions found in the Qor’an (e.g. 6: 45; 16: 115).

60 I.e. he is no longer the Morid of a *khāndān*, and thus ceases to be a member of the AH community.

Answer to Question 35:

God willing, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is firmly based upon justice, and other religions will enjoy freedom, and [the government is] a defender of breaking [the bonds of] dependence and is in favour of the independence of the country. Given these considerations, it is supported by the Ahl-e Haqq community.

Answer to Question 36:

The orientation of the Ahl-e Haqq is mostly toward matters of a religious nature.<sup>61</sup>

Answer to Question 37:

God is the beginning who has no beginning, a completion without an end, and a power above all powers; all that is, exists because of His Will and depends on Him, and not on anything that is seen on earth. In His Presence the passing of time leaves no trace and this is why, if all beings should become unbelievers, not even a speck of dust would land on the mantle of His greatness.<sup>62</sup> He both punishes and forgives; He is both kind and wrathful; both present and absent, both *zāher* ('outer') and *bāten* ('inner'), and in sum he is both the First and the Last. To understand more than this about the profound being of the Creator lies outside the power of the created.

Answer to Question 38:

Every single cell of each Ahl-e Haqq person recognises and confirms that there is no God in the World of Being but the One God. The Ahl-e Haqq also accept with heart and soul that the divinely inspired Prophets have come among humans from God (exalted is He) in order to guide humanity. The first of these was His Holiness Adam (God's chosen one) and the last His Holiness Mohammad (peace be upon him); this is a question of believing in the truth of the two elements of the Confession of the Faith.<sup>63</sup> The Ahl-e Haqq, however, do not regard it as obligatory to pronounce this formula with a particular accent or at a specific time, regarding it as sufficient not to deny the truth of these [words]. For the Ahl-e Haqq, the obligatory Confession of Faith is the formula 'The Friend First and Last'; the meaning of 'the friend' is the eternal Beloved, i.e. His Holiness the Lord [Ali], and by pronouncing this formula anew, the Ahl-e Haqq renew their oath of allegiance to the One they worship and to their Lord, repeating and remembering the very heart of their beliefs in order to increase their faith that Ali is the First and the Last.<sup>64</sup>

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61 The question was whether the orientation of the AH is mostly religious, political, patriotic, ethnic or otherwise.

62 Lit. 'the hem of his robe' (*dāman*). What is meant is that God would in no way be diminished by anything humans could do.

63 'There is no God but God and Mohammad is His Prophet'.

64 This interpretation of the word *yār*, 'friend', which in classical Persian texts usually refers to God, as a reference to Ali is probably not shared by most Yāresān from Guran, cf. above, p. ix.



The Questions 39, 40 and 41 have been answered in the answer to Questions 18 and 22.

Answer to Question 42:

The Qor'an is the Word of God, and the miracle<sup>65</sup> of His Holiness Mohammad (peace be upon him). The Commands of the Qor'an must be carried out by the Shi'ite and Sunni communities, and all (religious) groups and schools that are connected with these. The great ones of the Ahl-e Haqq believe that they have summarised the essence of the Qor'an for the community (*ommat*) of the Ahl-e Haqq in the form of the rules found in the *Saranjām*. It is clear that the Qor'an contains countless explanations (*ta'ābir*), and each human being should understand these according to his power and (metaphysical) knowledge (*ma'refat*). Finally, the Ahl-e Haqq are obliged to carry out the stipulations of the *Saranjām*, which are the very essence of the Qor'an

The Questions 43 and 44 have been answered in the answer to Questions 18 and 22.

Answer to Question 45:

At the time of carrying out any one of their ritual obligations the Ahl-e Haqq must be clean and pure, and must wash their whole body (*ghosl*). However, as the Ahl-e Haqq do not say prayers in the sense you mean, there is no need for them to ritually wash parts of their body (*wozu*).

Answer to Question 46:

The Ahl-e Haqq have no need whatever to pray in the form that is adopted among classes (*tabaqāt*) of Muslims,<sup>66</sup> they have their own particular observances (*ebādat*) and ways of remembering God (*azkār*).

Answer to Question 47:

This Question has been answered in the answer to Question 22.

Answer to Question 48:

Pilgrimage to the Ka'ba, if possible and feasible, is right and proper. However, there is no command to show it is obligatory. The Ahl-e Haqq believe that, while God's dwelling place is everywhere, there are certain holy places which have witnessed the manifestation of the Essence of God (*Haqq*) and have a very special rank, such as Mount Sinai, the Ka'ba, Najaf the Noble, etc., and pilgrimage to these blessed places

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65 Muslims consider the Qor'an to be the greatest of the miracles performed by the Prophet Mohammad.

66 Note the apparently redundant use of the words 'classes of'. By using this formula, the author avoids specifying whether or not the Yāresān are Muslims.

has the same merit as the *Hajj*.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the Ahl-e Haqq believe that the noble shrine of His Holiness Soltān Sahāk is equal in rank to Noble Najaf, and is also the site of a Manifestation of God, and pilgrimage to this place constitutes a pilgrimage to the House of God.

Answer to Question 49:

First of all, wherever they look, the Ahl-e Haqq see nothing but God. Then, they recognise places of the Manifestation of the (divine) Essence generally, and for those who have ‘submitted their head’ to His Holiness, they recognise the shrine of Soltān Sahāk as a lawful direction of prayer.<sup>68</sup> Finally, the Ahl-e Haqq consider the *jamkhāne* as a manifestation of the divine Essence, and sees this place as a house of God of equal rank to the Ka’ba.

Answer to Question 50:

Among the various kinds of *jehād*,<sup>69</sup> the Ahl-e Haqq are mostly concerned with the ‘greater *jehād*’, i.e. with the struggle against the ego-soul, and the greatest efforts of one who treads the Path [of the faith] lies in the realm of defeating the inner Satan. Truly this is a matter of climbing a ladder towards redemption. About the matter of *khoms* and *zakāt* the relevant answer was given in the reply to Question 22. ‘To enjoin what is right and forbid what is reprehensible’<sup>70</sup> is not regarded as a general duty among the Ahl-e Haqq. This duty has been enjoined to the class of Sayyeds more than others, especially to those who are Pirs. Naturally others too may invite others to the path of rightness and virtue according to the amount of knowledge and practical ability (*amal*) they have. However, if this group does not do this, no responsibility and accountability in the matter adheres to their being. The Sayyeds, on the other hand, have a duty and responsibility in such matters, and if they fail to do this, an inner accountability will take hold of their being.

Answer to Question 51:<sup>71</sup>

*The mind boggles trying to imagine the ocean*

*It is impossible even to imagine what goes on in a drop*<sup>72</sup>

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67 I.e. the pilgrimage to Mecca.

68 Muslims turn towards Mecca when they pray. The author explains why the AH do not generally do this.

69 On *jehād* see above, fn. 41.

70 A Qor’anic phrase much quoted in Islamic discourse, meaning that all Muslims should do their best to further the good and prevent what is wicked.

