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Oral Tradition among Religious Communities in the Iranian-Speaking World

Khanna Omarkhali and Philip G. Kreyenbroek, *Special Editors*

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The contribution that various branches of "Oral Studies" could make to the study of non-Western scriptural religions is as yet largely unexplored. In the Iranian cultural sphere—where languages are spoken that belong to the Iranian branch of Indo-European, such as Persian and Kurdish—we find a number of religious traditions that were transmitted orally for a large part of their existence.

First, there is Zoroastrianism, the dominant religion of the Iranian world before Islam, whose relatively well preserved sacred texts in the Avestan language originated over 2,000 years before an adequate script was developed in the early-first millennium CE. The texts, therefore, have been transmitted orally for a very long time. Cognate with Zoroastrianism are three religions that originate in the Kurdish-speaking lands. Until recently the Yezidi religion forbade the use of writing for religious purposes. The sacred texts of Yarsanism were mainly handed down orally until a few decades ago. Finally, certain Iranian-speaking groups of Alevis in Turkey have long cultivated much of their cultural and religious heritage without the use of writing. Whilst influences from Islam can be detected to varying degrees in these traditions, their prominent non-Islamic components show a surprising similarity. Furthermore, orality plays a key role in the traditions of the Khaksar Order of Islamic mystics in Iran. The shared cultural elements of certain Kurdish-speaking Muslim and Neo-Aramaic-speaking Christian communities are currently being researched.

A range of different methodological approaches to the study of these religions is represented here. The editors have adopted a broad view of the concept of "religion" in mainly oral traditions. Several of the religions studied here have not developed an explicit theology, and the boundaries between "religious" and "non-religious" are vague. Religion is widely seen as tradition, and much of the tradition is felt to be religious.

The study of oral transmission in different cultures cannot be expected to produce prescriptive results and can only show what is possible in oral traditions. It is hoped that some of the features of the traditions discussed in this volume may resonate with researchers in other fields of Oral Studies.

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Introduction

Whilst the study of "oral verbal art" in the literary sphere is now receiving a certain amount of academic interest, much less attention has so far been paid to the dynamics of orality in the sphere of religion, not least in non-Western traditions.[1] Many specialists in such fields as religious studies and theology were trained as philologists, and some regard arguments based on orality with suspicion. This relatively discouraging academic environment, combined with the hazards of embarking on a novel approach and, in the case of the "great world religions," the vastness of the terrain to be covered and the minute contribution even the most successful piece of "oral" research could make, have led to a comparative lack of academic curiosity about the role of the spoken word in the history of religious traditions and the dynamics of their current developments.

In several branches of Iranian studies, however, demand created supply: in the study of smaller religious traditions in the Iranian-speaking world,[2] the role of orality became so evident that a growing number of scholars are now seriously engaged in the study of various aspects of orality in religious traditions. Several cultures in the Iranian-speaking world were either very slow to accept the use of writing when it came to religious texts, or did not have the means to develop a strong written culture. Points of focus in current research include the orally transmitted religious/cultural heritage informing the life of religious communities and the modes and implications of oral transmission of sacred texts, as well as those of the process of scripturalization that is currently taking place in some traditions. As will be seen from the articles in this volume, both research questions and methodologies represented here are varied and exploratory.

It should be pointed out here that the editors have adopted a very broad view of the concept of "religion" in mainly "oral traditions." Several of the traditions covered here have not developed an explicit theology, and the boundaries between "religious" and "non-religious" elements are vague. Religion is widely seen as tradition, and much of the tradition is felt to be religious. Texts with a moral or traditional component, such as Yezidi "laments" or wedding songs (see below), though not regarded as sacred, are definitely felt to be based on or related to "religion."

Two papers on the close cultural contacts between Christian and Muslim communities are included here to show that, in some largely "oral" cultures, linguistic and religious boundaries between communities are far more porous than in their "scriptural" counterparts.

Before the advent of Islam in the seventh century CE, the dominant religion in much of the "Iranian" world was Zoroastrianism. Sacred texts of that religion were transmitted orally from the second millennium BCE until sometime between the third and seventh centuries CE, when an adequate alphabet was devised to write their language. Because the Avesta, the sacred

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[1] For studies on oral verbal art in "Iranian" languages, see Kreyenbroek and Marzolph 2010. Despite its title, with which the Editors did not agree, the work does not deal exclusively with orality, but also with written literatures in modern "Iranian" languages other than Persian.

[2] The word "Iranian" refers to a branch of Indo-European languages including Persian, Kurdish, and other modern and ancient languages.

"book" that contains most of these texts, now exists in written form, manuscript-based philological research has long been the sole approach to the study of early Zoroastrianism, ignoring the immense importance of the role of orality in the early stages of the religion (Kreyenbroek in this volume) and disregarding the fact that orality continued to play a key role in the transmission of the texts later on (Cantera in this volume). In the traditional study of Zoroastrianism, the focus was mainly on the remote past. The immense value of oral history-type research as a way of discovering what religion means to modern Zoroastrians (Stewart in this volume) is only coming to light now (see further below).

Kurdish is an "Iranian" language among whose speakers we find a number of religious minorities,[3] including the Yezidis,[4] the Yārsān or Ahl-e Haqq, and the Alevis of Turkey. Most Yezidis reject any connection between their faith and Islam, whilst only some groups of Yārsān do so, and Alevism is generally regarded as being within the fold of Shi'ite Islam. Despite such differences in self-identification, Yezidism, Yarsanism, and the Alevi tradition of the Dersim area have a range of striking common characteristics that do not go back to Islam, which suggests they have common roots in the remote past. One of these common features is that music forms a key part of their religious life; in the case of the Alevis, so does dancing.

Yezidism was mostly transmitted orally until recently, and the tradition of teaching the sacred texts by word of mouth is still alive, showing many common features with what is known of oral teaching in early Zoroastrianism. The Yārsān believe they once had a holy book comprising their religious texts. In practice, only individual texts were sometimes written down in the past, and such manuscripts were handed down in priestly families as sacred objects, rather than sources of information. There is no evidence that such manuscripts or other written texts played much of a role in the transmission of the sacred texts until a process of scripturalization began in the late-twentieth century. For the respective roles of orality and writing in the tradition of the Alevis of Dersim more research is needed, though it has been shown that in Alevism generally the role of oral transmission far outweighed that of the written word until recently (see Şahin 2005:465-85).

The fact that only one contribution to this issue concerns a Persian-speaking branch of Islam reflects the state of the art in Iranian studies. This is the more regrettable because few approaches could contribute more to our understanding of Sunnite and Shi'ite religious groups in Iran, the Kurdish Autonomous Region, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan than oral-history type projects of the kind discussed by Stewart in this volume.

In the field of ancient Zoroastrian studies, methodological debates concerning orality are now emerging. For a time, the theories of P. O. Skjaervo, who seeks to apply the oral-formulaic theory of Milman Parry and Albert Lord to these religious texts, have found a certain acceptance, particularly from traditional philologists. Kreyenbroek's article in this volume challenges these

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[3] We are aware of the objections some people have against this term, arguing that it represents the view of a majority and may have negative effects on the communities concerned. However, not only do some of these groups use the term to describe themselves, but international efforts to ensure their safety in recent years have argued for the need to protect religious "minorities" that experienced the fury of the Islamic State (IS) or were likely to do so. As minority status plays a key role in the culture of these groups, this term will be used here whenever appropriate.

[4] Many Yezidis in the Caucasus reject an identification as "Kurds," and after the IS brutalities against the Yezidis in the past decade, there is now a modest tendency in other Yezidi communities to do the same.

views, arguing that the sources show that the early religious texts were carefully transmitted by priestly lineages and not extemporized on the basis of a known storyline (which rarely exists in the case of religious texts) and some well known passages frequently repeated as "building blocks." Cantera, on the other hand, accepts Skjaervo's theory in principle, but his contribution in this volume is not directly concerned with it. What he proves is that, when a written tradition of the Avesta had existed for several centuries, the variations in the extant texts can only be explained by postulating that oral transmission still played a key role.

In sharp contrast to these papers about the distant past, Stewart's paper deals with the many points that arose when she was conducting a research program on modern Zoroastrians in Iran based on oral interviews. The idea of qualitative oral research in Zoroastrian communities—in order to discover what the religion actually means to its followers—was first attempted by Kreyenbroek (2001) with a great deal of help from Sarah Stewart, who has now perfected both methodology and technique, suggesting that this approach may indeed have a future.

In the section on Yezidism, Eszter Spät, using her extensive fieldwork among Yezidis in Northern Iraq, describes in detail how the community uses the traditional genre of "lament" (*xerîbî*) to deal with its feelings about the IS genocide of the Yezidis of Shingal in Kurdistan.

Focusing on the Yezidi tradition in the diaspora, Stuewe analyzes Yezidi wedding songs performed in Germany. On the basis of Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope" (that is, the way meaning is put into words in a given time and space), Stuewe examines the Yezidi "village chronotope" (that is, the mental image of the good, traditional village life) in order to analyze how Yezidis in the diaspora construe their idea of a "good Yezidi."

Another ground-breaking and important article is Amy de la Bretèque and Omarkhali's "exploratory study . . . of the acoustic shape of the Yezidi religious hymns." Many of the main religious compositions of Yezidism, the *Qewls*, are performed to music; many of these *Qewls* have their own *kubrî* or "melody," some of which are analyzed here.

In the section about the Yārsān or Ahl-e Haqq, both authors focus on the tradition of the Guran region, which rejects any connection with Islam and has preserved many ancient traditions. This focus reflects the interests of two scholars who are actively engaged in research on this community at the time of writing and is in no way intended as a value judgment on this and other Yārsān communities.

Kreyenbroek introduces the Yārsān and their worldview, discusses the problem of communicating with local informants whose vocabulary and categories differ from those used in academic publications, the process of scripturalization that is currently taking place among the Yārsān, and the various categories of "religious" texts.

Hooshmandrad uses the rich experience she gained over many years of fieldwork focusing on the musical tradition of the Yārsān of Guran, to offer fascinating insights into the interplay of music, text, and meaning during religious performances.

For the section on Alevism, we were fortunate to secure the collaboration of two scholars whose contributions throw important new light on aspects of Alevi culture. Gezik has offered us his translation of a story about the cosmogony by a member of the Alevi group of Dersim. The text is unique and illustrates the links between the cosmogonies of the Dersimi Alevis, the

Yārsān, and the Yezidis, by showing, for instance, that the Peacock Angel (Melekî Tawûs) plays an important role in Dersimi Alevi culture as well as in the other two traditions.

Arnaud-Demir's equally fascinating paper seeks to integrate the study of oral textual tradition, music, and dance among the Alevis, offering a dazzling new perspective on the potential links between dance and oral verbal art.

Raei, who has done important work on Islamic minorities in Iran, here discusses the 'Ajam dervishes, an interesting group of mystics who are Shi'ites and hold a special position among Iranian Sufis because they do not have a lineage of spiritual leaders (*selsele*); they are regarded as a branch of the equally mysterious Khāksār Order, which in turn has close links with the Yārsān. Raei analyzes their role in the transmission of popular Persian narratives, discussing performances that members of this group gave in public places such as coffee houses. These were influenced by the medieval, semi-religious concept of *fotuwat* (roughly corresponding to the Western notion of "chivalry"), whose importance for the understanding of some modern religious minorities is sometimes underestimated. The paper includes what is perhaps the first analysis of the social structure of this religious group, and the role which "men of speech" play there.

The two final articles deal with the interaction between Muslim and Christian communities in the Kurdish-speaking regions. The authors are part of a Moscow University research project on modern Neo-Aramaic (Turoyo), a Semitic language many of whose (Christian) speakers are in close contact with Kurdish-speaking Muslim communities. The audio recordings accompanying this issue include material related to both these papers.

Lyavdansky shows the close connection between these two cultures, using as an example a tale about the hero Mîrza Mihemed/Mirza Pamat in Muslim Kurdish and Christian Neo-Aramaic oral narrative traditions. Whilst the tales themselves are not religious in nature, the article illustrates the porosity of religious as well as linguistic boundaries in large "oral" cultures.

Furman, Kuzin, and Demir compare the Turoyo and Kurdish versions of a song about a Christian Bishop, Metran Îsa, discuss the historical background of this narrative as well as some linguistic aspects of the Kurdish version, and give short glossaries of relevant terms in both languages.

At the end of this introduction, perhaps we will be allowed to express some of our hopes for the future of this type of research. A fundamental question regarding changes in oral transmission of religious texts and subjects is not so much whether such changes occur, because we know they do; rather, further research is needed as to which aspects or elements of the tradition are particularly "predisposed" to changes and which are not. So far, this question has only been studied on the basis of the Yezidi tradition (Omarkhali 2017), but similar studies on other religious communities could give us a much better understanding of the dynamics of oral transmission.

As was said earlier, the potential value of qualitative oral interviews about the history and identity of religious groups or communities is enormous. Stewart (2018 and 2020) has shown that a strong sense of Iranian national and cultural identity is a key element in contemporary Zoroastrians' sense of religious identity. At the time of writing it would still just be possible, for example, to discover what mental image ordinary Iranians had of "Islam" at the time of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which might yield important new insights.

Whilst the oral-formulaic theory can be helpful where epic poetry and religion meet,[5] "sacred" poetic traditions in the Iranian-speaking world plainly do not rely on that type of transmission. It is clear that other ways of transmitting religious poetry exist, ranging from syllable-to-syllable memorization to verse-by-verse (Kreyenbroek forthcoming), from the use of archaic language to that of contemporary speech (or somewhere in between), from home tuition to studying with religious specialists—but we do not yet know nearly enough.

At the time of writing, traditionally conservative and mainly "oral" religions such as Yarsanism and Yezidism are either discussing or engaged in processes of "scripturalization." This generally means that the oral textual tradition is to be committed to writing so as to produce a book that is expected to be a counterpart of the Bible or the Qor'ān. Among the reasons for this development are the fact that surrounding religions possess a Holy Book; that such a book is believed to be a better source of religious authority than the oral tradition; and a strong sense that the "oral" is inferior to the "written." Although the scripturalization processes among the Yārsan and the Yezidis take very different courses, it is fair to say that both the followers of these religions and many Western academics could benefit greatly from a better understanding of—and more respect for—the complexity, rigors, and freedoms of oral transmission. More research among the older generation of transmitters, which again is still just possible at this time, may yield information about the earlier oral tradition that would be priceless both for believers and academics.

Our aim in editing this issue was to draw attention to the benefits of the study of oral religious traditions and the need for greater efforts in this field, in the Iranian sphere and probably others. To do so, we edited an issue that illustrates the variety of subjects and approaches in Iranian studies and, we hope, will show the inherent interest and importance of the subject.

Philip Kreyenbroek
Khanna Omarkhali
Special Editors, *Oral Tradition*, 35.2

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[5] Some heroes of the Iranian National Epic have the status of saints in the Yārsān tradition, and epic performances therefore can have a certain religious connotation.