71 The question is: ‘What is the spiritual status of Ali (peace be upon him)? Explain this according to the beliefs of the Ahl-e Haqq or of your lineage’.

72 A line from a poem by Hāfez.

You are asking for a description of the Unlimited by the limited, for explanation of the Endless by the negligible, for an exposé on the Ocean by a drop. In order to know His greatness it is best to turn towards the Lord's own words. In this matter of His blessed views I shall draw attention to some examples from His Holiness the Lord's secret discourses from the Sermon *al-Bayān*:<sup>73</sup>

'The keys to the World of the Unseen are with me.'<sup>74</sup> 'I am aware of all things.' 'The Signet ring of His Holiness Solomon (son of David)<sup>75</sup> is with me.' 'I divide heaven from hell.' 'The Book of what has been and what will be is with me.' 'I cause the trees to grow.' 'I cause the rivers to flow.' 'I cause the earth to be wide.' 'I keep the heavens aloft.' 'I am the Light that Moses saw on Mount Sinai, and [by which] he was guided.' 'I am the one who destroys castles.' 'I draw forth the believers from the graves.' 'I speak (and know)<sup>76</sup> all the languages in the world.' 'I am the Lord of Noah, Jonah and Job; I am the one who afflicts and delivers.' 'I am the one who has invested the Prophets (*al-anbiyā wa'l-morselin*) with Prophethood.' 'I am (the true recipient of)<sup>77</sup> the ritual prayer (*salāt*), *zakāt*, *hajj*, and *jehād*.' 'I am the Greatest Name [of God].<sup>78</sup>' 'I am He who brings into being (*taqdir*) and shapes humans and animals in the wombs of their mothers.' 'I am the one whom Gabriel and Michael serve.' 'I allowed Moses<sup>79</sup> to cross the sea and caused Pharaoh and his army to drown.' 'I spoke with the tongue of Jesus in the cradle.' 'I know the number of ants in the world and their weight and their lightness, and the number<sup>80</sup> of mountains and their weight and the number of raindrops.<sup>81</sup>' 'I give light to the sun, the moon and the stars.' 'I was with all the Prophets in secret, and I am with Mohammad secretly and openly<sup>82</sup>, in this *hadith* His Holiness the Lord reveals, 'I was with all the Prophets of the past, and I am with Mohammad (God's blessing upon him) secretly and openly'.

These few *hadith* are examples of the thousands of documents containing discourses which the Ahl-e Haqq have about this. When faced with the everlasting greatness of His Holiness their Lord, they bow and submit their head. In short, they regard him as the Essence of their God.

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73 A well-known sermon attributed to Ali.

74 All these short sayings are quoted in Arabic with a Persian translation, which generally corresponds exactly to the original. These texts will therefore be translated only once here.

75 Only in the Arabic version.

76 Only in the Persian version.

77 Only in the Persian version.

78 Only in the Persian version.

79 The Arabic version adds the epithet *al-kalim*, 'who talked [with God]'.

80 Persian: 'extent and height and depth'.

81 Persian: 'drops falling from the clouds'.

82 *Non liquet*, Translated on the basis of the Persian version. The text has *sayran wa jahzan*, which would probably mean 'travelling and dispatching'.

Answer to Question 52:

Most believers in the world and all divinely inspired religions expect the coming of a Saviour, who will come from God (exalted is He) to put an end to the waiting of the Lovers of God. For instance, in Christianity they expect the appearance of their Lord, and the Shi'ites await the coming of the Mahdi (may God hasten is coming). The Ahl-e Haqq believe that the essence of the Mahdi has become manifest in Pir Benyāmin or, to put it another way, Pir Benyāmin is an incarnation of the Mahdi (may God hasten is coming). Eventually the Will of God will ordain that this fundamental Essence that has become manifest in the three persons mentioned above, will appear [again], so that the world shall be ordered another way and the wishes, desires and visions of all religions will be realised. The reason for calling these three persons, whose being was surely governed by the same Essence, by different names at different times [is that] as teachers of the Worship of God to different human societies, [their teachings] were according to the degree of aptitude and spiritual need of each one.

Answer to Question 53:

A woman must 'submit her head' just like a man and most (almost all) commands that exist for men also apply to women. The most important command pertaining to women's matters is that of chastity and purity. On the one hand, in the matter of observing inner and outer modesty<sup>83</sup> as far as convention dictates, there is no difference as to the obligations on women and men.<sup>84</sup> [But] after all, the main duty of a woman in the family is the raising of children in a religious and principled manner, which, when put into practice, will be a great help for the improvement of society.

Answer to Question 54:

In Ahl-e Haqq society women are equal to men, and their status is equivalent to the status of men. There may well be women who are worthier and more acceptable in the eyes of God (exalted is He) than many men.

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Finally, I would like to draw the attention of those brothers who have played a role in drawing up, planning, and writing these questions, to Article 23 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, in the hope that all sectors in this country, particularly government agencies and revolutionary institutions, will feel bound by it and compelled to carry it out conscientiously; for these laws, as you yourself recognise, are the result of the achievements of the Revolution, and tens of thousands of people have been martyred to bring them to fruition. So why is it that the very executors of

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83 Lit. 'veiling'

84 I.e. both men and women must observe the customary dress-code for their gender, and spiritual modesty.

the Law and the guardians of the system of the Islamic Republic tread them underfoot, which is most regrettable?

Article 23 of the Constitution [states]: ‘It is forbidden to investigate beliefs, and no one should be molested or blamed merely for holding a belief.’

With apologies for taking your time and writing at length,

Yours faithfully, as a representative of the Believers in God and Truth (*Haqq wa Haqiqat*),

Sayyed Khalil Ālinezhād

5 November 1986 (14.8.1365)

## APPENDIX 4: Authoritative Muslim Comments on Yāri

The Website *Adyān wa Mazāheb* (Religions and Schools),<sup>1</sup> where ‘representatives of the Supreme Leader and of Universities’ answer questions from the public about matters of religion, published the following account:

Q. What kind of cult are the Ahl-e Haqq and what are the conditions for changing one’s religion from Ahl-e Haqq to Shi’a?

A. The Ahl-e Haqq cult is an eclectic religious tradition, comprising a mixture of ancient beliefs, [from] Christianity, Islam etc. At the moment the Ahl-e Haqq are divided into three main groups:

- 1 Devil-worshippers. This group regards the devil as sacred, the pig as holy and they are against all forms of purity. Most of this group live in the regions of Kerend, Sarpol-e Zahab and adjacent areas.
- 2 The Ali-Ellāhis (those who say Ali is God). This group believes that his Holiness Ali is God, and consider their religion to be entirely separate from Islam. This group lives mainly in north-western Iran and some other regions.
- 3 Muslim Ahl-e Haqq. This group regards itself as Shi’ite, but they differ from the Shi’ites in their habits and customs.

Most of our information regards the third group because the other two are essentially devoid of any intellectual basis; they merely follow their ancestors blindly and have practically no religious traditions or beliefs of any interest. Generally speaking we can say about this group and others that any group that distances itself from the Path of the Qor’an and the Holy family, is guilty<sup>2</sup> of dangerous unorthodoxy in various areas.