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Early Zoroastrianism and Orality

Philip G. Kreyenbroek

Most readers of *Oral Tradition* may not be overly concerned with the oral transmission of premodern compositions. Those who study the religious texts of the ancient Zoroastrian religion, however, must now take the long period of oral transmission of these texts, and its implications for our understanding of its contents, very seriously indeed. A survey of what is now known about the history and transmission of these texts, therefore, has a rightful place in a volume on orality in Iranian cultures. The present article will offer a brief overview of academic approaches to the study of orality in early Zoroastrianism, Zoroastrianism and its background, the texts and their history, the Middle Persian translation of Avestan texts, the appearance of a written Avesta, the priestly transmitters of religious texts, the process of teaching and learning, and finally some other implications of the oral background of some of our texts.

Academic Approaches to the Study of Orality in the Avesta

Zoroastrianism is the main religion of ancient, pre-Islamic Iran, and still survives in Iran, India, Pakistan, and in the diaspora, mainly in Anglo-Saxon countries. The study of Zoroastrianism traditionally focused on the limited corpus of religious texts that have been preserved in writing. Among these, the Avesta, which is widely thought of as the sacred book of Zoroastrianism, in fact consists of a number of heterogeneous texts in an Old Iranian language (Avestan). Another group of texts is transmitted in a Middle Iranian language, Pahlavi or Middle Persian. Given the relative difficulty of reading texts in these languages, the study of Zoroastrianism was long left mostly to philologists, who treated the extant texts as if they had originated as manuscripts. It is now generally recognized, however, that all Avestan and many Pahlavi texts were transmitted orally for a long time before being written down. This recognition is not yet reflected by the scholarly attention given to this vital fact. Only a handful of contemporary Iranists are studying questions related to the implications of an early oral transmission for our understanding of these texts and, more generally, of premodern Zoroastrianism.

Among these, the Harvard Iranist P. Oktor Skjaervø is an adherent of the school of thought that regards the findings of Milman Parry and Albert Lord, based on a Serbo-Croat epic

tradition, as prescriptive laws informing all oral composition.[1] His attempts to apply the "principles of oral literature" (Skjaervø 1994:205) to the Avesta resulted in several articles, one of which, "Hymnic Composition in the Avesta" (Skjaervø 1994), was praised by the French Iranist Jean Kellens because: "It proposes a scheme of the history of the Avestan texts based on the common laws of oral literatures" (1998:490).[2] These two philologists, in other words, have accepted a generalization of Parry and Lord's theories and proceeded deductively to apply theories based on the practices of modern Serbo-Croat epic poets to the religious traditions of the ancient Iranians. The problem, in my view, is not only that the Avestan texts are not epic poetry, but also that in the case of Zoroastrian texts we are dealing with questions of transmission rather than composition. Priests were painstakingly trained to recite these religious texts without a single error or deviation from the text as they were taught it. As is well known, even such measures cannot guarantee that a text remains unaltered indefinitely, but the conditions are far removed from those of Serbo-Croat bards. The findings of Parry and Lord, in short, simply do not apply here.

Another approach can be found in the work of Almut Hinze, some of whose work seeks to ascertain to what extent principles or techniques that are found in other oral traditions are applicable to the parts of the Avesta. In her article "On the Literary Structure of the Older Avesta" she considers the question of orality and argues that the *Gāthās* (on which see below) are instances of ring composition (2002:39-46).

The present writer was trained as an Iranist and historian of religions. Apart from studying ancient Iranian texts, he has led an "oral history" type project on modern Zoroastrianism in India,[3] and studied the contemporary, largely oral religious traditions of the Yezidis and Yārsān (Ahl-e Haqq) of Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan.[4] His experience of these modern traditions led him to call into question the relevance of some of Parry and Lord's theories for "fixed" religious texts whose recitation contains no element of extemporizing, and which cannot by any means be described as epic in character. He advocates a more inductive approach to the study of oral traditions, seeking to learn the conditions governing the transmission and function of religious texts in each culture individually, and challenging commonly accepted views on the genesis and history of certain compositions. Elsewhere (Kreyenbroek 2015) he has shown that one cannot understand the ancient Zoroastrian tradition without assuming the existence of a strong and more or less uninterrupted, "priestly" tradition, informed by, but largely independent of, the transmitted texts. The results of part of his research in this area are presented here.

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[1] Skjaervø 2012:4, fn. 1: "The beginning of modern study of oral literature is often placed in 1928, which is when Milman Parry presented his two doctoral theses on Homeric style to the Faculty of Letters of the University of Paris. A couple of years later, Parry moved to Harvard University, where he continued his studies, but died of an accident six years later. By then he had acquired and trained Albert Lord as his student, who also became a professor at Harvard and continued Parry's work. Among Harvard scholars who have explored orality over the last decades is Lord's student Gregory Nagy, to whom I owe my own introduction to the field."

[2] Translation from French by the present author.

[3] See Kreyenbroek 2001, which was based on fieldwork in India during frequent visits, 1994-96.

[4] See, for example, Kreyenbroek 1995a, which was partly based on field research in Northern Iraq in 1992.

Zoroastrianism

The common ancestors of the speakers of Iranian and North-Indian languages are thought to have moved away from the wider group of Indo-Europeans perhaps around 3000 BCE, and to have developed a distinctive shared religious culture which continued to evolve when the group split up into "Proto-Indians" and "Proto-Iranians," perhaps around 2000 BCE. The Iranians reached their present homeland (modern Iran and most of the Kurdish-speaking regions to the west, and modern Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in the east) in the course of the second and early-first millennia BCE.

Zoroastrians regard themselves as followers of Zarathustra (Avestan: *Zarathushtra*, Greek: *Zoroastèr*), who probably lived in the eastern Iranian regions some time before 1000 BCE. Zarathustra was a learned priest in the Indo-Iranian tradition, who reinterpreted the meaning of traditional religious lore and preached that the iniquitous social conditions of his time were the result of a cosmic struggle between the powers of Good and Evil. He taught that it was the task of human beings, and the purpose of their existence, to align themselves with the powers of Good in order to fight Evil. In the course of time this message led to the genesis of a new "religion" (in the sense of a formal bond between men based upon their beliefs), which first spread and developed in the Eastern Iranian lands. Eventually Zoroastrianism also became prominent in the West under the Achaemenid dynasty (550-330 BCE), from the time of Darius I (ruled 522-486 BCE) onwards. Western Iran gradually became the center of Zoroastrian culture, and the place where the tradition that is represented by our sources developed further. After the defeat of the Achaemenids by Alexander the Great (330 BCE), Zoroastrianism lived on. It became politically influential again under the Sasanian dynasty (224-651 CE). With the coming of Islam in the seventh century CE, Zoroastrianism gradually lost territory, and by the tenth century it had been marginalized and reduced to minority status. A considerable community fled to India, where they eventually thrived and became known as Parsis ("People from Persia").

Texts and Traditions

The (oral) religious texts of the Indo-Iranians probably included hymns to praise the gods, and "mantic" poetry: by formulating a hidden truth in precisely the right way, it was thought, the poet might acquire power, more or less compelling the divine beings to do as he wished. Both these genres are represented in the Avesta. The *Yashts* (whose authors are not named; see below) are hymns of praise to the divinities, whilst Zarathustra's own "songs," the *Gāthās*, clearly represent the "mantic" genre.[5] Zarathustra formulated the Truth as he understood it, and thus sought to compel or persuade the divine beings to grant his wishes because of the truth of his words.

Over time, the *Gāthās*, together with another composition, the *Yasna Haptanghāiti*, became the core of the liturgy of the central ritual of Zoroastrianism, the *Yasna*. Other texts were

[5] On the Zoroastrian *Yashts* as heroic poetry and the *Gāthās* as magical formulations of truth, see Thieme 1957, especially p. 95.

added to this liturgy which, under the name *Yasna*, became part of the extant Avesta. The *Yashts* form another major component of this work, as does the *Vendidād* or *Vīdēvdād*, a long composition of heterogeneous texts which originally appear to have belonged to a learned tradition, but later came to be used as part of an extended liturgy. Another text that can be added to the *Yasna* liturgy is the *Vispered*, a somewhat repetitive, formulaic text.

An important difference between the *Gāthās*, the *Yasna Haptanghāiti*, and certain prayers on the one hand, and the other Avestan texts on the other, is the form of the language of the extant texts. The language of the first group appears to be much older than that of the second, which suggests that these texts came to be memorized very precisely (perhaps word-for-word or even syllable by syllable) at an early stage of their existence. A possible explanation for this is that they were regarded as particularly holy or powerful, so that the need was felt to repeat them exactly as Zarathustra may have uttered them. The language of the other texts, on the other hand, reflects a much later stage in the development of Avestan, and may have evolved alongside the natural spoken language for centuries. Still, the language of these Old Iranian texts stopped well short of evolving to a "Middle Iranian" stage, which suggests that they became "fixed" a long time before they were committed to writing in their present form (Kreyenbroek 1996:224-26). Until the emergence of a special "Avestan" alphabet some time under the Sasanians, none of the scripts commonly used by Iranians were capable of rendering the precise sounds of Avestan, so that any hypothetical early written text could not have been read from the page by those who did not already have the text by heart.

This state of affairs begs the question as to how and when the sacred texts, which must have been transmitted orally in a vast region over a considerable length of time and may therefore have shown a range of local variants, could come to be "fixed" in one particular form for further oral transmission. Given that children of priestly families began learning the texts by heart (following their own family tradition) at a very early age (see below), and given the poor communications at the time, it would have been practically impossible to make an existing priesthood give up the tradition they had memorized in favor of a newly instituted, unified "received version." The only way such a process is imaginable is a scenario where a small, authoritative group of priests taught these texts to another group of transmitters who had no prior knowledge of them. This would have been the case when Zoroastrianism first became influential in Western Iran, under Darius I.

At that time, the religious tradition of the Western Iranians, deriving from the Indo-Iranian one, had its own professional priestly caste, the *Magush* or Magi, while the earlier inhabitants of their land, the Elamites, also had their own professional priesthood, the *Shatin*. When Zoroastrianism became prominent in western Iran, its liturgical language remained Avestan, whilst the inhabitants spoke cognate but quite different languages (Old Persian and Median). The ancient Iranians, it seems, did not have the theoretical knowledge that is required for teaching a new language, so that it would have been very difficult for inhabitants of Western Iran to acquire an active knowledge of Avestan. At an early stage, the priests celebrating Zoroastrian rituals in Western Iran may have been immigrants who were native or at least fluent speakers of Avestan. When Western Iranian priests accepted Zoroastrianism and sought to continue their role as priests, they were presumably taught the texts by a small group of Avestan-speaking teachers (Avestan: *aēϑrapaiti*, Pahlavi: *hērbed*) and learned the texts by heart exactly as

they were taught. This means that, whilst they could officiate at rituals and recite the Avestan liturgy, they no longer had the capacity to add to or alter the memorized texts to any significant degree. As a result, the "Young Avestan" texts reflect a stage of linguistic development that is similar to that of Old Persian of the Achaemenid Inscriptions (fifth century BCE), which would be commensurate with a "fixation" around that time (Kreyenbroek 1996).

The Zand and the Written Avesta

In the course of time comprehension of Avestan became increasingly difficult for speakers of Western Iranian languages. The priesthood solved this problem by developing a simple way of translating the Avestan texts by using one standard translation for each Avestan word. Although not quite automatic, this relatively simple system may have been informed by the requirements of oral transmission. This translation, known as *Zand* or "exegesis," was taught as the basis of "advanced priestly studies (*hērbedestān*)."[6] Eventually, commentaries by prominent teachers became a fixed part of the transmission and were memorized along with the actual translation.

The *Zand* probably played a key role in the development of a considerable corpus of orally transmitted religious literature in Middle Persian. Some texts that had no known Avestan equivalent were nevertheless thought of as being based on lost Avestan originals (Boyce 1979:136-38). Others show a very limited percentage of Avestan texts with their Pahlavi versions, and consist mainly of priestly comments in Pahlavi. Only a few Pahlavi texts are attributed to a historical author; many were probably transmitted orally for some considerable time, with their language evolving with the natural language of their times. An exception, it seems, is the actual *Zand* of the Avesta, whose language has been shown to be more archaic in character than that of other Pahlavi works (Cantera 1999). This suggests that the text was either committed to writing earlier than other texts or, more probably, that it was taught with particular care. A final redaction of many Pahlavi texts probably ensued in the ninth and tenth centuries CE.

As was said earlier, in Sasanian times a system was developed for writing Avestan. This key development resulted in a written version of the sacred texts, which came to be thought of as a single "book," known as *Abestāg*, a word that may have meant "testament" (Sundermann 2001; other proposed etymologies also exist), and whose use may have been inspired by the Christian term "Testament," since no such book had existed in Zoroastrianism until then, and a name had to be found for it.

The Zoroastrian tradition soon adapted its narrative to the existence of a written Avesta by claiming that copies of such a book had existed in ancient times but were destroyed or stolen by "Alexander the Accursed," or Alexander the Great (Boyce 1984:114). Because only a limited number of manuscripts probably existed in Sasanian times and the traditional oral way of teaching and learning continued, the existence of a written Avesta does not seem to have profoundly affected the religious tradition as a whole for several centuries. In oral transmission,

[6] See Kotwal and Kreyenbroek 1992:15-18.

the testimony of the various Avestan texts could not easily be studied and compared, and perhaps because of this, all religious "judgments" by highly qualified priests were held to be equally valid even if they contradicted one another. There is no evidence to suggest that this approach ever changed during the Sasanian period.[7] Several centuries later, in the work of the ninth-century high priest Manushchihr, we see that theological thinking had advanced to the extent of accepting that only one opinion could be the true one; however, the only criteria cited in such matters was the number of qualified priests supporting the various opinions rather than, for example, an objective comparison of the contents of the Avesta (Kreyenbroek 1994:12).

Transmitters and Traditions

The Zoroastrian priesthood is hereditary. Sons of priestly families were taught to recite Avestan in their home environment (or at least by a family member) from an early age. Presumably, they were taught texts that were most likely to be needed in everyday ritual practice. As to higher priestly education, an Avestan text on this subject with Pahlavi translation and commentary, the *Hērbedestān*, has been preserved (Kotwal and Kreyenbroek 1992). This work (Herb.12-14)[8] states that "advanced priestly studies (*hērbedestān*)" entailed a three-year-long period of study with three different priests (Kotwal and Kreyenbroek 1992:62-63), a course of study that probably included memorizing more "advanced" texts, exegetical texts such as the *Zand*, a wider tradition of priestly knowledge (see below), and learning to deal with the religious questions and problems of the laity. There is evidence to suggest that, at an early stage in the history of Zoroastrianism, one of the main parts of the curriculum was a form of "exegesis" of the *Gāthās* and the most important prayers (Kreyenbroek 2015). This "exegesis," however, mainly seems to have connected words of the ancient texts with the fundamental teachings of the faith (for example, "God is the Lord"), rather than explaining the actual meaning of the texts. As was shown elsewhere (Kreyenbroek 2015), a more complex and wide-ranging system of priestly teachings must have complemented the information found in such texts. Later, when the *Zand* had come into existence, it can be shown that this word-for-word translation of Avestan texts, together with the priestly comments that had become part of the text, became the core of *hērbedestān* teaching (Kreyenbroek 1987), while the transmission of further priestly knowledge presumably continued in this setting.[9]

When studying the various discourses that constituted the "Zoroastrian Oral Tradition," one finds that these must have included at least three main categories, each with some sub-categories:

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[7] It was still adhered to under Khosrow I; see Kreyenbroek 1994:10.

[8] The following abbreviations will be used here: Av. for Avestan; Herb. for *Hērbedestān*; k. for *karde*; Ner. for *Nērangestān*; v. for verse; Phl. For Pahlavi; Y. for *Yasna*: Yt. for *Yasht.*

[9] *Pace* Skjaervø (1994:203 with n. 7), I do not think the later *Zand* was a direct continuation of the early form of exegesis exemplified by the *Bagān Yasn*. The ways of explaining the texts are fundamentally different; the *Bagān Yasn* connects parts of prayers with key beliefs; the later *Zand* essentially translates the Avestan texts.

1. Religious texts
    — Religious texts memorized verbatim
    — Religious texts in "freer" transmission
2. Priestly knowledge
    — Exegesis of texts
    — Wider religious knowledge
3. Lay discourse on religion
    — Discourse that repeated and confirmed traditional knowledge, myths, stories
    — Discourse on religious questions, prompted by priests

The fixed transmission of the *Gāthās*, and at a later stage of all Avestan texts, has been discussed above. Before the fixation of the Young Avestan texts, one question is how free the transmission of these texts was. As will be shown below, Avestan texts that were recited as part of a liturgy needed to be pronounced absolutely correctly, and priests were trained to be word-perfect. It is therefore unlikely that the transmission of these texts was very free. Given that the language of the texts evolved along with the natural language of its speakers, however, it seems likely that, instead of the extremely meticulous (syllable-for-syllable?) way of teaching the *Gāthās*, a somewhat freer method (perhaps line-by-line, or verse-by-verse; see below) was used.

Lay discourse on religion is rarely reflected by the texts, but the way priestly teaching could affect the laity is shown by the history of the movement of Mazdak, a sixth-century priest who pointed out at a time of famine that hoarding food and forms of social inequality ran counter to the teaching of the religion as represented by the *Zand*. His preaching led to a popular revolution in Iran, which initially caused the king, Kawād I (ruled 488-531 CE), to accept Mazdak's teachings. The traditional priesthood and the nobility positioned themselves against Mazdak, accusing him of heresy, and deposed the King. Kawād I eventually returned as king and gave up his support of Mazdak. The movement was then defeated by the king's heir, the later King Khosrow I (ruled 531-79), who had Mazdak killed (c. 524). Khosrow was evidently so alarmed by the potential results of popular religious belief based on the *Zand*, that he forbade the priesthood to teach the *Zand* to the laity.[10]

"Manthrification"

Whilst early "exegetical" texts seem to be rather perfunctory as regards the meaning of texts (see above), they stress the importance of correct pronunciation. The texts should be pronounced "without insertions or displacements [that is, of sounds, syllables, or words]." When one recites a prayer without error, this will help one to cross into Heaven (Y.19.5-6). The emphasis on proper pronunciation, rather than understanding, points to a reception of these texts as being effective primarily as pronouncements, rather than vehicles of meaning, a development that could be described as "manthrification" (from Av. *mąθra*, "holy pronouncement"). This trend continued or increased when the Avestan texts became harder to understand, particularly when the center of Zoroastrianism shifted to Western Iran. In later times at least, priests turned to

[10] *Zand i Wahman Yasn* II.1-4; see Kotwal and Kreyenbroek 1992:17-18. This ban was never revoked and probably played an important role in the developments that eventually led Zoroastrianism to become a mainly orthopractic religion.

the *Zand* (and presumably to the priestly tradition) for meaning, whilst the Avestan texts were perceived predominantly as holy pronouncements. A further consideration was that mispronunciation and other errors in the recitation were regarded as sinful (Herb.13).

The Process of Teaching and Learning

On the method of advanced teaching and learning in post-Achaemenid times, we find the following in a Pahlavi comment (Herb.13.4): ". . . if he (the student) pronounces it with him [the teacher] three times and he can recite it the fourth time, then it is considered that he has memorized it" (Kotwal and Kreyenbroek 1992:69).

According to an earlier text (Y.19.6), the oral learning process had four stages:

a. First the candidate spent time "concentrating (*fra.mar-*)" on a sacred text, that is, studying it without uttering it, probably by listening to the teacher's recitation.
b. Then he recited the holy words softly (*drəŋjaiia-*), careful not to make them sound like a formal utterance (where an error would be sinful).
c. After mastering this stage, he went on to recite (*srāuuāiia-*) the text aloud, formally but mainly in a ritual context.
d. Finally, he was allowed to perform (*yaz-*) it during a formal ritual.

Another relevant point is that the *Nērangestān* (26.1, 27.1) refers to the failure to recite the *Gāthā* texts for half a year as a punishable sin. This may be connected, in an oral tradition, to the need to keep repeating these difficult texts in order to avoid lapses. In contemporary (traditional) Zoroastrian practice the *Yasna* liturgy is still recited without reference to a written text, and some priests recite the *Gāthās* together informally several times a week so as to avoid errors.

Units of Text

Avestan texts (Y.57.8; Ner.5.1, 2) state that the *Gāthās* were recited "in verse-lines, in stanzas (*afsmaniuuąn vacastaštiuuaṯ*),"[11] which seems to reflect the way the divisions of these texts were perceived and formally recited (even though they might initially have been memorized syllable-by-syllable or word-for-word). This division into verse-lines and stanzas applies to other poetic Avestan texts than the *Gāthās* (that is, those that originally had a syllabic meter),[12] even though later changes in meter (perhaps the shift to a stress meter) obscured the original meter and led to additions which no longer followed the original poetic rules.

In many cases, a number of stanzas belonging together form a *karde* (Av. *yasnō.kərəti*, Phl. *kardag*). A *karde* generally has characteristic initial and closing formulae (for some

[11] See Kreyenbroek 1985:80.

[12] So Ner.6.1, referring to the "act of worship (*Yasna*)" generally.

exceptions see Hinze 2014). A collection of *kardes*, or other longer sequences of poetic texts, could be known by various names depending on the text they belonged to: in the *Yasna* such sections are known as *hāiti* or *hā*; in the case of the hymns to the Divinities (*yazata)*, each of these is now referred to as a *Yasht*.[13] In prose works such as the *Vendidād* and the *Nērangestān*, a "chapter" is called a *Fragard.*

That this division of poetic texts does indeed reflect the way such divisions were perceived and memorized is suggested by the occasional presence of a verse-line in more than one place; this occurs more often in the case of stanzas, and sometimes the same, or a very similar *karde* may crop up in more than one *Yasht*. This indicates that these units represented a reality in the perception of priests (minor differences between versions being due, one imagines, to variations in priestly transmissions in different localities).

The Origin of the *Yashts*

The extant hymns to individual Divine Beings show many variations. Some are extremely long (Yt.10 has 145 stanzas) and contain material that may go back to the Indo-Iranian past, while others are very short (Yt.21 has only two stanzas). In some of the shorter *Yashts* (Yt.16, 18), moreover, the text has no obvious relation to the *Yazata* to whom it is dedicated, and seems to be "borrowed" from hymns to another *Yazata*.

The sequence of *Yashts* to various divinities, and also other standard enumerations of divinities (*Siroza*), correspond to that of the *Yazata*s to whom the days of the Zoroastrian calendar are dedicated. In all probability, the Zoroastrian calendar was instituted in Achaemenid times (Hinze 2014). It seems plausible, therefore, that the extant *Yashts* were composed or compiled in Achaemenid times on the basis of existing texts (it was apparently not possible to compose new texts for calendar divinities for whom no such texts existed), and taught to the newly Zoroastrianized Western Iranian priesthood (see above).

In the *Yashts* the meaning of both verse-lines and stanzas is usually clear and coherent, and the same is true of most—though not all—*kardes*. The structure of many *Yashts* (that is, the sequence of *kardes*), on the other hand, shows a very different picture. There, the same passage may occur twice in the same *Yasht*, and again in a different hymn.[14] Contradictory images occur next to each other,[15] while *kardes* dealing with the same aspect of a *Yazata*'s nature may be strewn more or less all over a *Yasht* interspersed with *kardes* dealing with other aspects of his or her personality.[16] It is interesting to note that the passage found in Yt.10.31-34, and again in

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[13] In the texts themselves, the word *yasht* may refer to what is now known as a *Yasna.*

[14] For example, Yt.10, k.8.v.31, k.13.v.56; Yt.10.v.55 is partly repeated in Yt.8 and Y.11.

[15] For example, Yt.10.31, where Mithra is invoked by name, and v.55 (= v.74), where he complains that men do not call him by name; v.55 is followed by v.56 (= v.31); in Yt.19, the divinity Ardwīsūr is described both as a river and as a statue.

[16] For example, Mithra's warlike aspects are stressed in Yt.10.k.2; k.3 (which repeats part of k.2); k.5, second half; k.9; k.11; k.18; k.19, second half; k.28; k.31, second half; k.33. The *kardes* between these texts mostly deal with other aspects of Mithra's being.

v.56-59, may originally have been an independent prayer to Mithra.

It seems legitimate, in view of all this, to wonder whether the original texts used to praise the *Yazatas* were not much shorter than our extant *Yashts*, and may in fact have consisted of one or more *kardes*. This would explain the use of the relatively short (seven stanzas) prayers (*niyāyesh*) to the sun and moon as *Yashts* for these beings; presumably the prayers were already well known and were not felt to require lengthening. The contents of longer *Yashts*, some of whose *kardes* or stanzas may appear more than once, often in slightly different forms, suggest that extant Avestan texts were collected, possibly from priests representing different lines of transmission, in order to compile the hymns as we have them now.

It may also have been at this time that some simple pious statements, to the effect that the great God, Ahura Mazdā, was superior to the recipient of the *Yasht*, or repeating other key teachings of Zoroastrianism, were added to compositions whose contents mainly praised the *Yazad* alone, parts of which may have originated in much earlier times.

Some Further Implications of Early Oral Transmission

It seems important to stress that, given the originally oral transmission of the texts, the state of the grammar of a composition cannot be taken to be an indication of its date of origin, as is often maintained by Iranist philologists. As was pointed out earlier, the language of many texts evolved for a long time before it was "fixed." Moreover, "learned" texts, such as the *Vendidād* and the *Hērbedestān* and *Nērangestān*, which were long transmitted by a single teacher to his pupils, typically show more grammatical "errors" than texts that were used in the liturgy, in which more than one priest always participated. In the latter case, the priests presumably corrected each other's mistakes, so that the texts remained grammatically purer.

Many Iranists have sought to assign a date to the composition of the hymns on the basis of their language. The notion that it is possible to establish a clear point of origin of most oral compositions may well be incorrect; it seems more probable that a core of ancient verses was added to (and perhaps partially omitted) over centuries until it was finally "fixed" in the Achaemenid period.

Oral transmission necessarily implies continuity. The fact that Zarathustra used mantic poetry of a kind that goes back to Indo-Iranian times shows that an unbroken chain of transmitters of that tradition must have existed at the time of the prophet and taught him his craft. In ancient Indian poetry, the name of the composer of a religious poem is often mentioned (Jamison and Brereton 2014:9). It is extremely likely that this was also usual in the Iranian tradition before Zarathustra. The fact that no composers other than Zarathustra are mentioned in the Avesta can therefore be interpreted as a case of "conscious forgetting," perhaps informed by a strong sense of disruption caused by the exceptional status of the prophet and his "religion."

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On the Edge between Literacy and Orality: Manuscripts and Performance of the Zoroastrian Long Liturgy

Alberto Cantera

1. Today's Performance of the Long Liturgy

The Long Liturgy (later LL) is the main Zoroastrian ritual. The central part[1] consists of the recitation of the Gāϑās and the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti, a series of texts in Old Avestan, an Iranian language older than the one of the rest of the liturgy. In antiquity, this recitation was simultaneous with the pressing of a plant (known metonymically as *haōma*, "juice"), and an animal sacrifice, a small portion of which was then offered to the fire. In modern times, the sacrifice and the meat offering have been abandoned. This central section is preceded by an introduction during which the priest acquires the necessary qualification for the sacrifice, among others by drinking a previously pressed *haōma*. The whole is closed by the demand for a reward for the performance consisting basically of offerings to the fire (firewood and the dry residue of the pressing of *haōma*) and the water (a libation containing the *haōma* prepared in the central part of the ceremony).

A change in the self-understanding of Zoroastrians in Iran has shifted the focus from the ritualistic approach to a religious identity defined more in ethical and subjective terms (Mazdapour 2004; Ringer 2011). Furthermore, the celebrations in pilgrimage centers have increased vastly to the detriment of the rituals performed in the fire-temples. Accordingly, the importance of this liturgy has drastically diminished in the last fifty years, especially in Iran. The neglect, simplification, or substitution of rituals has had such an impact on their performance in Iran that we can affirm that they have almost completely disappeared. The text of the Yasna is sometimes read, mostly on the first day of the seasonal festivals (the *gāhāmbār*). The priests sit in front of a table and read the Yasna from a book, mostly from the description of the liturgy by Anklesaria (1888). The text does not even need to be recited in full, but may be abbreviated in different ways. Ritual actions have been reduced to a minimum.

In India, ritual practice has followed the same trend, albeit not to the same extent. Only the Yasna and Vīdēvdād (the latter mainly within the context of the ceremonies for the preparation of the *Nērangdīn*—consecrated bull's urine used for purification purposes) continue to be regularly performed. In contrast to what happens in Iran, the texts are not just read from a book, but recited from memory within the context of a ritual performance that includes similar

[1] On the structure of the LL, see Cantera 2020c.

ritual actions to those described in manuscripts that are several centuries old. Kotwal and Boyd (1991) have provided a description of the standard performance, the Yasna. Furthermore, several videotapes record parts of the performance of the Yasna as presently performed in India.[2]

2. The Sasanian Avesta: Deconstructing the "Sasanian Archetypes"

The Avestan texts preserved on manuscripts (the oldest extant ones dating back to the thirteenth century) are basically the same that are still being used in the LL and other Zoroastrian rituals. The exceptions concern mainly (1) certain variants that are no longer performed in modern practice, such as the Vīštāsp Yašt, (2) parts of former rituals that were no longer performed at the time of the extant manuscripts (from the end of the thirteenth century on), such as the Hādōxt Nask, and (3) two meta-ritual treatises, Hērbadestān (on the priestly teaching) and Nērangestān (a set of instructions for the proper performance of the rituals). Nowadays, the relationship between extant manuscripts and the Avesta as described in Pahlavi literature and the Persian Revāyats is problematic.