On the official website of Ayatollah Makārem-e Shirāzi,<sup>3</sup> we find:

Q. What is [your] judgment about having relations and associating with Ahl-e Haqq?

A. The Ahl-e Haqq have two groups: one group reject the obligatory observances of Islam, they do not accept any of these, such as ritual prayer and the fast, and partak-

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1 <http://www.adyan.porsemani.ir/content> under: *ahl-e Haqq cegune ferqei ast*.

2 Lit. ‘subject to’ (*dochchār*).

3 <https://makarem.ir/main.aspx?typeinfo=21&lid=0&catid=44744&mid=255164>

ing of food prepared by them, social intercourse and marriage with them is absolutely not allowed. another group, on the other hand, bear witness to the Oneness of God and the Prophethood of Mohammad,<sup>4</sup> and even if they do not observe the obligatory rites, they refrain from denying the Prophethood [of Mohammad] and there is no objection to social relations with that group; marriage with them is problematic in case there is fear that the [Shi'i] spouse will come under the influence of the other's beliefs. If there is no fear in this regard, it is not absolutely forbidden (*harām*), but if there is no compelling need it is better to marry someone else.

Q. In our town there are many who belong to this group, and I have rented my house to one of them, who believes in *niyāz*<sup>5</sup> instead of *namāz* (Islamic prayer). What is [your] legal judgment about having amicable relations with them, partaking of their votive offerings (*nazr*), renting to them and having other dealings with them?

A. If it does not strengthen their religion there is no problem.

SF<sup>6</sup> quotes the following *fatwās* by leading Āyatollāhs:

Ayatollah Hādawi Tehrāni:

The Ahl-e Haqq have many beliefs and peculiarities that are contrary to the commands of Islam. They belong to the category of infidels. I have discussed some of their beliefs in detail elsewhere.

Ayatollah Sāfi Golpāyegāni:

In reply to your question related to the sect known as Ahl-e Haqq, a sample of whose beliefs you have sent me. They have deviated from the path of Truth, and it is very necessary that male and female believers should restrain themselves from social intercourse and having connections with them. Marriage with them is also forbidden (*harām*).

4 Lit. 'the prophethood of the Prophet' (*resālat-e peyāmbar*).

5 On the *niyāz* ritual see above, p. 103

6 <http://www.kurdistanmedia.com/farsi/idame/23538>.

## APPENDIX 5: *Kalāms* in recent compilations

A survey of of *kalāms* included in recent publications, in the order in which they appear in each work. Texts that are included in more than one collection are marked with an asterisk.

<i>Safizāde 1996</i>	<i>Hoseyni 2003</i>	<i>Tāheri 2007</i>	<i>Anon.1.</i>
*Bārgah Bārgah	Kalām-e Xazāne	*Dawray Buhlul	*Dowre-ye Bābā Xošin
Dowre-ye Haftawāne	*Gawāhi-ye Dowre-ye Bābā Nāwus be zohur-e Ḥadrat-e Soltān	*Dawray Šāh Xošin	*Dowre-ye Bābā Nā'us
*Dowre-ye Gelim wa Kul	Gawāhi-ye Dowre-ye Qeys	*Bābā Sarhang	*Dowre-y Bahlul
*Dowre-ye Čehel-tan	*Gawāhi-ye Dowre-ye Bābā Jalil	*Dawray Bābā Nāwus	*Dowre-ye Bābā Jalil
*Dowre-ye 'Ābedin	Gawāhi-ye Dowre-ye Soleymān	*Dawray Bābā Nāwus	*Kalām-e Dowre-ye Bābā Sarhang
Xorde Saranjām ( <i>Short texts connected with rituals</i> )	*Gawāhi-ye Dowre-ye Bābā Sarhang	*Bayāwbas Sājnāri	*Kalām-e Dowre-ye Soltān Sahāk
	*Gawāhi-ye Dowre-ye Haftan	*Piraw Pirāli	*'Ābedin maramo
	*Kalām-e Haftan	Dawray Barzinja	*Kalām-e Aḥmad
	*Goruh Goruh	Sayyeia Šiyani	*Dāmyāri
	Mučyāri-ye Ḥadrat-e Soltān	Arkān-e Jam, Du'āhāy Yāresān	*Šandarwi (Gelim wa Kul)
	Ma'refi-ye Haftan	Kalām Haftan	*Bārgah Bārgah



<i>Safizāde 1996</i>	<i>Hoseyni 2003</i>	<i>Tāheri 2007</i>	<i>Anon. I.</i>
	*Bayāwbas-e Haftan bā sar-e ḥalqe-ye Haftawāne	Čeltan	*Goruh Goruh
	Sāwā	Čiltanān	Ey Deyre Deyre
	Pire-w Pirāli	Paydāyeš-e Haftawāna	*Dowre-ye Čeltan
	Gawāhi-ye Xelqat Haftawāne	Bārgah Bārgah Šandarwi (Gelim wa Duš)	*Aw Kamākan Yā ‘Ali Hānā
	*Šandarwi 1&2 (Gelim wa Kul)	*Dāmyār Dāmyār	*Bē Gāwān Gāwē
	*Bārgah Bārgah	*Kamākanān Dawray Sāwā	Yār-o Yādegār Gar nemidāni
	*Dāmyār Dāmyār	Kaḷa Zarda	Šim aw sar cašme
	Gawāhi-ye Haftan be Dunhā-ye gozašte 1&2	Yārān Qawaltās	*Zolāl Zolāl
	Haft Xalife	‘Ābedin Jāf	*Dowre-ye Sayyed Xāmuš
	Haft Sāzči	Šayx Safi Ardabili	Dowre-ye ‘Āli
	Haft Guyande	Dawray ‘Āli Qaḷandar	Dowre-ye Bābā Ṭāher
	Haft Kowzeči	Gawāhī Haftan	
	*Haft Saqqā	Haftawāna	
	Gawāhi-ye Pir Benyāmin	Gawāhī Haft Xalifa  Gawāhī Haft Sāzči	
	*Towziḥ-e Mažhar-e 14 Badān	Gawāhī Haft Guyanda	

<i>Safizāde 1996</i>	<i>Hoseyni 2003</i>	<i>Tāheri 2007</i>	<i>Anon.1.</i>
	99 Pir-e Šāhu	Gawāhī Haft Gozači	
	66 Yār	Gawāhī Haft Saqā	
	Kalām-e Bābā Yādegār	* Gawāhī dar Bāray 14 Badān	
	Kalām-e Šāh Ebrāhim	Gawāhī 72 Pir	
	Peydāyeš-e Haftawāne	Gawāhī 99 Pir Šāhu	
	*Kamākanān	Gawāhī 66 Ghuḷām Zařin- Čāwagān	
	Kale Zarde	Bābā Hendu	
	Qabḍ-e Ruḥ	Qawzay Ruḥ	
	Sayyed Šayāni	Bayāwbas lēw Sirwān	
	Čeheltan	Bay‘at wa Tabay Yāri	
	*Zolāl Zolāl	*Goruh Goruh	
	*Kalām-e Sayyed Xāmuš	*Diwān Bābā Yādegār	
	Arkān-o Qawānin-e Awwalin-e Yāri dar Perwdiwar	La Dāykbuni Šāh Ebrāhim	
	Short texts connected with rituals	*Zolāl Zolāl  Jānešinī Šāh Ebrāhim	