The eighth and ninth books of the Dēnkard and Chapter 28 of the Anthology of Zādspram, two works from the second half of the ninth or even tenth century, describe an Avesta that is quite different from the Avestan texts we encounter in the manuscripts.[3] They describe an Avesta of twenty-one books (*nask*) that were arranged in two different ways: according to the twenty-one words of the Ahuna Vairiia, or in three groups of seven books.[4] Their compilation is the result of a Sasanian rescue program instigated in their time by a Parthian and several Sasanian kings.[5] This rescue program was necessary, as Alexander's conquest had supposedly destroyed the written book of the Avesta, and seriously compromised the tradition.

Western scholarship has found difficulties in explaining the exact relationship between this "Great Avesta" and extant Avestan texts. Firstly, it seems that at least three-quarters of the original texts have been lost (Geldner 1896a:20). Secondly, the extant texts do not appear in the same arrangement as described in the Dēnkard. Only one of the twenty-one *nasks* has been preserved in the same arrangement as the one described in Pahlavi literature, the Vīdēvdād, with a further three in a similar arrangement, the Bayān Nask,[6] the Vīštāsp Sāst, and to some extent

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[2] J. W. Boyd and W. R. Darrow have recorded the film, *A Zoroastrian Ritual: The Yasna* (1982). It is a staged production that reproduces the parts of the Yasna during which ritual actions (and not simply recitations) take place. A further videotape recording of some sections of the Yasna was prepared under the direction of Khojeste Mistree. The ceremony was performed by Mobed Asphandiar Dadachanji and Mobed Adil Behsania at Vatcha Gandhi Agiary, Gamdevi, Mumbai, in 2013. A first complete video of another staged performance of the Yasna is being prepared within the context of the Multimedia Yasna Project.

[3] For summaries of the description, see Darmesteter 1892:III, x-xvi.

[4] Accordingly, if the Great Avesta has to be imagined as written, at least two different versions existed, in which the twenty-one books were arranged in two different ways.

[5] For a collection of the texts describing this process, see Bailey 1943:151-64; Cantera 2004a:106-63; Tremblay 2012:107-08.

[6] See König 2012.

the Stōd Yasn. Furthermore, we have some sections of the Huspārom: the Hērbadestān and Nērangestān. Other extant Avestan texts are either scattered among several *nask* or simply missing from the Great Avesta. Since the beginning of the study of the transmission of the Avestan texts, it has been noted that the key for the preservation is their ritual usage (Darmesteter 1892:I, xxxviii-xxxix; West 1892:xxxix), meaning that the texts were preserved because they were actually used in the rituals. Most non-ritual Avestan texts were therefore lost at an unspecified time, although probably after the end of the ninth century, as the Dēnkard contains almost all twenty-one *nasks* of the Great Avesta.

The idea has always been of two realities, although only Kellens (1998) has formulated it with clarity, drawing the corresponding conclusions: a Great Avesta, consisting of what the Sasanian kings were able to rescue from a supposedly older "Greatest Avesta," and a series of rituals. The differences among scholars concern the ontological position of each reality and its respective chronological position. The traditional view is that the ritual Avesta is a subsidiary collection extracted from the Great Avesta, and therefore later than that text. See, for example, the statement by X. Tremblay (2012:131):[7]

> L'Avesta est une constellation de compilations de textes le cas échéant étronçonnés ou transposés destinée à la liturgie, aussi dénuée d'unité stylistique qu'un Τυπικόν ou un Ευχολόγιον byzantin, uni seulement par la langue et la fin: accomplir soit le sacrifice qui donnera l'immortalité et la définitive sur les démons, soit les prières mineures qui permettent entretemps de contenir le mal. . . .

This understanding of the nature of the extant texts is combined with a view in which the written transmission has played a dominant role since the development of the Avestan script. Accordingly, the Great Avesta's reduction to the extant texts used in the liturgies is explained by the loss of manuscripts. Only one or very few copies of each text would be available, whereby the loss of a manuscript would mean the loss of a text (Hoffmann and Narten 1989:17). Although Bailey has clearly shown that the oral transmission continued after the beginning of the written one, and was even more prestigious than the latter, the history of the transmission of the Avestan texts has been explained as an almost exclusively written one.

Kellens (1998:477-83) has revealed the shortcomings of this view. Firstly, the surviving texts are not directly sections of the Great Avesta, so we must explain how the liturgical tradition arose. The loss of manuscripts of the Great Avesta cannot have led to the appearance of the extant manuscripts, as the texts are presented in a different arrangement than the one they

[7] The following statement by H. Bailey is also well known: "I may say that it is likely that our present Avestan texts go back to an edition after the fall of the Sasanian empire of the fragments saved from the first edition of about the middle of the sixth century A.D." (1943:193).

supposedly contained.[8] Secondly, the texts are not randomly arranged, but follow a ritual cursus. This argument has subsequently been further developed. Some years later, Kellens (2012) showed that the Avestan texts themselves followed a liturgical cursus similar to the one of the LL as it appears in the manuscript. This means that the liturgical cursus according to which the text is arranged already existed when the Avestan texts were composed in antiquity. Moreover, Kellens has progressively arrived at the conclusion that the text of the LL is a coherent and carefully arranged text. His new commented translation of the LL is a systematic attempt (especially in the later volumes) to reflect this coherence (Kellens 2006, 2007, 2010, and 2011; Kellens and Redard 2013).[9] Thus, Kellens substitutes the model of linearity (the linear transformation of the Great Avesta into the extant Avesta) with one of simultaneity. In Sasanian times, there were two parallel collections: the Great Avesta and the Ritual Avesta. The extant Avesta known from the manuscripts derives from the latter and has no relationship with the former.[10]

The flaws in the traditional model detected by Kellens are obvious, and the alternative he proposes will certainly be upheld. Nonetheless, the availability of new materials (the liturgical manuscripts through the Avestan Digital Archive and the Nērangestān through the new edition by Kotwal and Kreyenbroek (1995, 2003, and 2009)) have led to a better understanding of the liturgical tradition's historical development. Accordingly, Kellens' standpoint on the Ritual Avesta should be reappraised. Furthermore, a new understanding of the integration of the apparently non-ritual texts in the liturgies has prompted a new view of the relationship between the Ritual and the Great Avesta.

According to Kellens (2012), the ritual cursus of the LL is contemporary to the composition of the Avestan texts, but the arrangement of the texts according to this cursus as we know it probably took place in Sasanian times, before the invention of the Avestan script. However, it is highly likely that already in antiquity, at a time when Avestan was still a living language, not only the ritual cursus of the LL but also its texts were arranged in the form they still have in the manuscripts and in modern practice (of course, with the inevitable changes that a performance over centuries involves). The Avestan version of the Nērangestān[11] already followed the same version of the LL that is known to us through the manuscripts and modern practice (Cantera 2014:210-16). Furthermore, the variants of the LL attested in the manuscripts constitute a complex ritual system that adapts to different performative contexts. The creation of such a

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[8] Geldner also supposes a Yasna-liturgy from the Sasanian period onward (Geldner 1896a:18 n. 4 and 1896b:xxxiiii). The difference with Geldner is that whereas Kellens attributes the origin of the Yasna-text to the Sasanian period, Geldner thinks that the Yasna-text was arranged later. The distinction between the Yasna-ritual (the "*cursus liturgique*") and the Yasna-text also appears in Kellens, albeit dated some centuries earlier: the Yasna-ritual is already known to the composers of the Avestan texts and not only to the authors of the Middle Persian literature. The Yasna-text is Sasanian for Kellens, but post-Sasanian for Geldner.

[9] See also the review by Cantera (2016). Ahmadi (2018) argues against this. For a reply to his criticism, see Cantera 2020c.

[10] The idea that the extant Avestan texts represent a kind of "prayer book" has already been expressed several times; see Spiegel 1882:605; Nyberg 1958:23; Panaino 1999 and 2012:84-86.

[11] The Nērangestān has recently been made accessible in a reliable edition and translation by Kotwal and Kreyenbroek (1995, 2003, and 2009).

system in Late Antiquity, a thousand years after the demise of Avestan as a living language, is extremely unlikely.

Kellens' "Ritual Avesta," from which our manuscripts derived, consisted of two "anthologies": the recitative of the LL and the collection of short rituals (Kellens 1998:477, 479). He does not conceive it as a book, but as two "Stammhandschriften" with an independent transmission (Kellens 1998:488). Indeed, his "Ritual Avesta," the two "Stammhandschriften," suffers partly from the same problems as Hoffmann's archetype: it is a theoretical starting point for the written transmission from which our manuscripts stem, but neither the exact content of these anthologies can be defined nor the exact relationship between our extant manuscripts and this pristine composition. The Great Avesta is, for Kellens, a "réalité presque aussi théorétique que l'Avesta d'Andreas" (1998:488). The same could be said concerning the Sasanian "Ritual Avesta." How should we imagine the collection of the LL? Did it contain the description of one or all the variants of the LL? If only one, which one? How and when were the others copied for the first time? From which source?

In fact, the variants of the LL in Sasanian times were not limited to the Yasna, Visperad, and Vīdēvdād, as Kellens seems to assume, but many other variants existed, some of which have been preserved in the manuscript tradition: Vīštāsp Yašt and Dō-Hōmāst. Others existed, but they have been lost: the Bayān Yašt and the Hādōxt, among others. Moreover, did the "Stammhandschrift" contain a scheme of a neutral performance of a variant LL or the specific performance for a day and with a particular dedication? The idea of the "archetype" or "Stammhandschrift" of the LL does not sufficiently consider the LL's enormous dynamism (see below). The problem is compounded further still for the short rituals.[12] Does Kellens assume the existence of a sort of *Tamām Xorde Avestā*, even though there is no evidence of anything similar before the copy of Ms. E1? There is evidence that the *rituals* existed, and that at a certain point their descriptions were transcribed close to the oral transmission. But which rituals and what the manuscripts looked like remain purely speculative. The simplest hypothesis is that the manuscripts were not very different from the extant ones in their arrangement and disposition. The extant manuscripts do not form two collections, but a much more complex arrangement with at least three different categories (LL, *Drōn Yašt*, and minor rituals), with different types of manuscripts in each category. They reflect the three basic types of past and present rituals.

The liturgical manuscripts are not the scions of the two "Stammhandschriften"; instead, they continue a long oral tradition of describing the liturgies. Novices in the priestly schools learned the texts by heart together with the basic instructions for their proper performance. The ritual instructions could be learned separately from the texts as collections (as we find in the Nērangestān[13]) or together with the liturgies. No Avestan versions of these descriptions have survived, but they can be imagined because the *Nērangestān* contains the Avestan versions of certain instructions (Darmesteter 1892:I, xciii; Cantera 2014:191-92, 211-16). The Avestan descriptions were abandoned and substituted by the Middle Persian ones we know from the

[12] On the historical constitution of the manuscripts of the Khordeh Avesta and of the Yašts, see König 2012, 2015, and 2016.

[13] Chapters 28-33 contain summaries of these complete descriptions in the form they were transmitted orally.

manuscripts in Sasanian times, exactly in the same way as the ritual instructions in Middle Persian were later substituted in India by others in Gujarati. Thus, the manuscripts are simply written versions of descriptions of the liturgy that had been circulating orally since antiquity and continued being learned and recited in the priestly schools in Sasanian and early Islamic times. We cannot be sure whether the descriptions of the LL were all written down at the same time or not, and even less so whether or not they were all transcribed in Sasanian times. The answer depends on the assumed purposes for the transcription (see below). In any case, it cannot be ruled out (and seems indeed more likely) that different liturgies were penned at different times. The LL, as the longest one, is a prime candidate for being the first ritual to be written down.

Besides, Kellens does not clearly define the position and function of the Great Avesta. Its existence is beyond question, but the details of its contents escape us, and its existence as a written book is also uncertain (Kellens 1998:486, 488). The traditional view was, as we have said, that the Ritual Avesta derives from the Great Avesta. In my view, the contrary is true: the Great Avesta seems to be a rearrangement of the texts of the Ritual Avesta. There is a special performance of the LL in which dialogues between Ahura Mazdā and Zaraθuštra are inserted into the recitation of the central part of the LL, the Old Avestan texts (Cantera 2013b). This is the most likely context for the oral performance of any Avestan text that is not purely ritualistic, and which is presented as a revelation from Ahura Mazdā. The manuscripts preserve only two of this most complex type of LL (*Vīdēvdād* and *Vīštāsp Yašt*), and only the Vīdēvdād is still performed, and solely in India. The traditional view is that this kind of ceremony is the result of a late expansion of the LL through the intercalation of books from the Great Avesta (Modi 1922:350-51). Malandra even contends that the ceremony was an innovation of the Islamic period (Malandra 2000). However, the intercalation of these texts is not the only specificity of this type of ceremony. There are also differences in the standard litanies of the LL. One of the most significant ones is the substitution of the mention of the part of the day when the ceremony is performed, the so-called ceremonial *ratu*, a formula specific to each ceremony (Cantera 2013b; Martínez Porro 2022). The ceremonial *ratu* in the dative is for the Vīdēvdād *dātāi haδa.dātāi vīdaēuuāi zaraθuštrāi aṣaōne aṣahe raθβe*, and for the Vīštāsp Yašt *haδa.mąθrāi zaini.parštāi upairi.gātubiiō gərəptāi mąθrāi spəṇtāi aṣaōne aṣahe raθβe.* Consequently, ceremonies of this nature are unlikely to be later creations. They originated at a time when Avestan was a living language.

Within this context, the *nasks* gathered in the Great Avesta seem to be the dialogues between Ahura Mazdā and Zaraθuštra removed from their ritual setting, as we can see clearly for the Vīdēvdād. Furthermore, the central texts of the LL that served as basis for the intercalations were also compiled in a *nask*, the Stōd Yasn.[14] The Pahlavi literature classifies the twenty-one *nasks* of the Great Avesta into three groups:

[14] The special position of this *nask* among the others is emphasized through its highly prominent position in both arrangements of the Great Avesta: as the first *nask* of the first group, the *gāhānīg*, in the arrangement of the *nasks* in three groups, and as the *nask* corresponding to the last word of the Ahuna Vairiia in the alternative arrangement.