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## Index

- Ābedin Jāf, 32, 127–128, 129, 171;  
*Daftar-e*, 12
- Abu Muslim, 22, 23
- Abu'l-Wafā'i, see Khāmushi
- Abu Muslim, see Muslim, Abu
- Achaemenid Empire, 13–14, 16
- Adam, first man, 80, 83, 84, 86, 88, 89,  
91, 134, 135, 137, 143, 144, 158, 159,  
162; and sacred musical instruments,  
26
- Adi b. Musāfir, see Sheykh Adi b.  
Musāfir
- Āditya, 10
- Ahl al-Kitāb*, 68
- Ahl-e Haqq, ix, xiii, 1, 35, 38, *et passim*;  
other names for, 1; Muslim ~, 7; see  
also Kāka'i, Tāyefe, Yāresān
- Ahremen, 15, 17, 27
- Ahura Mazdā, 14, 15
- Alevism, 4, 29–30, 37, 59 fn. 84, 63 fn.  
111
- Alexander the Great, 17
- Ali, ix, fn. 1, 1, 3 with fn. 20, 21, 22, 25,  
29, 47–48, 50 fn. 42, 74, 78 with fn.  
24, 90 with fn. 85, 92, 136, 138, 142,  
149, 151, 152, 153, 156, 158 with fn.  
39, 159, 160, 162, 164–165 with fn.  
71; as manifestation of the Divine,  
90, 96, 116; descendants of, 59; the  
First and Last, ix fn. 1, 162 with fn.  
64; is God, 22, 90, 100 fn. 14, 143,  
144; and Soltān Sahāk, 151, 153; his  
sword, see *Zu 'l-Feqār*
- Ali-Ellāhi, 1, 3, 22, 24, 90, 116, 143
- Ālinezhād, Sayyed Khalil, 5 fn. 32, 69,  
90, 149–167
- Āli Qalandar, 36 fn. 30, 39, 41, 77, 161;  
~i *khāndān*, 41, 149; *Kalām-e*, 128
- Almās Beg (Almās Khān, Khān Almās),  
33 fn. 13, 41, 56, 76 with fn. 11, 96,  
130. *Daftar* of, 129
- Almāsbeği, family of Sayyeds, 41
- Ameretāt, 10
- Amesha Spenta*, 10, 11, 14, 27, 87; see  
also Heptad
- Anāhitā, 10, 14, 15, 17, 87
- Anfāl campaign, 70
- Ardabil, 35; Sheykh Safi ~i, 171
- Ārmaiti, 10
- Ashi, 10
- Aśvina, 10; see also Twin Gods
- Ātash Beg (Khān Ātash), 41, 56, 130
- Ātashbeği *khāndān*, 41, 42, 64, 148
- Avesta, 9, 10, 12, 54 fn. 60, 86, 90, 95,  
135; *Khorde* ~, 124 fn. 22
- Avestan, 10, 16, 23 fn. 50
- Awwal o Ākher Yār*, ix, 99, 100, 143
- Azerbaijan, 1, 2, 23, 32, 34, 57, 69, 94
- Bābā Heydari *khāndān*, 36 fn. 30, 40, 41
- Bābā Jalil, 48, 50, 140; *Dowre-ye*, 125,  
170
- Bābā Nā'us, 48, 52–53, 139; *Dowre-ye*,  
125, 170
- Bābā Sarhang, 45, 48, 50, 125; (*Dowre-ye*), 170
- Bābā Yādegār, 33, 39, 40, 41, 42, 49, 54–  
56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 64 with fn. 113,  
77, 85 with fn. 60, 87, 94, 108 fn. 41,  
114, 121, 126; Sanctuary of, 33;  
*Dowre* of, 122; *Kalām-e*, 172
- Bābā Yādegāri *khāndān*(s), 36 fn. 30, 39–  
40, 41, 57, 63, 64, 75; Tensions and  
differences with Shāh Ebrāhimis, 39,  
41, 56, 60, 63, 67–68, 76, 126; see  
also 'Orientation'

- Bābak, 21 fn. 38, 23  
 Babu Isi *khāndān*, 40  
 Baghdad, 49, 55, 63, 141  
*Baġlama*, 29; see also Sāz  
 Bahrām, 86; see also Verethraghna;  
 Bahram Elahi see under Elahi  
 Bājalān, 32 fn. 5, 34  
 Barzanje'i, see Sheykh Isā Barzanje'i  
 Barzinja, 33, 144, 145; *Dowre-ye*, 170  
*Baste*, 16, 34 fn. 19, 84 fn. 3  
*Bāten* ('Inner'), 6, 15, 26, 43, 73, 76, 87,  
 122, 127, 141, 159, 162  
*Bāteni*, 21  
*Bayāwbas* (*Bayābas*, *Bayāwbast*), 80 with  
 fn. 32, 84–85, 91, 92, 94, 95, 125,  
 136, 140; *Jam* of ~, 57; *Dowre-ye*, 91,  
 125; second ~, 84; *Perdiwari* ~, 84;  
 later ~, 84, 93; final ~, 93; ~-e  
*Sājnāri*, 170; ~-e *Haftan*, 171; see  
 also under Pact  
 Benyāmin, Pir, 34, 36, 46, 47, 53, 61, 63,  
 77, 82, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 91, 92, 103,  
 105, 108, 113, 125–126, 127, 137,  
 138, 140, 141, 143, 144, 146, 147,  
 166; the eternal Pir, 105; as the Devil  
 (*Sheytān*), 61, 88, 143, 146, 147;  
 similarities with Mithra, 86, 91; and  
 Mahdi, 166;34; Sanctuary of, 34;  
*Gawāhi-ye Pir* ~, 171  
*Birāy/Wālley Yāri* (Brother/Sister in  
 Yāri), 28, 30, 37  
 Boar, 10  
 Bohlul, 45, 48, 49, 50, 59, 123, 125, 145;  
*Dawray*, 170  
 Brāke, Sayyed, see Sayyed Brāke  
 Brother/Sister in Yāri, see *Birāy/Wālley*  
*Yāri*  
 Bruinessen, M.M. van, 4, 49, 52  
 Bull sacrifice, 17, 27, 81  
 'Caste', 36  
 Cautes, 10  
 Cautopates, 10  
*Chakide*, 37  
*Chasbide*, 32 fn. 8, 37, 42  
*Chāwdār*, 74, 142  
*Chehel Tan*, 77, 86, 91, 93, 122, 125, 140;  
*Dowre-ye*, 171; see also Forty  
 Persons  
*Chel Tan*, see *Chehel Tan*  
 Christianity, 18, 19, 27, 68, 90, 166, 168  
 Circle of Dāwud, 114  
 Clapping, 98, 100, 148  
 Cockerel, 40, 104; Sacrifice of, 101, 104,  
 110, 112, 148  
 Constitution of the Islamic Republic, 68,  
 166, 167  
 Conversion, 37–38; in Yezidism, 37; to  
 Islam, 19  
 Covenant (*shart-o peymān*), 84; (*shart*),  
 95  
 Creation Myth, 11, 15, 17, 80, 81;  
 Zoroastrian, 11, 15, 81; see also Pearl  
 Crone, P., 23–24, 25  
 Cycle, 12, 26, 43, 45, 46; of history  
 (*Dowre*), 6, 12, 26, 44, 45, 46–47; ~s  
 of (Stage of) *Shari'at*, 46–47; of  
*Tariqat* and *Ma'refat*, 48; of *Haqiqat*,  
 45, 53, 91, 122; ~s of texts, 44; ~ical  
 Time, 12; see also *Dowre*  
*Daftar* (text), 47, 48, 49, 51, 94; -e  
*Diwān-e Gewre*, 51, 55; -e *Haqiqat*,  
 95; swearing oath on, 123;  
 (notebook), 99  
*Daftardān*, 6, 117,  
*Daftardār* (epithet of Pir Musi), 122, 123  
 Dalahu, Mt, 33, 55, 63, 114 fn. 61  
 Dalil, 28, 31, 36 with fn. 30, 37, 38, 61,  
 91, 98, 101, 103, 104, 107, 123, 147;  
 see also *Farrāsh*, *Khādem*  
*Dāmyāri*, *Kalām* of, 128  
*Darwish*, 42, 46, 54, 58, 96, 130, 139  
 Dāwud, 36, 46, 47, 53, 61, 63, 69, 77, 78,  
 82, 85, 86, 87, 105, 108, 110, 112,  
 113, 119, 125, 126, 127, 134, 137,  
 138, 140, 141, 143, 144, 147, 148; as  
 the Devil, 61, 79, 86, 88, 91, 92, 134;  
 as Eternal Dalil, 103, 105; as *Rahbar*,  
 147; as *Moshkel-goshā*, 86; see also  
 Circle of ~  
 Dāwud Qoli *khāndān*, 38 fn. 46  
*Def*, 26  
 Demiurge, 27, 86, 90  
 Dere Tuy Mate, 61, 146  
 Devil (*Sheytān*), 88, 168; -worshippers,  
 67, 68, 168; Benyāmin as, 61, 88,  
 143, 146, 147; Dāwud as, 61, 79, 86,  
 88, 91, 92, 134; see also Satan,  
*Sheytān*

- Diaspora, 69, 71  
*Didedār*, 6, 26, 36, 65, 73, 76, 117, 127  
 Discourse, Yāresāni, 26, 44, 74, 75, 79, 85, 88, 90, 121, 165  
 Discrimination, against Yāresān, 68  
 Divisions, social, 31 *et passim*  
*Dowre*, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 84, 88, 92–95, 136, 170, 171; see also Cycle  
 Dualism, 79  
*Dunāduni*, 46, 78, 144; see also Metempsychosis, Reincarnation  
 Elahi, Nur-Ali, 4; Dr Bahram, 4  
 Eschatology, 96; in Zoroastrianism, 15–16  
 Eshāq, see Sahāk  
 Esrāfil, 83 fn. 50, 85, 87, 92  
 Essence, divine, 6, 38, 44, 48, 50, 51, 56, 57, 58, 73, 77, 78, 79, 85, 92, 94, 95, 96, 121, 134, 135, 136, 137, 155; see also *Zāt*  
 ‘Essentialist’ questions, 9  
 Evil, 14–15, 27, 79, 87, 140, 141, 144  
*Eyd-e Qorbān* and Yāri, 115  
 Ezrā’il, 78, 83 fn. 50, 85, 87, 92, 113, 137  
 Falakeddin, Sayyed ~ Kaka’i, see under Kaka’i  
 Falcon, 128  
*Farr*, 57  
*Farrāsh*, 61  
 Fast, 68, 109–112, 158; of Marnow, 109–111; of Qawaltās, 111–112, 145; Three-day ~, 109, 158  
*Fatwās* about Yāresān, 168–169  
*Forqān al-Akhbār*, 3–4  
 Forty Persons, see *Chehel Tan*  
 Four Angels, 45, 46, 79, 82, 83, 84, 91, 134  
*Gāthās*, 9, 10, 11  
*Gelim wa Kul*, 124, 125–126, 170, 171  
 Geography, 33–35, 131  
 Gewre-Sewar, see Mohammad Gewre-Sewar  
*Gholāt*, 21, 22  
 Girdle, 98, 101, 148; Sacred, 13, 16 with fn. 28; exchange of ~s, 37  
 Gnostic Movements, 18  
 Gobineau, J.A., Conte de, 2, 3, 82  
 Good and Evil, 14–15, 79, 87, 140, 141, 144  
 ‘Guest’, 6 fn. 36, 11, 77, 78; see also *Mehmān*  
 Guran (region), 1, 7  
 Gurani, Literary, 2  
*Haft Tan*, 14, 41, 47, 51, 56, 62, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 84, 85, 87, 88, 91, 92, 96, 108, 122, 126, 128, 134, 137, 138, 140, 142, 147, 170; see also Heptad  
*Haftawāne*, 41, 51, 62, 64, 79, 87–89, 108, 128, 137, 139, 141, 170, 171; *Dowre-ye*, 124, 170; *Peydāyesh-e*, 172; see also Heptad  
*Hajj*, 35, 158, 164, 165  
 Halabja, 1, 145, 146  
 Hallāj, Hoseyn Mansur al-, 24, 93 with fn. 114  
 Hamadan, 1, 32, 34, 35, 40, 112, 115  
*Ham-khwāni*, 99  
 Hamzeh’ee, 4, 40, 41, 50, 96, 111  
*Haqiqat*, 38, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 53–54, 78, 91, 135, 139, 140, 146, 167; *Daftar-e*, 95, 122, 135; Stage (*Dowre*, Period) of, 45, 122, 125, 128, 139, 140, 154; see also Soltān Sahāk  
*Haqq (Hazrat-e Haqq, Truth, God)*, 45, 46, 47, 53, 78, 79, 81, 88, 100, 127, 128, 134, 136, 128, 160, 163, 167  
*Haqqāni*, 120, 130  
 Hasan b. Ali, see under Imām  
 Haurvatāt, 10  
 Hawar, 61, 98 fn. 4, 146  
 Hawara Kon, 61, 146  
 Hawraman, 31, 33, 49, 52, 54, 57, 60, 91, 92, 110, 125, 127, 131, 140  
 Heaven and Hell, 16, 114, 129, 143, 144  
*Heft Surr*, 14; see also Heptad  
 Hellenistic cults, 17–18  
 Heptad, 26, 27, 41, 44, 51, 62, 79, 80, 85–87, 88, 89, 93, 134; see also *Amesha Spenta*, *Haft Tan*, *Haftawāne*, *Heft Surr*  
 Heresiarchs, 23, 58, 59  
 Heydari, Sayyed Nasreddin, 40, 58, 65, 94, 124, 142