— *gāhānīg*: Stōd Yasn, Sūdgar, Warštmānsar, Bayγ, Wašti, Hādōxt, Spand

— *hadāmānsrīg*: Dāmdād, Waxtar, Pāzen, Ratuštāiti, Brih, Kaškaysraw, Vištāsp Sāst

— *dādīg*: Nigādom, Duzd-sar-nizad, Huspārom, Sagādom, Vidēvdād, Cihrdād, Bayān Yasn

Only two *nasks* are preserved among extant Avestan texts: the Vīdēvdād and the Vištāsp Sāst in their corresponding intercalation ceremonies, namely, the Vīdēvdād and the Vīštāsp Yašt. It has hitherto gone unnoticed that the word serving as a designation for the group of the corresponding seven *nasks* is precisely the first word of the ceremonial *ratu* of the corresponding ceremony. Thus, the Vīdēvdād appears in the group *dādīg*, and the first word of its ceremonial *ratu* is *data-*. The Vīštāsp Sāst, in turn, belongs to the group called *hadāmānsrīg*, and the first word of its ceremonial *ratu* is *haδa.mąθra-*. Accordingly, we may contend that each *nask* is a dialogue between Zaraθuštra and Ahura Mazdā inserted into the performance of the LL, and that the classifications of the *nasks* into three groups has a ritual origin: it is based on the common ceremonial *ratu* used in the corresponding ceremonies. It seems that there were at least three different ceremonial *ratu*, but one of them, corresponding to the ceremonies into which the *gāhānīg nasks* were inserted, has not survived, perhaps because these ceremonies have ceased to be held. In fact, it is likely that many of them were no longer widely performed even in Sasanian times. Hence the need to salvage the texts that were dispersed (the insistently repeated term *pargandag*) in the different regions by the different kings, starting with Valaxš and later by Ardašīr and Šābuhr (see DkM411.17). Clearly, whereas the LL's structure was familiar to the entire priesthood, individual priests did not know all the *nasks*, but probably just one or two. The best-known *nasks* were probably the most frequently performed, such as the Vīdēvdād. Others were known by only a few priests in certain areas. Hence, the story told in the *Abdīh ud sahīgīh ī sīstān* that after the destruction brought to Sīstān by Alexander the Great, only a group of women and children knew the Bagān Yašt (Bailey 1943:161).[15]

The rituals that originated during the Achaemenid Empire and spread over vast areas, probably through the institutional support of the Achaemenid kings, continued to be performed until the Sasanian period. Centuries of ritual performance, partly under foreign rule, led to some changes (despite the conservative nature inherent to oral traditions) and the neglect of certain rituals. The basic variants of the LL were not threatened, as their knowledge was part of priests' basic instruction. By contrast, the *nasks* were known only by a certain number of priests. Thus,

[15] The Pahlavi narrative of the different attempts to gather the scattered texts sometimes refers specifically to written texts. In the famous account of the fourth book of the Dēnkard, written texts are explicitly mentioned. Thus, Valaxš set out to collect the surviving fragments of the *abastāg ud zand* copied by Darius III, both the written texts and the orally transmitted ones (*har čē . . . pargandagīhā abar nibištag tā če uzwān abēspārišnīg pad dastwar mād ēstād . . . nigāh dāštan ō šahrīhā ayyādgar kardan framūd*, "he ordered to preserve and send as memoranda to the countries everything that was extant scattered in written texts including as well the ones orally transmitted by the *dastwar*," Dk4.16 [DkM412.7]). According to Dk3.420 (DkM406.3), Ardašīr gathered the books that were scattered (*ham nibēg az pargandīh ō ēk gyāg āwurd*, "he gathered and brought the books from the dispersion to one place"). Nonetheless, this information should be considered with caution, exactly like the information about the written Avesta of Achaemenid times (the one of Vištāsp on golden tablets, Dk3.420 [DkM405.17], Dk4.14 [DkM411.17], ŠE 3; or on parchment in golden ink, Dk53.2 [DkM437.17]; or the copies made by Darius III, Dk4.15 [DkM412.3]). These notes are anachronistic attributions to the past of the actual transmission modes of the time of the Dēnkard and all the other Pahlavi ninth-century sources. Within the Islamic context, they could at least in part be motivated by the interest to show that Zoroastrians have a protracted tradition (as already assumed by Bailey 1943:151).

those *nasks* that were less frequently recited (because the ceremonies in which they were embedded were more rarely performed) were almost or completely lost. Accordingly, some salvage programs were launched, although they were of only limited success in the long term.

The origin of the liturgical manuscripts is clear. They are the result of the progressive transcription of the traditional descriptions of the liturgies that had been transmitted orally since antiquity. The exegetical manuscripts in which the text of the liturgies or of some parts thereof were translated, first into Pahlavi and then into Sanskrit, require a different explanation. This is not the place for a detailed discussion, so I will simply outline the main stages in this parallel tradition. The archaisms of the language of certain Pahlavi translations of Avestan texts and other signs indicate that some of them had already been composed in the first centuries of the Sasanian era.[16] The translation was also orally transmitted. It is probable that not all Avestan texts were translated, but only the ones whose content was relevant. This excludes the litanies of the LL and many of the short liturgies. Translations were probably produced for the same texts that were integrated in the Great Avesta. They were, basically, the central texts of the LL and the *nasks*. Thus, the translation of the Vīdēvdād, the Vištāsp Yašt, and at least some Yašt, would be the heirs of the translations included in the Great Avesta for the corresponding *nasks*. The translation of the Stōd Yasn was extended to become a translation of the complete Yasna. This process probably occurred as late as the beginning of the eleventh century. The introduction of the so-called combined manuscripts (including ritual instructions and Pahlavi translation) describes the joining process of a liturgical manuscript with one containing the Pahlavi translation (Geldner 1886-96:I, xxiv-xxvii; Cantera and de Vaan 2005). The manuscript containing the Pahlavi translation was probably a manuscript with a Pahlavi translation of the Stōd Yasn, and the translation of the sections of the LL that were not part of it were produced at that time. The same process involved the translation of some of the sections of the Visperad that do not appear in the Yasna.[17]

In any case, it seems that no extant Yasna manuscript with Pahlavi translation continues a Sasanian tradition of a Yasna with translation, but without ritual instructions. The exegetical manuscripts of the Yasna belong to two different groups:

> 1. The first group includes a series of manuscripts copied in India in the nineteenth century, while harking back to an Iranian manuscript produced in the region of Kāzerun, a copy of which was sent to India, probably in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries (Cantera 2012c). These manuscripts include ritual instructions in Pahlavi that are similar to the liturgical manuscripts.
> 2. The second group consists of the manuscripts copied by Mihrābān Kayxōsrō in India at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth, as well as their copies. They do not include ritual instructions.

However, we have reasons to affirm that Mihrābān's manuscripts were also extracted

[16] See Cantera 2004a:164 ff., especially 220, where older literature is discussed.

[17] The latter clearly complements the non-Stōd Yasna-sections of the Yasna. The fact that it includes, for no apparent reason, only the sections until Y54 might indicate that the translation of the Visperad is not a traditional one, but created once and for all.

from a manuscript similar to the ones in group 1, including not only the Pahlavi translation, but also the ritual instructions. First, we find ritual instructions concerning the number of repetitions and the speaker. Second, whenever the manuscripts in group 1 include ritual instructions, Mihrābān has left blank spaces. What is more, some blanks are filled in ms. 510 (K5), with the expected ritual instructions written in red.[18] They are mostly the titles of sections or short instructions, such as the speaker or the position of the auxiliary priest when speaking. Sometimes, however, they are longer ritual instructions.[19]

These ritual instructions could have been added by a second hand, but even this would show that the blank spaces in the Yasna manuscripts written by Mihrābān were understood as corresponding to the texts written in red ink in the liturgical manuscripts. The absence of the red texts in Mihrābān may be accidental (it was intended to be copied later, but this never happened) or intentional (as the manuscript was not created for liturgical use, the ritual instruction could be omitted). In any case, the blanks show that Mihrābān's Yasna manuscripts derive from ones that also included the ritual instructions for the performance.

In sum, there has been a continuous ritual activity from antiquity through to modern times. The manuscripts are the scions of the description of the ceremonies that were learned by heart in the priestly schools as part of the necessary apprenticeship for the performance of the rituals, and not automatic copies from a Sasanian archetype either of the Great Avesta or of a Ritual Avesta. The content-oriented texts of the rituals were also learned together with their Pahlavi translation, especially the dialogues between Ahura Mazdā and Zaraθuštra that were intercalated in some performances of the LL. These texts were also separately arranged as structured collections. At least two arrangements are known: one after the twenty-one books of the Ahuna Vairiia and another in three groups of seven *nasks* each. This collection did not simply include the texts that were regularly performed, but is the result of several attempts to preserve texts that were under threat because their ritual performance was no longer common. The use of script would at least be a useful tool for the preservation of these texts, and probably not only for that.

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[18] A very interesting feature of mss. 500 (J2) and 510 (K5) is the numbering of quires in red ink. They indicate the end of a quire through the word *rāyēnīd* in 510 and *rāyēnīdag* in 500 at the bottom of the page and the number of the following quire in the left margin through the corresponding ordinal + *judēdād* <*ywdtyd't*> <<*abāg*>> *zand.* The indications are in red, and probably by a second hand. The quires consist mostly of twelve folios, but we find some of ten or even of nine folios, for example, 500 (J2) folios 5v, 17v, 29v, 39v, 51v, 63v, and so forth; 510 (K5): 10v, 22v, 34v, 46v, 58v, 67v, and so forth.

[19] An extraordinary position is adopted by a long ritual instruction that appears in Y8.6-7 in ms. 510 (K5):

> *wehēnīgīhā (?) tā gyāg srišāmrūtīg gōwišn srōšdrōn xwardan ud dahān pāk kardan ud dast pad pādyāb kardan ud abar barsom nihādan ud ašemwohū wehēnīgīhā (?) cahrušāmrūtīg guftan yatāhūweryō 4 guftan*
>
> Until the place where he has to recite three times (the Aṣəm Vohū). He should eat the srōšdrōn, make his mouth clean, wash his hand with *pādyāb*, put it on the barsom, recite four times the Aṣəm Vohū, and recite four times the Yatāhūweryō.

In ms. 500, we find instead a blank space. However, in the group 1 manuscripts, we find the same instruction with only a few textual variants, mainly a different spelling of the difficult word *wehēnīgīhā* and the end that says *yatāhūweryō bišāmrūtīg gōwišn*, "he has to say the Yatāhūweryō twice." Similar instructions appear in the liturgical manuscripts, too, but the wording of ms. 510 (K5) corresponds to the exegetical manuscripts in group 1.

3. The Invention of the Avestan Script and the First Manuscripts

When writing appears for the first time in an oral tradition, the function of manuscripts can be multifarious, together with the consequences its appearance has for the oral transmission. The manuscripts may appear as a tradent, an alternative to memory for preserving and handling texts in fading oral traditions, or as an instrument in the process of memorizing texts that continue being transmitted mainly orally, or as tools for the aural performance of a text, etc. Even within a tradition, manuscripts might enter into the oral tradition with different functions depending on the nature and role of the texts. We have reasons to assume that the introduction of writing pursued different goals for the tradition of the Great Avesta than for the Ritual Avesta.

Manusčihr, the head of the Zoroastrian priesthood in Iran in the second half of the ninth century, informs us in one of his letters that Wehšābuhr presented the twenty-one *nasks* of the Avesta to the priestly assembly organized by Xōsrō I at the beginning of the sixth century. The assembly agreed on it and, consequently, they were transcribed and sealed (NM1.4.17):[20]

> *wehšābuhr pad hanǰaman ī anōšag-ruwān xusraw ī šāhān šāh ī kawādān wīst ud ēkān ˣbazišnīhā ōwōn nimūd kū ōwōn menišn padiš ēstād hēnd u-šān nibišt ud āwišt*.
>
> Wehšābuhr presented in the assembly of the king of kings, Xōsrō, son of Kawād, of immortal soul, the twenty-one parts so that all were unanimous, and he wrote and sealed them.

In fact, Xōsrō I's reign is widely accepted as the most likely time for the invention of the Avestan script.[21] As a consequence, the twenty-one *nasks* of the Great Avesta were purportedly written down. The *nasks* had been collected a few centuries before, a last time during the reign of Ardaxšīr I (224-42 CE). According to the Pahlavi account, the collection of the *nasks* was accompanied by the creation of written copies, but this information cannot be either verified or falsified. The only certainty is that the extant Avestan copies do not hark back to these alleged copies produced in the third century, but were copied directly from the oral transmission when the Avestan script was invented. After their recovery, some ceremonies might have been reactivated, as seems to have been the case for the Bayān Yašt.[22] Other *nasks* were preserved for the importance of their contents as a source of authority in legal, ritual, and theological matters, but perhaps no longer used in ritual performances. These were probably taught and learned orally in the priestly schools, together with their Pahlavi translations, as we know was the case for the

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[20] See Bailey 1943:173; Kanga 1966:50, 56; Cantera 2004b:123. On this assembly and the transcribing of the Avesta under Xōsrō I, see Cantera 2004a:160-62; Huyse 2008; Rezania 2012.

[21] This is a widely accepted notion; see Cantera 2004:160-2; Cereti 2008; Huyse 2008; Panaino 2012:79-82. Tremblay (2012:117) proposes a slightly later date, between 550 and 630. Kellens (1998:488) used to postulate a post-Sasanian date for the invention of the Avestan script, Hoffmann and Narten (1989:34) a much earlier date because of the (incorrect) assumption that the inscription of a sarcophagus in Istanbul shows that the Pahlavi cursive (on which the Avestan script is based) had already adopted its form in the fourth century.

[22] At some point, it was known only by a group of women and a child in Sīstan (see above). Nonetheless, the Nērangestān describes it as a regularly performed ritual (Kreyenbroek 2008).

Vīdēvdād.[23] Several oral versions of the most popular ones were circulating simultaneously and competing with each other (Cantera 2004:220-29). The preservation in memory of so many *nasks*, some of them no longer in ritual use, and furthermore in different versions by different schools, posed a great risk of loss. Some of them were lost even after they had been transcribed, and before the end of the ninth century.[24] Accordingly, preservation of the many *nasks* (especially the ones less frequently performed ritually) might have triggered the invention of the Avestan script.

Furthermore, a corpus scattered among different priestly schools was difficult to control. Since the Avesta and its translation was one of the main sources of authority, one does not wonder that at some point there arose the temptation of limiting the freedom of interpretation, and the idea of fixing a canonical exegesis. Accordingly, Xōsrō proclaimed that the *zand* ("traditional translation and interpretation of the Avestan text") should not be taught out of the established agreement (ZVY2.4). His attempt at preserving and controlling the interpretation of the Avestan texts is no surprise considering the turbulent times caused by the Mazdakite movement that used the Avestan texts and their interpretation for political goals that threatened Xōsrō's position (Rezania 2012). The manuscripts were thus created for a dual purpose: first, they are a repository containing texts that were threatened in the oral tradition and in pursuit of completeness; second, they are authoritative, while seeking to define the canon for the proper translations and commentaries of the Avestan texts.

However, to that double purpose, the invention of the Avestan script would have been unnecessary. It is likely that Avestan texts were copied before the invention of the Avestan script in Pahlavi script, and even in others. Actually, the Avestan script has an almost unique peculiarity, as has been repeatedly emphasized, that is very illustrative about the main purpose of its invention:[25] its phonetic (and not phonologic) character. It conveys the impression that it was created for the faithful reproduction of orally transmitted texts, in contrast to the shortcomings of the Pahlavi alphabet, which works well for reproducing content, but whose reading aloud is nigh on impossible.[26] The Avestan alphabet consists of fifty-four letters[27] (but more might have been created[28]). It distinguishes phonetic nuances without phonological relevance. For example, it distinguishes fifteen vowels (*a*, *ā*, *å̊*, *ą*, *ǫ*, *ə*, *ə̄*, *e*, *ē*, *o*, *ō*, *i*, *ī*, *u*, *ū*), three palatal *š* (*š*, *ś*, *ṣ*), and

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[23] A complete English translation of the Pahlavi text and commentary of the Vīdēvdād has been published by Moazami (2014). For a partial edition and translation see Andrés-Toledo 2016.