- History, 1, 6, 20, 33 fn. 14, 96, 121, 125, 131; Cyclical, 6, 12, 15, 23, 26, 34, 45, 46, 58, 77, 78, 79, 84, 96, 123; Linear, 15, 79; Mythical and Factual, 43–71, 121; Early, 1, 34, 59; of the *Khāndāns*, 41–42, 60, 64; Yar. ~ in Iran, 5, 66–70, 138; in Iraq, 70–71; in the Diaspora, 71; of texts, 122; Religious ~ and Mythology, 75–76; of Religions (SW), 94; of the Study, 25; see also under Cycle, *Dowre*, Stage
- Holul*, 53, 129; see also Metempsychosis
- Hoseyn b. Ali, 20, 66 fn. 120, 67, 155, 158
- Hoseyn Beg Jāf (Hoseyn Jalad Jāf), 53, 54, 144
- Hosseini, Sayyed Fereidoun, viii, xi, 7, 88 *et passim*
- Imām (Emām), 21, 73, 151, 154, 155, 157; Ali, 144; Hasan, 139; Hoseyn, 161; Ja'far Sādeq, 154, 156; Musa, 144; Hidden, 21
- Imāmate, 157
- Indo-Iranian(s), 9; ~ Religion, 9–13
- Initiation, 37–38
- 'Inner', see *Bāten*
- Islam, 3, 5, 9, 14, 16, 18, 19–24, 80, 90, 95, 103, 109, 110, 115, 129, 135, 136, 146, 147, 154, 158, 168, 169; Yāri as True ~, 149, 150, 151, 153; see also under Isma'ilism, Khorramiya, Pre-Islamic, Shi'a, Sufism, Sunna
- Isma'ilism, 21–22, 126
- Ja'far Sādeq, Imām, 154, 156
- Jam, 29, 36, 37, 42, 61, 69, 70, 74, 76, 92, 97–100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 106, 107, 108, 110, 112, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 131, 142, 148; *Arkān-e*, 170; of Bayāwbas, 57, 92
- Jamkhāne*, 69, 70, 86, 101, 112, 113, 115, 131, 160, 164
- Jamshid, 91, 125, 138
- Jebrā'il, 80, 85, 87, 92, 137
- Jehād*, see *Jihād*
- Jeyhunābādi, Hājj Ne'matollāh Mokri, 3, 4, 31, 35, 38, 39, 41, 50, 65–66
- Jeyhunabadist, 35, 37, 38, 90
- Jihād* (*Jehād*), 158, 164, 165
- Joneydi *khāndān*, 38 fn. 46
- Ka'ba, 163, 164
- Kāka'i, 1 with fn. 1, 2, 32, 34, 37, 70–71, 74, 88, 89–90, 98, 102 fn. 21, 112, 141, 143, 146, 147; Family of scribes, 124; Perdiwari ~s, 61–62
- Kaka'i, Sayyed Falakeddin, xi, 5 fn. 35, 7, 62 fn. 102, 70
- Kāka'i, Seyyed Khalil Āghābāb, 74, 75, 78, 88, 89, 141–145
- Kalām(s)*, 2, 6, 7, 8, 32, 46, 47, 51, 62, 117–132; 133, 142, 143, 148, 170–172; Use of the term, xii with fn. 2, 43 with fn. 2, 117 with fn. 1; Contents of, 125–129, 161, 170–172; Collections of, 7, 123–125, 170–172; Cycles (*Dowre*) of, 44, 51; Perdiwari, see Perdiwari *Kalāms*; Non-Perdiwari, 129–130; Performance of, 116 119–121; Role in religious life, 121–123, 130–132; Structure of, 118–119; Gurani, 31–32, 64–65; Kurdish, 32; Persian, 32; Turkic, 7 fn. 39, 32–33; *-e Warzāwar*, 130
- Kalāmkhwān*, 6, 26, 131
- Kalhari, 31 fn. 3
- Kamānche*, 120
- Karaj, 1, 35, 69
- Kelardasht, 1, 35, 152
- Kermānshāh, 1, 7, 31, 31, 34, 54, 69
- Ketāb-e Saranjām*, see *Saranjām*
- Khādem*, 61 fn. 95, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105, 110, 148; see also Dalil
- Khāksār darwishes, xi, 2 fn. 12, 32 fn. 8, 37 fn. 40, 42
- Khalife*, 61, 91, 98, 104, 142, 148
- Khāmushi *khāndān*, see also Abu 'l-Wafā'i
- Khān Ahmadi *khāndān*, 38 fn. 46
- Khāndān*, 3, 36, 37, 38–42, 50, 55, 56, 61, 62, 63, 64, 67, 75, 103, 105, 111, 148, 151, 152; History of the ~s, 41–42, 60; Later ~s, 64; see also Bābā Yādegāri, Shāh Ebrāhimi
- Khāwankār, 85, 92; *Eyd-e*, 109–111
- Khorramiya, 16, 22–24
- Khurdanaye*, 24
- Khwarnah*, see *Farr*

- King (God), 51, 53, 55, 81, 83, 89, 100, 105, 118, 147; see also *Pādeshāh*
- Kurdish, ix, xi, xiii, 2, 32 *et passim*
- Kur-e bāten*, 73
- Lakki, 31 fn. 3, 33,
- Lori, 33
- Lorestan, 1, 33, 50 fn. 44, 34, 50, 51, 56, 89, 93 fn. 107, 139
- Ma'refat* (divine knowledge), 38, 46, 57, 79, 163; Stage of, 45, 46, 48, 49, 53, 93, 139, 146; *Dowres* of ~, 139; see also Knowledge, Stage, *Tariqat*
- Majāzi*, 120, 121, 130
- Majlesi*, 120
- Maku, 35
- Malak Tāwus*, 26 61 fn. 96, 97, 90-91, 134; Alevi counterpart, 29; see also *Tawusi Melek*
- Mani, 18
- Manichaeism, 18, 78 fn. 25
- Maqdisi, al-, 23
- Marriage, 67 fn 25, 148, 159; between Muslims and Yāresān, 169; taboo on ~ between Sayyeds and Morids, 38; taboo on ~ between Yāresān and outsiders, 38
- Mazdak, 23
- Mazhar*, see *Zohur*
- Mehmān*, 6 fn. 36, 77; *Zāt*~, 50, 77; *Dāwud*~, 78; *Pir-e Musi*~, 127; see also under Guest
- Metempsychosis, 53; see also *Holul*
- Mikā'il, 83 fn. 50, 85, 87, 92, 137
- Mir Khosrow, 89
- Miresuri *khāndān*, 40
- Mir-Hosseini, Z., 4, 5, 35
- Mithra, 10, 11, 13, 14–15, 17, 22, 27, 28, 61, 86, 90, 91, 109; Lord of the Pact, 84; see also under Benyāmin, Dāwud, Pact
- Mithraism, 4, 10, 11, 16–17; see also Mithras
- Mithras, in Roman Mithraism, 4, 16–17
- Mohammad, Prophet, 20, 21, 45, 46, 48, 50, 59, 94, 95, 128, 135, 136, 139, 154, 158, 162, 163, 165, 169; see also Mostafā
- Mohammad Gewre-Sewar, Sayyed, 87 with fn. 77, 137 with fn. 11, 139, 142, 143
- Mokri, M., 3, 4, 5, 39, 59, 124
- Monism, 79
- Monophysites, 18
- Moradi, Ali-Akbar, vii, 7, 77, 82, 120, 121, 129 fn. 36
- Moradi, G., 55
- Moral code, see *Rāsti*, *Pāki*, *Nisti*, *Redā*
- Morid, 25, 28, 32, 36, 37, 38, 41, 51, 103, 111, 114, 131, 152, 157, 160
- Moshkel-goshā*, see under Dāwud
- Mostafā (Pir), 47, 64, 86–87, 88, 92; name of Mohammad, 59, 95 fn. 115; as epithet of Ali, 95 with fn. 115
- Mostafā'i *khāndān*, see under Sayyed Mostafā'i
- Mortazā, see Ali
- Mourning, 66, 114; forbidden, 113; practised, 114
- Moustache, 28, 29, 35, 69, 146, 147, 151, 159, 160
- Mūsahiplik*, 30
- Musi, Pir, 34, 47, 53, 64, 76, 82, 83, 85, 86, 87, 92, 108, 113, 122, 123, 125, 127, 138, 140, 141, 144, 147, 148; Sanctuary of, 34; see also *Daftardār*
- Music, ix, xi, 4, 5, 6, 25, 29, 61, 97, 98, 99, 100, 115, 116, 117, 120; Sacred ~ in other traditions, 25–26, 29; see also *Bağlama*, *Def*, *Kamānche*, *Shibab*, *Tanbur*
- Muslim, Abu, 23, 27
- Mythology, 17, 18, 75–76, 85, 91
- Myth of Creation, see Creation Myth
- Namāz*, 103, 115, 169
- Nature, elements of, 87–88; in the Indo-Iranian religion 10–11; in Zoroastrianism, 14
- Nazm*, 97, 99, 100, 119, 121, 148
- Nazr*, 101–102
- Nestorians, 18
- Nisti*, 74; see also under *Pākii*
- Niyāz*, 103, 151; and *Namāz*, 169
- Nowruz, poet, 46, 74, 94, 111, 130; *Daftar* of, 129
- Nur-Ali Elahi, see under Elahi

- Nutmeg, 104, 105; Prayer of, 104, 105–109
- Oral Transmission, 8, 19–20, 81
- ; ‘Orientation’, 39, 40, 41, 55; *see also* Shāh Ebrāhimi, Bābā Yādgarī
- ‘Outer’, *see Zāher*
- Pact, 80, 85, 86, 87, 91; of Benyāmin, 86, 147; Second, 80; Final, 84; in Zoroastrianism, 86; *see also Bayāwbas, Shart-o Eqrār*
- Pādeshāh* (King, God), 55, 82; *see also* King
- Pāki*, 74; ~, *Rāsti*, *Nisti*, *Redā*, 74; *see also* Purity
- Peacock Angel, 27, 29, 61 fn. 96, 90; *see also Malak Tāwus, Tawusi Melek*
- Pearl, 45, 53, 79, 80, 81; 103 fn. 30; Second, 81; *see also* Creation Myth
- Perdiwar, 33, 34, 55, 60, 84; as place of pilgrimage, 146; Cycle of, 50; Community of, 63; Period of, 140
- Perdwari Kāka’is, 61–62, 141; beliefs of, 145–148
- Perdiwari *Kalāms*, 2, 7, 31, 57, 74, 94, 110, 111, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 124, 125, 130–131; Contents of, 125–129; *see also Kalām*
- Persian, xii, 1, 2, 24, 31, 32, 118, 142, 145, 148, 149; Middle ~, 11; Mithraists as ‘~s’, 16
- Pilgrimage, 33, 37, 114–115, 146, 163–164; Islamic, *see Hajj*
- ‘Pillars of Faith’, 74–75
- Pir, 31, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 51, 52, 54, 103, 105, 114, 142, 143, 151, 157, 160, 164; Bābā Yādegār as Soltān’s ~, 54–55; ‘Eternal ~’, 103; ‘The dead ~’, 139; Sayyed acting as ~, 38, 101, 142, 160; in Alevism, 29; in Yezidism, 28; Numbers of ~s, 92; *see also* Seventy-two ~s
- Purity, 74, 146, 157; *see also Pāki*
- Qawaltās, ‘Seven Friends of’, 92; Fast of, *see under* Fast
- Qushchioghli, 33
- Rahbar*, 86; 146; *see also* Dāwud, *Rēber*
- Ramzbār, 46, 47, 49, 64, 77, 85, 86–87, 92, 108, 137, 138, 147
- Rāsti*, 74; *see also under Pāki*, Moral code
- Rēber*, 30, *cf. Rahbar*
- Recurrence, 6, 75, 76, 78, 79
- Redā*, 74, *see also under Pāki*; Kākā ~, 51
- Reincarnation, 6, 12, 16, 18, 21, 23, 78
- Religious History, *see under* History
- Religious Knowledge, 12, 44, 76, 111, 117; and emotion, 97; and texts, 111, 117, 121–123, 134; *see also Ma’refat Resāle*, 2 fn. 12
- Resurrection, 84, 147, 156–157
- Rituals, 16, 97–116
- Sacrifice, blood, 101; *see also under* Bull Sacrifice, *Nazr*
- Sahāk, *see* Soltān Sahāk
- Sāheb*, of days and seasons, 113; ~ *Nazr*, 101 fn. 19
- Sahne, ix, 1, 5, 34, 35, 64, 65, 69, 90, 114, 115, 116, 149–169
- Sāj-e Nār*, 80, 84, 106
- Sanctuary, *see* Shrine
- Sar Sepordan*, 36, 40, 103–109, 143; *see also* Nutmeg
- Sarane, 55
- Saranjām*, 32, 124, 142, 143, 147, 148, 151, 152, 158, 159, 160, 161; Command of, 140; *Khorde* ~, 124, 171
- Sārli, 32 fn. 5, 34 with fn. 19, 98 fn. 4
- Satan, *see Sheytān*
- Sāwe, 1, 35
- Sayyed, 31, 36, 37, 38, 59, 60, 61, 65, 66, 76, 98, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 110, 111, 113, 115, 120, 123, 131, 132, 142, 148, 152, 160, 161, 164; -*e waqt*, 59; Endogamy among ~s, 38; acting as Pir, *see* Pir
- Sayyed Brāke, 6, 32, 40, 46, 56–58, 65, 77, 84, 92, 93–94, 129–130, 142; Cycle (*Dowre*) of, 92, 94
- Sayyed Falakeddin Kaka’i, *see under* Kaka’i
- Sayyed Fereidoun Hosseini, *see under* Hosseini
- Sayyed Habib Shāhi *khāndān*, 38 fn. 46
- Sayyed Mostafā’i *khāndān*, 37, 40, 63