[24] The Avestan text and the Pahlavi translation of the Wašti Nask had, indeed, already been lost when the description of the Dēnkard was prepared (Dk8.12), and the same is true for the Pahlavi translation of the Waxtar Nask (Dk8.6).

[25] Beginning with Morgenstierne (1942), who has laid the foundations for the present understanding of the Avestan script, and further developed by Hoffmann (1971 and 1986; Hoffmann and Narten 1989).

[26] There are three main reasons for this difficulty: (1) the use of one letter for several phonetic values; (2) the use of aramaeograms; and (3) its orthographical conservatism.

[27] Most of the manuscripts do not use all of them, but there are some letters whose usage is limited to certain types of manuscripts.

[28] Some more letters might have been created, but had disappeared before the time of the extant manuscripts (Ferrer Losilla 2016).

three velar nasals (*ŋ*, *ŋ́*, *ŋˇ*). For a content-oriented collection, the need for an accurate pronunciation would not have been a priority. The correct pronunciation of the Avestan texts is, however, extremely important for their recitation in the ritual performances (Morgenstierne 1942). We know that the differences in the recitation were enormous across the different regions of the Sasanian Empire. The magnitude of this problem can hardly be overestimated. Some years ago, a version of one of the most frequently used Avestan prayers, which is repeated several times in each performance of any ritual, was recognized by Gershevitch (cited in Sims-Williams 1976:75-82) in a Sogdian manuscript in Manichaean script dated around the tenth century. The pronunciation is quite different from the one reflected in the manuscripts:

Aṣəm Vohū in the Avestan manuscripts	*Aṣəm Vohū* in the fragment from Dunhuang
aṣəm vohū vahištəm astī *uštā astī uštā ahmāi* *hiiaṯ aṣāi vahištāi aṣəm*	[wrt]mwγštmyštʾy wštʾwštʾy wštʾγmʾytwrtʾʾy ʾγwštʾyrtm /urtəmwə(x)xuštəmištī uštāyuštī uštāhmāy iturtāi əxuštāyirtəm/

Besides certain "Sogdianisms," such as the palatalization *ištī* instead of *asti*, we find more significant differences. The most intriguing one is the preservation of the group *rt*, where the manuscripts show *š*. This letter appears where we etymologically expect a post-tonic *rt*.[29] The loanwords in Middle Persian show that at the beginning of the third century the pronunciation was *hr*, later *hl,* and by the time of creation of the Avestan alphabet a sound similar to /ʃ/. However, this evolution concerned only the pronunciation of the Avestan texts in the region of Fārs. In other regions, the pronunciation evolved in a quite different way, as the Sogdian version of the Aṣəm Vohū shows. Hence, it is very likely that the invention of the Avestan script reflected an attempt to generalize a specific performance of the rituals, even with a particular way of reciting the texts in Western Iran. The first manuscripts containing descriptions of the ceremonies might have been prescriptive: they probably respond to an attempt to create a homogenous performance of the rituals in the realms of the Sasanian Empire. Later, in the interplay of oral and written transmission, they would assume other functions, but the initial one seems, however, to have been purely prescriptive.

The transcription of rituals, on the one hand, and of a selection of the texts with their Pahlavi translation, on the other, did not put an end to the oral transmission. The rituals continued being performed without the use of any manuscripts. At least some of the *nasks* also continued being learned by heart in the priestly schools. Different schools kept their alternative versions and transmitted them orally, as the existence of such schools even in the *zand*-related ninth-century literature shows (Cantera 2020a). Yet this affected, however, the works that were most frequently required: the Vīdēvdād for discussion about purity, and the Hērbadestān and Nērangestān for questions concerning the ritual. Other legal treatises have not been preserved, probably because a compilation such as the Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān ("The Book of the

[29] On this letter, see Hoffmann 1986.

Thousand Judgements") assumed the authoritative role of the legal *nasks*, and because they lost their relevance after the first centuries of Islamization because of the change in the legal system. For some *nasks*, the Pahlavi translation without the Avestan texts was also learned by heart, and parallel versions with different arrangements and epitomes were also composed and learned.[30] Besides the content-relevant *nasks*, the *nasks* that were still performed were also learned by heart together with their Pahlavi translation, such as the Stōd Yasn and the Bayān Nask. Accordingly, the rest of the Great Avesta that has come down to us consists of a few *nasks* with their Pahlavi translations that are precisely the ones for which a sustained oral transmission can be assumed. The written Great Avesta has disappeared without trace. The texts that were assumed to have survived in written copies have been completely lost. The only texts that survived were those that continued to be activated orally and learned by heart for that purpose. Far from putting an end to the oral transmission, the manuscripts entered into a complex interface for the preservation and updating of the Avestan texts in ritual performance, in the priestly schools, and in the assemblies where theological, legal, or ritual issues were debated. However, for a long time they played only a secondary role there.

4. Manuscripts and Performance: The Role of Manuscripts in the Preservation and Performance of a Dynamic Liturgy

After the success of M. Parry and A. Lord's oral-formulaic theory (Lord 1960; Parry and Parry 1971), literacy and orality quickly developed into antithetic concepts. According to this Great Divide, literacy and orality became not only two different and mutually excluding ways of conceptualizing and transmitting texts, but even antithetic cultural forces. It did not take long for such a deep division to be challenged (see Finnegan 1973 and 1977). First, both concepts, "orality" and "literacy," have to be calibrated "by taking account in at least three areas: the tradition (whether Native American, Turkish, medieval English, or whatever), the genre[31] (as closely as one can track this aspect across traditions) and the nature of the documents" (Foley 1991). Furthermore, neither concept is mutually exclusive, as they often participate together in an interface for preserving and activating texts. These are the two ends of a "cultural diglossia" (Stock 1983), in which literacy does not simply supersede orality, but instead both constitute a continuum. As K. Reichl says, "in the orality-literacy continuum tensions and combinations in many shades and hues are conceivable" (2015:38). In Iran, for example, the use of writing was for a long time limited to administrative purposes and political propaganda. Its use was, however, widely excluded for literary and religious texts. This started changing in Sasanian times, but the progressive transformation to a chiefly written textual production and

[30] One surviving example is the Zand ī Fragard ī J̌uddēwdād (König 2010; Elman and Moazami 2014). This tradition also survives in the eighth and ninth books of the Dēnkard, with the former epitomizing the twenty-one *nasks* of the Avesta and the latter only three *nasks* of the *gāhānīg* group: Sūdgar, Warštmānsar, and Bay Nask, albeit in great detail. An analysis of the text of these two long epitomes in search of traces of literacy or orality is still pending.

[31] This aspect merits special attention in the studies about the oral production of the Avestan texts whose ritual performance involves a different performative frame than the epic texts, for example.

preservation was not completed before the advent of Islam, and even at that time the diglossia continued.[32] Third, texts are rarely exclusively oral or written. Orality and literacy might be involved in the composition, preservation, and activation of texts in a productive combination (Finnegan 1977:17).

The transition from orality to literacy is rather a complex process that is modulated in different ways in different traditions. In Ancient Greek, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed according to the rules of oral-formulaic theory by *aoidoi*. From the sixth century on, when script was introduced in Greece, *rhapsōidoi* simply recited the texts they had learned by heart in an almost identical way in each performance. They learned the texts either from other *rhapsōidoi* or from written sources (Reichl 2015:19). In Islamic tradition, once the *muṣḥaf* codex had been produced, at the time of the third caliph ʿUthmān (654-66), the text of the Qurʾān moved from the realm of orality to that of aurality: the written text was now read aloud in public. Moreover, the writing down of the text did not mean the end of its memorization. As T. Herzog says: "The Qurʾān itself is memorized to this day and comes fully alive only in oral recitation (as a text intended for aural reception), while the written book of the Qurʾān often only serves as a prop for memory and a guarantor of the correct recitation of God's word (with the exception of blind recitators, who of course have no written props)" (2012:31).

The same (or a very similar) premise applies to the Avestan texts of the LL. As we have seen, they are still being memorized in India and "come fully alive" only in the ritual performance. The Avestan texts were "composed in performance" according to the rules of oral-formulaic theory by priests with abilities similar to the ones of the Greek *aoidoi*.[33] After the end of the Achaemenid period, the priests developed into a kind of *rhapsōidoi* that performed in the ritual the text they had learned by heart and had to update according to very specific rules for each new performance. Like the *rhapsōidoi*, they mostly learned the text from other priests and reproduced them verbatim in the liturgy. To that purpose, they probably developed techniques similar to the ones of the close tradition of Vedic poets.[34] They might also have used written texts for the memorization, but there is no evidence of this before the invention of the Avestan script. The invention, despite its importance for the transmission, did not put an end to the oral transmission. Already Bailey (1943:149-68) has pointed out that the oral transmission continued even after the invention of the Avestan script, and was even held in greater esteem than the written one still in the ninth century. For the ninth-century authors, memory is more prestigious than the manuscripts as tradent of the texts.[35] This fits well with the external information that

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[32] For the refutation of the oft-assumed divide between the orality of the Middle Persian tradition and the Islamic literacy, see Vevaina 2015. A very illustrative collection of essays on the role of orality and the interplay with literacy in the literary history of Iran has been assembled by J. Rubanovich (2015).

[33] On the application of this method to the oral composition of the Avestan texts, see Skjærvø 1994, 1997 [2000], 1998b, 1998a, 1999, and 2012 .

[34] For an overview of Vedic techniques, see Kiparsky 1976.

[35] The Graeco-Roman world, among many other cultures, also knows a similar preeminence of memory (Cribiore 1996:42; Park 2009:65).

stresses that Zoroastrians did not use books, like the observations in the Syriac books collected by F. Nau (1927).[36]

Indeed, Bailey's oversight regarding the ritual nature of the Avestan texts meant that he failed to notice that the prestige of orality not only concerned the preservation in memory, but also the oral performance. He quotes the text *Panǰ xēm ī asrōān*, "The Five Virtues of the Priests," to show that "the trained memory is one of the necessary qualities for a good *dastaβar*" (Bailey 1943:158). The text, nonetheless, places the emphasis on the performance in worship:

> *čahārom yazišn ī yazdān rāst wāzagīhā narm naskīhā pad nērang yaštan*
>
> The fourth (virtue) is the performance of the ceremonies for the gods according to the ritual instructions with the correct words and the memorized *nasks*.

Even in modern times, the usage of manuscripts during the performance is not allowed, except for the Vīdēvdād ceremony. Although in Late Antiquity the learning of the *nasks* was one of the duties of priests and even educated laity,[37] their learning by heart by the priests was abandoned at some point. The question 65 of the Dādestān ī dēnīg informs us that a priest in formation did know by heart five *nask*. Nonetheless, this capacity seems to have vanished between the ninth and the sixteenth centuries. Already the Revāyat of Kāmdin Šāpur, written in 1559 (928 YE), informs us that the recitation of the ceremony until the intercalation of the first *fragard* proceeds without the use of a manuscript. When the main priest has to begin with the recitation of the words *mraōʇ ahurō mazdå̊*, "Ahura Mazdā said" (beginning of the first *fragard*), he then touches the manuscript with his right hand and reads until the end of the first intercalation. He should then continue reciting without using the manuscript, but before he does so he must wash his hands with purified water. This procedure is repeated at the recitation of any intercalation of the Vīdēvdād. By the sixteenth century, a manuscript was being used for the recitation of the *fragards* of the Vīdēvdād, but its use is limited to the longest part, the *nask*, whereas the proper ritual is performed without use of the manuscript. The manuscript is even considered an impure object in the ritual area. Thus, the priest has to wash his hands, polluted through the manuscript, before continuing the recitation after each use.

Liturgical manuscripts are basically excluded from the activation of the text in performance. Their role is somewhat confined, as in the case of the Qurʾān, to the preservation of the text and a prescriptive function as guides for correct performance. The latter seems to have been the main reason for the creation of the first liturgical manuscripts in Sasanian times (see

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[36] The information gathered by Nau and his conclusions were sharply criticized by A. Christensen (1936:515-17), but have been critically reinstated by Tremblay (2012:114-16).

[37] In fact, not only priests learned the ritual texts by heart, as stated in the text *Xōsrō ud rēdag*, "Xōsrō and the Page," where the page affirms that he has learned at school (*frahangestān*) a series of ritual texts including the most complex ones: the Yašt, the Hādōxt, the Bayān, and the Vīdēvdād (Bailey 1943:160). Apparently, the performance of rituals (even complex ones) was not an exclusive competence of the priestly class in Sasanian society. Anyone fulfilling a series of requirements, with some of the main ones including knowledge of the texts by heart and having the necessary ritual purity, could perform rituals.

above, section 3) and was never completely lost. Thus, the dismantlement of the Ātaš Bahrām in Sanjān during the second half of the fifteenth century caused a major break in the ritual tradition. Consequently, it triggered, on the one hand, the sending of letters (known as the Revāyat) to the Zoroastrian communities in Iran searching for advice and requesting liturgical manuscripts (Cantera 2014:154-62) and, on the other, the production of liturgical manuscripts in two Indian centres, Bharuch and Navsāri. In the former, Ardašīr Zīvā has created the first liturgical Yasna based on an exegetical manuscript copied two centuries earlier by Mihrābān Kayxōsrō (see below, section 5). In the latter, Āsdin Kākā produced a copy of at least each one of the main types of liturgical manuscripts, based partly on the manuscripts copied in India at the end of the thirteenth century by Rustām Mihrābān (Cantera 2014:153-54.). The instructive and prescriptive nature of the Indian liturgical manuscripts is informed by the fact that from the very beginning the ritual instructions were written in Gujarati[38] in order to instruct the Indian priests that did not know Pahlavi how to perform the ceremonies.

The prescriptive value of liturgical manuscripts depends on the prestige of their scribe. Famous scribes were commissioned to copy manuscripts that were especially prestigious and invested with exceptional authority. Accordingly, some priests were professionals that were invited to other regions to produce authoritative copies that might be used there. A well known example is the case of the brothers Frēdōn and Wahrom Marzbān, who lived in Kermān, but copied most of their manuscripts in Torkābād (Cantera 2014: 93-96). The sending of manuscripts from Iran to India during the period of the Revāyats must also be seen under the same light. The prestige of the copyists depends, of course, not only on their technical abilities in the production of manuscripts (calligraphy, binding, quality of the paper, and so forth), but also on their reputation as authoritative priests or the fact that they were in possession of prestigious old manuscripts that allowed them to know how the ceremonies should be performed. Accordingly, admired scribes not only copied authoritative manuscripts, but also had the authority to sanction other manuscripts copied by other less renowned copyists. The celebrated Frēdōn Marzbān, for example, sanctioned at least one manuscript of the Visperad and the Vīštāsp Yašt (mss. 2010 + 5010), copied by Mānušcihr Ardašīr, before sending it to India, as well as the Vīdēvdād manuscript 4025.