- Sāz*, see *Bağlama*  
 Seleucids, 18  
*Serr-e magu*, 75  
 Seven Angels, 92; see also *Haft Tan*  
 Seventy-two Pirs, 92; see also Pir  
 Shabak, 32 fn. 5, 34, 70  
 Shāh Ebrāhīm, 33, 39, 40, 41, 42, 46, 55, 60, 62, 63, 64, 75, 77, 85, 87, 108, 126, 138, 139  
 Shāh Ebrāhīmī *khāndān*(s), 39, 40–41, 42, 57, 67, 75, 148; Tensions and differences with Bābā Yādegāris, 39, 41, 56, 60, 63, 67–68, 76, 126; see also ‘Orientation’  
 Shāh Fazl, 48, 49, 93 with fn. 11, 139  
 Shāh Hayāsi *khāndān*, 39, 40, 41, 64  
 Shāh Khoshin, 32, 33, 45, 48, 50–52, 83, 93, 123, 131, 139, 147, 148; and *tanbur*, 51  
*Shāhnāme*, 58 fn. 80, 120 fn. 14, 121  
*Shāhnāme-ye Haqiqat*, 3, 4  
 Shahrezur (region), 31, 33, 34  
 Shariyār (Shaliyār), Pir, 112; *Dawray-*, 170  
 Shahu, Mt, 33, 63, 92, 112, 140; *Noh Pir-e*, 92  
*Shamshāl*, 120  
 Shari’a, 19, 25, 48, 95, 136, 145, 158; see also Islam  
*Shari’at*, Cycles of, 46–47, 92, 138; Stage of, 44, 45, 53, 78, 91, 92, 128, 134, 135, 138, 139, 136  
*Sharr*, see Evil  
*Shart-o Eqrār*, 85; see also Pact  
 Sheykh Adi b. Musāfir, 25, 58  
 Sheykh Amir (Zule’i), 56, 59, 130, 138; *Daftar-e*, 129  
 Sheykh Isā Barzanje’i, 144, 151  
*Sheytān*, see Devil  
 Shi’a, 20–22, 25, 59, 66, 145, 168; Influence of, 151–152; Twelver, 21, 151; see also *Gholāt*, Islam, Isma’ilism  
*Shibāb*, 26  
 Shirt, sacred, 16  
*Shokrāne*, 103; see also under *Niyāz*  
 Shrine, 69; 114–115; of Bābā Yādegār, 33, 114; of Pir Benyāmin, 34; of Pir Musi, 34; of Shāh Ebrāhīm, 63; of Soltān Sahāk, 33, 114  
 Siyāwash, 77 with fn 15, 121  
 Social Organisation, 28, 30, 31–42  
 Song, 117 fn. 1; categories of, 120; ~-like texts, 119; of praise, 12, 155; see also *Nazm*  
 Soltān Sahāk, Soltān, 2 fn. 5, 28, 32, 33, 38, 39, 41, 45, 47, 49, 50, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 63, 68, 75, 77, 79, 82, 83, 84, 85, 87, 89, 91, 92, 94, 96, 103, 105, 112, 110, 114, 118, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 130, 137, 140, 142, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 150, 151, 153, 164; and the Stage of *Haqiqat*, 53–54, 92; Cycle (*Dowre*) of, 46, 47 fn. 14, 87, 92, 93, 122, 124; After ~, 62–66; Sanctuary of, 34; *Dowre-ye*, 125, 170  
 Sorani, 31, 53  
 Stage, of history, 44–46, 91, 138; see also *Shari’at*, *Ma’refat*, *Tariqat*, *Haqiqat*  
 Stone, in creation myths, 11, 82  
 Storylines, 117, 121  
 Sufism, 24–25, 44, 59, 153; see also Islam  
 Sunna, Sunni, 19, 20, 22, 25, 33, 50, 53, 55, 66, 127, 130, 146, 151, 153, 163; see also Islam  
 Swearing oaths, see under *Daftar*  
*Tak-khwāni*, 99  
*Tanāsokh*, see Reincarnation,  
*Tanbur*, 26, 29, 51, 62, 66, 98, 99, 100, 102, 111, 113, 120, 131, 134, 148; see also Shāh Khoshin  
*Taqiye*, 75  
*Taqlid*, 161  
*Tariqat* (Stage), 44, 45, 46, 48, 50, 52, 53, 93, 139, 146; *Dowres* of, 139; (brotherhood), 24; *Darwish-e ~i*, 46  
*Tawusi Melek*, 26–27; see also *Malak Tawus*  
*Tāyefe*, 1, 68, 142  
 Tehran, 1, 7, 32, 35, 57, 94, 112, 115  
 Ten thousand Servants, 92  
 Texts, sacred, 117–132 *et passim*  
 Thirty-Six Poets, 32, 56, 57, 58, 65, 77, 91, 94, 123, 129, 130  
 Time, concept of, 76 fn. 13; Cyclical, 12, 15, 23, 26, 44, 75, 79, 84, 96, 123; Linear trend in concept of, 79; End

- of, 15, 32 fn. 50, 87; Leader of the ~ (Age), 59, 60; see also under Cycle, Eschatology, History
- Tiri, 10
- Towhid*, 156
- Turkic, 32–33 with fn. 9
- Tutshami, 56, 47, 84, 114
- Twin gods, 10
- Veda, 9, 10, 11, 12
- Verethraghna, 10, 61; see also Bahrām
- Wakil, 103; see also under *Sar Sepordan*
- Waqf* deed, 59, 62–63 with fn. 107
- Weddings, 114
- Western Iran, Zoroastrianism in, 13–16; ~ian languages, 9
- Yādegār, see Bābā Yādegār
- Yāri*, xiii *et passim*
- Yezidism, 25–28, 37, 38, 59, 61–62, 120; and Yāri, 29, 37, 41, 43, 58, 60, 79, 96, 98, 103, 109, 114, 118, 146
- Yuga*, 12
- Zāher* ('Outer'), 26, 45, 76–79, 87, 88, 89, 122, 127, 162
- Zarathustra, 9, 11, 12, 47, 95, 128, 135, 138
- Zarde, 33, 34, 57, 60, 62, 63, 92, 99, 101 fn. 19, 139; *Kalām-e Kalle* ~, 126, 172; *Sarā-ye ~-ye Yazdejerdi*, 60
- Zardebām, 108 with fn. 41; see also Bābā Yādegār
- Zāt* (Essence), 44, 45, 54, 57, 73, 77–78, 93, 94, 95, 121, 127, 129, 130, 135, 136; ~-*mehmān*, 50
- Zazaki, 29, 32
- Zekr-e Ali*, 116
- Zohur*, 56, 76 fn. 12, 77–78
- Zoroastrianism, 17, 24, 27, 38, 45, 62, 68, 79, 81, 86, 87, 109, 113; in Western Iran, 13–16;
- Zu 'l-Feqār*, 22, 78, 92; *Daftar* of, 129
- Zu'l-Nuri khāndān*, 40
- Zule'i, Sheykh Amir, see Sheykh Amir