This explains two striking facts about the transmission of the liturgical Avestan manuscripts: first, most of the extant manuscripts were copied by specific families of scribes, and second, most of the extant copies of each class of manuscripts seem to share a common ancestor. Prestigious manuscripts were not only better preserved, but also more often copied. In fact, the vast majority of the extant Iranian manuscripts copied before the seventeenth century correspond to the family of Bundār Šāhmardān[39] (most especially to Marzbān Frēdōn and his sons). Even in the nineteenth century, the manuscripts of this group were still the basis for the production of manuscripts by Isfandyār Anuširvān. A similar situation applies in the first half of the eighteenth

[38] Notwithstanding, some manuscripts copied from Iranian originals kept the ritual instructions in Pahlavi. This is the case of the so called combined Yasna manuscripts (for example, mss. 400 [Pt4], 410 [Mf4]) and the copies of a Vīdēvdād manuscript sent to India at the beginning of the sixteenth century (from which five copies survive: mss. 4020 [Mf2], 4070 [K9], 4080, 4110, 4120), among others.

[39] About this family and the Pahlavi manuscripts they have produced, see König 2014; for this family's Avestan manuscripts, see Cantera 2014:93-96.

century, when most of the extant manuscripts were copied by a single scribe, Rustām Goštāsp. He had access to manuscripts by a branch of the Bundār Šāhmardān family, particularly the ones copied by, or in possession of, Gōpatšāh Rostom, some of which, like the lost manuscript Jp1 of the Vīdēvdād, had been copied by Frēdōn Marzbān (Cantera 2014:105). When Mullā Firuz spent some years in Yazd in the 1770s, Rustām Goštāsp's manuscripts still enjoyed considerable prestige. Accordingly, Mullā Firuz took several manuscripts copied by this scribe to Mumbai (Cantera 2014:175-78). One of the most important ones is manuscript D83, which contains a Yasna, a Visperad, several *šnūman*, and Drōn Yašt (Dhabhar 1923:14 -5), as well as three Khorde Avestā (Mf28, Mf29, Mf45) and a commentary on the Aṣəm Vohū (Dhabhar 1923:19-20.).

This tendency to preserve and copy especially important manuscripts is the most likely reason why all extant Iranian Vīdēvdād manuscripts hark back to one or several similar manuscripts copied by Šahryār Irdešīr[40] (Cantera 2014:96-104, 109-113), and why it is highly likely that all Vištāsp Yašt manuscripts go back to a single copy from which the ones by Rustam Mihrābān (at the end of the thirteenth century CE) and Xōsrōšāh Anušagruwān (in 1344) were made. We should not therefore conclude that the sixteenth century was a bottleneck in the transmission of the Vīdēvdād, and that only one manuscript was available. The same applies for the forerunner of all Vīštāsp Yašt manuscripts in the thirteenth century. Tremblay has expressed it perfectly through a biological analogy: "le prestige et donc le succès reproductif d'un individu puis de sa lignée, répété au cours de centaines de générations, finit par évincer totalement la descendance d'autres ancêtres" (2012:130).

A frequent function of manuscripts in many cultures is to support memory (see Cribiore 2001:213 and passim) and this, besides the prescriptive one, seems to have been a function of the Avestan liturgical manuscripts. The production of these kinds of manuscripts might have been much more abundant than the extant manuscripts suggest. Nevertheless, manuscripts copied for personal or family use and lacking the authority of the prestigious manuscripts written by certain families were not preserved over generations and were not copied outside the family, so most of them have been lost. Only manuscripts copied in the last phases of the transmission in the nineteenth century have survived.

The interactions between manuscript and memory are complex. Manuscripts might assist in the learning process, although at the same time they are conceived and can only be used by persons who know the texts, or at least important parts of them, by heart. Hence, the high number of abbreviations they contain that render the use of manuscripts possible only for readers that already know the text. Individual learning with the assistance of manuscripts has never superseded traditional oral teaching. The numerous abbreviations used in the manuscripts show, on the one hand, that the manuscripts could indeed be used only by persons who knew the texts and, on the other hand, the different focus of the sundry descriptions of the liturgies. The number and extension of the abbreviations depend on the variant of the LL they are covering and the type of manuscript. The text of the Yasna is the basic one, and its knowledge is presumed by the manuscripts of other liturgies. Nonetheless, even the Yasna manuscripts contain abbreviations that go beyond the ones of standard prayers. Thus, ms. 3 has:

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[40] A famous sixteenth-century scribe who has also copied an exegetical Vīdēvdād and a manuscript of the Dēnkard from which the most complete extant manuscript derives.

> *imą. haōmąsca. miiazdąsca.* tā ō ī ("up to") *huuarəštå. mąθrå. pairəca. dadəmahe. āca. vaēδaiiemahe.*

instead of the complete text:

> ***imą. haōmąsca. miiazdąsca.*** *zaōθråsca. barəsmaca. aṣaiia. frastarətəm. gąmca. huδåŋhəm. hauruuata. amərətāta. gąmca. huδåŋhəm. haōməmca. para.haōməmca. aēsmąsca. baōiδimca. imąm. aŋhuiiąmca. aṣaiiąmca. raθβąmca. ratufritīmca. gāθanąmca. sraōθrəm.* ***huuarštå. mąθrå. pairica. dadəmahi. āca. vaēδaiiamahi.***

It also abbreviates Y12.13-4, Y18.9-10, and so forth.[41] The abbreviations are much more important in other types of manuscripts. Manuscripts of the Drōn Yašt focus only on the sections that are different from the corresponding section of the Yasna (Y3-8). The same applies for the Visperad manuscripts, where we often find direct references to the manuscripts of the Yasna; for example, ms. 2010 abbreviates VrS0.5-10 with the indication *čīyōn pad yašt nibišt*, "As it is written for the *yašt* (=Yasna)."

The dynamism of the liturgy is a fundamental aspect of the complex interplay between manuscript and memory, but it has mostly been wholly disregarded. The activation of the Avestan texts in the ritual performance always entails an actualization of the text. The analysis of the liturgical manuscripts in recent years has revealed the dynamic nature of the Avestan texts. On the one hand, the LL can be performed in many different variants. On the other, each variant of the LL changes according to certain parameters in *each* performance. Each enactment differs from the previous one according to different parameters, such as the time of the performance and the specific god for whom the ceremony is performed.[42] This changing information is encoded in the liturgy's prose sections, a series of litanies that introduce the metrical sections (Cantera 2020c). Manuscripts comparable to the Christian missals, introduced in the thirteenth century, would have been needed for a full description of the different variants of the LL and their performance throughout the liturgical year. However, such complex manuscripts were never created in the Zoroastrian tradition, perhaps because of the exclusion of manuscripts from the performance. Thus, the priest needs additional information for this purpose that is not contained in the manuscripts. Nonetheless, except for the manuscripts of the Yasna, the manuscripts acknowledge, and partly reflect, the liturgy's dynamism. This aspect is essential for understanding the nature of the liturgical manuscripts.

The standard editions present the Avestan texts as static. The new edition of the Avestan

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[41] Not all abbreviations are of the same nature. Manuscript 40 is a modern and heavily abbreviated copy of ms. 10 (Mf1). It contains a Yasna and a Farroxši. It is one of the copies made at the end of the nineteenth century by Erachji Sorabji Kausji Mehrejirana from the manuscript in the collection of Mulla Firuz held at the Cama Oriental Institute with the goal of producing a copy of the original for the Meherjirana Library. The obvious interest of Erachji is the ritual instructions that are frequently more detailed in this manuscript than in other Yasna manuscripts. He therefore omitted large parts of the Avestan texts, simply copying the necessary portions of the text for correctly locating the instructions within the liturgy.

[42] The minor rituals do not contain this information in their own text (basically all the rituals included in the so-called Khorde Avesta or "small Avesta" manuscripts), because they were performed in combination with rituals in which this information is included such as the Drōn ceremonies or the LL.

texts we are preparing in the project Corpus Avesticum Berolinense seeks for the first time to reflect the dynamic nature of these texts, so that each ceremony is generated anew each time according to the performance parameters indicated by the user (Cantera 2019a). The variable texts are numerous (Cantera 2018). The text specifies three time coordinates at several moments of the performance:[43] the part of the day or *asńiia- ratu-*, the date of the celebration (day and month), and the seasonal festival or *yāiriia- ratu-*, if the liturgy is performed during one of the six yearly festivals, the *gāhānbār*.[44] The performance time sometimes has textual consequences beyond the standard time indications. This is, for example, the case of Y68.31 consisting of a collection of three quotations from Old Avestan. In Geldner's standard edition of the Yasna, we find the following text without further instructions:

vohū. uxšiiā. manaŋhā. xšaʊ̯rā. aŝācā. uštā. tanūm. [Y33.10c] (si bār "three times")
imā. raōcå̊. barəzištəm. barəzimanąm. [Y36.6b] (si bār "three times")
yaŋī. spəṇtā. ʊ̯βā. maińiiū. uruuaēsē. jasō. [Y43.7a] (si bār "three times")

Most manuscripts have exactly this text. Nonetheless, ms. 40[45] introduces the following instruction:

har gāh dārēd 3 bār guftan ud ka yašt nōgnāwar ayāb sīh rōzag har sē gāh ī nēmrōz ud aybārag guftan har ēk 3 bār

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[43] For a survey of the moments in the liturgy when this information is provided, see Cantera 2018:21-22.

[44] I have recently described the variations during the last festival of the year according to the *Revāyat of Kāma Bohra* (Cantera 2018:30-41). However, in the meantime, I have discovered a further one. In the Visperad and related ceremonies, the formula for "taking the word" (*wāz gīrišnīh*) used at the end of the Frauuarāne is, after the installation of the auxiliary priests, the "double taking of the word" (zōt *yaʊ̯ā. ahū. vairiiō. yō. ātrauuaxšō. frā.mē. mrūtē*. rāspīg *aʊ̯ā. ratuš. aŝāʇciʇ. hacā. aŝauuā. viδuuå̊. mraōtū*. rāspīg *yaʊ̯ā. ahū. vairiiō. yō. zaōtā. frā.mē. mrūtē*. zōt *aʊ̯ā. ratuš. aŝāʇciʇ. hacā. aŝauuā. viδuuå̊. mraōtū*.) instead of the one used in the Yasna (zōt *yaʊ̯ā. ahū. vairiiō. zaōtā. frā.mē. mrūtē*. rāspīg *yaʊ̯ā. ahū. vairiiō. yō. zaōtā. frā.mē. mrūtē*. zōt *aʊ̯ā. ratuš. aŝāʇciʇ. hacā. aŝauuā. viδuuå̊. mraōtū*.). However, some Visperad manuscripts indicate at the first Frauuarāne of the second Drōn Yašt that the standard "taking of the word" of the Yasna is used here, as well in the Visperad. The usual one in the Visperad is used here only when it is a ceremony for *gāhānbār* (ms. 2109, Cantera 2019b):

> *agar xšnūman gāhānbār bēd* zōt *yaʊ̯ā. ahū. vairiiō. yō. ātrauuaxšō. frā.mē. mrūtē.* rāspīg *aʊ̯ā. ratuš.* kardan hamrāspīg *yaʊ̯ā. ahū. vairiiō. yō. zaōtā. frā.mē. mrūtē.* zōt *aʊ̯ā. ratuš.* kardan agar ēzišn ī gāhānbār nē bēd zōt *yaʊ̯ā. ahū. vairiiō. zaōtā. frā.mē. mrūtē.* rāspīg *yō. zaōtā* zōt *aθā. ratuš*
>
> If it is the *šnūman* for the *gāhānbār*, then the *zōt* (should say) *yaʊ̯ā. ahū. vairiiō. yō. ātrauuaxšō. frā.mē. mrūtē.,* the *rāspīg* answers: *aʊ̯ā. ratuš.* The same rāspīg (continues with) *yaʊ̯ā. ahū. vairiiō. yō. zaōtā. frā.mē. mrūtē.*, the *zōt* answers *aʊ̯ā. ratuš.* If it is not a *ēzišn* for the *gāhānbār*, then the *zōt* (should say) *yaʊ̯ā. ahū. vairiiō. zaōtā. frā.mē. mrūtē.*, the *rāspīg* then *yō. zaōtā* and the *zōt* answers *aθā. ratuš*.

It is not clear to me why this difference should apply only to the Frauuarāne of the second Drōn Yašt, but the manuscripts indicate this alternative only at this point.

[45] Very likely a modern copy of ms. 10 (Mf1) by Rustam Goštāsp that I have not seen until now. This manuscript takes a very special position among the Yasna manuscripts because it includes more and longer ritual instructions.

> He should say three times the text of the corresponding *gāh.*[46] When it is a Yašt Nōgnāwar or Sīrōzag, then the three *gāh*, the one of Bāmyazd,[47] the one of noon and the one of *aybārag* (?) have to be recited, each one three times.

This instruction is better understood in the light of the instruction in New Persian we find in another manuscript of the Yasna, ms. 19:

> *agar hāwan bid vohū. uxšiiā. manaŋhā. xšaϑrā. aṣ̌ācā. uštā. tanūm.* agar raftwan bid *imā. raōcå̊. barəzištəm. barəzimanąm.* agar uziran bid *yaŋī. spəṇtā. ϑβā. maiṅiiū. uruuaēsē. jasō.*

> When it is *hāwan*, (he should recite) *vohū. uxšiiā. manaŋhā. xšaϑrā. aṣ̌ācā. uštā. tanūm.* When it is *rapihwin*, (he should recite) *imā. raōcå̊. barəzištəm. barəzimanąm.* When it is *uziran*, (he should recite) *yaŋī. spəṇtā. ϑβā. maiṅiiū. uruuaēsē. jasō.*

Regularly, the priest does not recite all three quotations, but only one depending on the time of the performance: Y33.10c in the morning, Y36.6b at noon, and Y43.7a in the afternoon.[48] The three quotations are recited only in special ceremonies with the dedication for Nōg-nāwar and Sīrōzag, but this is only rarely indicated in the manuscripts.

Moreover, each ceremony can be held for different gods or set of gods, and this involves more complex textual variations than the time of the performance. The selection of the god depends partly on the calendar date of the celebration, as well as on the purpose of the ceremony. The rules are complex, and an important part of priestly instruction. The dedication is always announced at the beginning of the liturgy and repeated at the end of each ceremony. Besides, the dedication appears as part of the litanies towards its end (Cantera 2018:25-27). The dedication consists of different parts:

> 1. Ahura Mazdā and the Amə̄ṣa appear in almost all dedications of the LL and the Drōn Yašt with only a few exceptions, such as the dedication for Sraōša, or sometimes for Miϑra;
> 2. the patrons of the corresponding part of the day;
> 3. the actual god(s) of the dedication;
> 4. the section for "all the gods," known as *vīspaēšąm*;
> 5. the *frauuaṣ̌i*-section, known as *aṣ̌aōnąm.*

Only the actual god of the dedication is mandatory. All the other sections might appear or

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[46] That is, the part of the day during which the liturgy is performed.

[47] The god of the dawn.

[48] This practice goes back at least to Sasanian times, as it is already alluded to in the Nērangestān (N29.6):

> *nōg-nāwar yašt-ē bowandagtar be kunišn u-š bowandagīh* vohū uxšiiā manaŋhā imå̊ raocå̊ barəzištəm barəzimanąm *ud* ẏahmī spəṇtā θβā mainiiū uruuaēsē jasō *har ēk 3 bār be gōwišn*
>
> The Yašt Nōg Nāwar has to be performed more completely. Its completeness consists of reciting each one of these texts three times: *vohū uxšiiā manaŋhā* (Y33.10c), *imå̊ raocå̊ barəzištəm barəzimanąm* (Y36.6b), and *ẏahmī spəṇtā θβā mainiiū uruuaēsē jasō* (Y43.7a).

not following complex rules that are never made explicit in the manuscripts, but are generally known by the priests. Furthermore, the number of possible dedications is high. They are mostly quite short, but some dedications are very long. Yasna manuscripts mostly contain the dedication of Minu-Nāvar. The Visperad manuscripts have the specific dedication for the seasonal festivals. Nonetheless, the latter often provide alternatives in some places (see below the example of ms. 2007). The information is, nonetheless, never complete and systematic. The Iranian manuscripts of the Vīdēvdād reproduce the ceremony for the god Sraōša, but sometimes an alternative dedication for Ahura Mazdā is indicated, although almost every dedication is possible, as the New Persian Revāyāt inform us. The manuscripts of the Vīštāsp Yašt are the most open ones. Most of them indicate in the first Frauuarāne that the dedication for the Daēna is required for the first performance of the day, but later on, every dedication is allowed (Cantera 2018:29 and 2020d; Martinez Porro 2022). At the rest of the positions where the dedication is expected, they just mention that the corresponding dedication has to be recited.

Some manuscripts try to complete, at least partly, the missing information regarding the dedications. The Yasna manuscripts by Rustam Goštāsp, for example, tend to include such information. His ms. 8, preserved today in the Fire Temple of Yazd and copied in 1706, includes, beside the Yasna, the Sīrōza and *šnūman ī Minu-Nāwar*. His ms. D83 at the Cama Oriental Institute is even more interesting (Dhabhar 1923:14-15). Beside a Yasna and a Visperad, it contains the Sīrōza and a series of Drōn Yašt from which almost only the dedications are copied (and the rest is abbreviated). I have recently seen a series of manuscripts of the Yasna at the National Library in Teheran (ms. 5-39196, 20570, 114-1689) that include a series of texts at the end similar to ms. D83. In fact, the longest dedication, the Sīrōzag,[49] is copied in a few Yasna (mss. 8, 19, 87, 252) and Visperad (mss. 2109, 2698) manuscripts, and in some Khorde Avestā manuscripts.[50] Furthermore, the manuscripts of the Drōn Yašt consist almost exclusively of long lists of dedications. However, in general, the impression is that the dedications, like the rest of the performative variations, were learned without the assistance of manuscripts for at least a thousand years after the creation of the first ones and that the partial inclusion of a list of dedications in the manuscripts is a late phenomenon, with the oldest example dating from the eighteenth century.

The presence of certain dedications entails further textual changes than just their bare text. The most relevant ones are two textual extensions when the dedication ends with the section for the *frauuašī*s: one is a text recited as well independently, called Stōm (Modi 1922:427-29). The other one is not known elsewhere (Y22.26-28 = Geldner's Y23.1-3). The latter is recited in

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[49] The Sīrōzag is a single dedication (and not an independent text that might be recited separately) that includes the patron of the thirty days of the month extended by three further dedications: (1) Haōma, (2) Apąm Napat and the waters, and (3) Dahmā Āfriti, a closing one for all the material and immaterial gods. Its relative success in modern manuscripts is due not to the frequency of its use in the performance of Drōn Yašt or Yasna, but to the fact that it is a kind of catalogue of the most frequently used dedications, the ones for each patron of the day.

It has traditionally been regarded as a text that has an autonomous existence. Even E. Raffaelli in his book on the Sīrōzag recognizes that it is a dedication, but refers to it as "its ritual recitation," assuming that there is also a non-ritual recitation (2014:4).

[50] For the manuscripts of the Khorde Avesta, see Raffaelli 2014:66, but the list will be much longer in the analysis of this class of manuscripts being carried out by G. König within the framework of the Corpus Avesticum Berolinense.

the litanies *āiiese yešti* and *aṣaiia daδąmi*[51] in the Hōmāst (and also in the Drōn Yašt in the Visperad and related ceremonies).[52] It appears with *āiiese yešti* after the dedication of Y22.25 (= VrS25.31 in the Visperad and in the second Drōn Yašt, VrS78.32), and with *aṣaiia daδąmi* (in the second Drōn Yašt, VrS82.19 and after Y66.19 = VrS90.27).[53]

The longer extension in the *yazamaide* litany (after Y25.4 and VrS78.32), the Stōm, appears as well in the *yazamaide* litany of Y59 (Y59.19-28). When the *frauuaṣis* are mentioned in the *yazamaide* in the LL, the standard verb *yazamaide* is substituted by *staōmi zbaiiemi ufiiemi* and extended with a series of adjectives for the *frauuaṣis* (Y59.19):[54]

> *aṣāunąm vaŋᵛhīš sūrå spāntå frauuaṣaiiō yazamaide staōmi zbaiiemi ufiiemi*
> *yazamaide nmāṅiiå vīsiiå zaṇtumå daẋiiumå zaraθuštrō.təmå.*
>
> I praise, call, chant, and we made a *yasna* for the good, strong, and beneficent *frauuaṣis* of the orderly ones, (the *frauuaṣis*) that belong to house, the clan, the tribe, the country, and district of the *zaraθuštrō.təma*
>
> (The text corresponding to Y59.20-28 follows.)

The Yasna manuscripts include both texts *in extenso* because the dedication of Minu-Nāwar ends with the *frauuaṣis*. However, all the other manuscripts of the other liturgies omit these extensions. Nonetheless, some manuscripts mention the possibility of their appearance. Thus, ms. 2007 describes in first instance a Visperad to be performed during one of the six yearly festivals (*gāhānbār*), but almost systematically details the differences when it is performed with a dedication that ends with the mention of the *frauuaṣis*. When the use of such a dedication does not involve major differences, it indicates that any *šnūman* can be generally used, and then describes the use of the dedication for the *gāhānbār* (for example, VrS27.43 in the litany *āuuaēδaiiamahi* of the Hōmāst):

> *ā[aţ]. d[īš]. āuu[aδaiiamahi]*. xšnūman ān ī bēd wizārdan agar xšnūman ī gāhānbār bēd *āaţ. dīš. āuuaēδaiiamahi. raϑβō. bərəzatō. yō. aṣahe. raϑβąm. aiiaranąmca.*
>
> *ā[aţ]. d[īš]. āuu[aδaiiamahi]*. He should perform the corresponding dedication. If it is the dedication for the *gāhānbār*, (he should say:) *āaţ. dīš. āuuaēδaiiamahi. raϑβō. bərəzatō. yō. aṣahe. raϑβąm. aiiaranąmca.*

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[51] This litany appears displaced at the end of the ceremony (Y66) when the actual offering of the libation prepared during the Hōmāst takes place (Cantera 2020c).

[52] It corresponds to the text edited by Geldner as Y23.1-3.

[53] The text corresponds to Geldner's Y23.1-3 with *āiiese yešti*. The variant with *aṣaiia daδąmi* is not edited in Geldner's edition, but can be found in the edition of the Corpus Avesticum Berolinense (that is, in Y66.19).

[54] The text appears in Geldner as Y26.

When the dedication for the *frauuašis* entails extensions, then a different formulation is used (for example, VrS25.31-32, dedication in the litany *āiiese yešti* of the Hōmāst):

> agar xšnūman dudigar bēd ka xšnūman ahlawān padiš bēd *auuaŋhå. frauuašaiiō. yå. paōiriia. åŋharə* . . .
>
> If it is a different dedication (from the one for the *gāhānbār*), when the dedication contains *ahlawān* (he should say): *auuaŋhå. frauuašaiiō. yå. paōiriia. åŋharə* . . . (Y23.1-3).

Accordingly, the actualization of the Avestan texts in performance requires two kinds of knowledge, namely, the long parts of the core text and the variable sections, and their combination. The manuscripts basically contain the former and, sometimes, a few short and unsystematic instructions regarding the latter. Their understanding is restricted, however, to experts who know the texts alluded to and their combinations. This lore of ritual and textual knowledge was only transmitted orally until the eighteenth century, and even then it appeared in the manuscripts in only limited form. Thus, Avestan manuscripts play a very specific role in a mainly oral tradition: they function as a prescriptive tool for preserving the performance from changes and, at least from the seventeenth century on, serve as a tool for memorizing the texts. These circumstances have important consequences both for their production and for the methods of analysis that might be used for the Avestan manuscripts. They are simply a link in a chain in which oral methods and processes dominate. Their position and relevance have changed throughout history, but even in modern times, where manuscripts have been replaced by printed books, their place remains subordinate to that of memory and oral performance, except in Iran, where the oral tradition has completely dried up in the twentieth century.

5. The Interplay of Memory, Performance, and Written Sources in the Production of Manuscripts: The Priest as Scribe

The view of transforming an oral transmission into a written one as a one-time process has conditioned our understanding of the process of producing manuscripts. Once the first manuscripts had been produced, the creation of further manuscripts would be limited to copying one manuscript from another, and the oral transmission would have been abandoned or only residually maintained, but without influencing the written one. In this model, the scribe is exclusively an agent of the written transmission, who does not participate in the oral transmission. This model is, however, valid only for texts for which there was no oral transmission before the production of the manuscript, or whose oral transmission had been terminated through the production of the first written copies. In other scenarios, written and oral transmissions coexist and participate in a common interface for the preservation and review of texts, including the production of the manuscripts. In many traditions, scribes are not only agents of the written transmission, but also of the oral one, as we have seen for the Qurʾān in the previous section. Thus, the manuscript is not only the tradent, but shares this role with the scribe who knows the text he is copying by heart. In Kirk's words, "the oral and the written vectors

intersect in the scribe" (2016:114). During their coexistence, both tradents, manuscript and memory, interact for the preservation and activation of the texts, albeit in different settings in the different traditions.

This is clearly the case of the Zoroastrian tradition. The scribes are the same priests that perform the rituals in which they recite the texts from memory, without the assistance of the manuscripts they produce (except, as we have seen, in the case of the Vīdēvdād ceremony in modern times). Nonetheless, the traditional view dominated the analysis of the Avestan manuscripts. Once the Avestan texts had been written down, the manuscripts would have behaved similarly to a purely written transmission. A manuscript is a copy of another one, and if there are any differences, these are due to error or contamination, that is, comparison of one source to another one (Geldner 1886-96:I, xlviib). For N. L. Westergaard (1852-54:19-20), the manuscripts were drafted in Sasanian times and distributed to the regions, but only the ones copied again in the region of Yazd-Kerman have survived. For Geldner, our manuscripts go back to the original manuscripts of a liturgical post-Sasanian redaction of the Avestan texts that occurred long after the edition of the Great Avesta (Geldner 1896b:xlvi). For Hoffmann and Narten, the existing manuscripts are again descended from the first Sasanian ones via a series of hyparchetypes for each class of manuscripts that must have existed around the tenth century: the theory of the hyparchetypes.[55] Kellens' modification of Hoffmann and Narten's view replaces the Sasanian archetype through two "Stammhandschriften" that contained two ritual collections, and is therefore closer to Geldner's approach (except for the simultaneity instead of linearity between Great Avesta and Ritual Avesta).

Despite the differences in detail, all the models operate within the same theoretical framework according to which once the first manuscripts had been produced, the process was limited to the simple copying of extant manuscripts (except for the second editorial process assumed by Geldner).[56] The only relevant tradents of the text are the manuscripts, and the role of memory and performance is limited to the distortion of the original spelling of words through the so-called vulgate-pronunciation. Hoffmann and Narten describe it in the following terms (1989:18):[57]

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[55] First, Hoffmann (1969) postulated a single archetype for all the variants of the LL. A few years later, H. Humbach (1973) did the same for the Vīdēvdād. He assumed two successive hyparchetypes: (1) a liturgical one whose relationship with the hyparchetype for all the variants of the LL is unclear; (2) an exegetical archetype. Kellens (1998:447 n. 449) further assumes a dependence on the liturgical manuscripts from the exegetical hyparchetype because of the glosses of the Pahlavi translation that sometimes appear in the liturgical manuscripts. However, as Ferrer (2012) has shown, this process affects only the Indian liturgical manuscripts, and even then, progressively. For a history of this theory, see Kellens 1998:466-73, and for general criticism, see Cantera 2012a:290-97; Tremblay 2012:118-25.

[56] Skjærvø adopts a more nuanced position, postulating that the texts, once copied, "were probably corrected and edited for some time after" (2012:19). This "conscious interference" would have continued for centuries.

[57] Geldner's statement is quite similar (Geldner 1886-96:I, xlvii): "There are, especially, two influences at work which tend to detract from the fidelity of the manuscripts. On the one hand, the copyists knew the majority of their texts by heart. The oral text, however, had become more corrupted than the written text and keeps constantly crossing the latter. Scribes who read and copied word for word from the text before them, ran less danger than those scribes who grasped the entire sentence and wrote it off before looking again at the copy before them."

> Jeder Schreiber hatte gelernt, Avesta-Texte zu rezitieren, und zwar nicht aufgrund von Handschriften, sondern durch mündliche Weitergabe. In den meisten Fällen wird er das, was er kopierte, auswendig gekonnt haben. Mit diesem Klang im Ohr schrieb er ab und „verbesserte" bewußt oder unbewußt seine Vorlage. Diese Erscheinung, die man Vulgata-Aussprache nennen kann, lagert überall unseren Handschriften. Selbst die ältesten sind davon schon schwer betroffen. Da der Schreiber jeweils schon wußte, wie es „eigentlich" heißt, hat sich der Sinn für buchstabengetreues Kopieren nie voll entwickelt.

Although Hoffmann and Narten acknowledge that the scribe knew the text by heart, the changes introduced in the manuscripts seem to be limited to the spelling of the words, hence their designation of this phenomenon as vulgate-pronunciation (*Aussprache*) and the insistence on the sound (*Klang*). As linguists, they were more concerned about the infinite number of small variations in the spelling of single words than about other more significant textual variations. The latter were simply explained according to the traditional methods applied for purely written transmissions. Moreover, the dependences of the manuscripts continued being analyzed exactly in the same terms established by Westergaard and Geldner: common "errors" reveal a common source, and when the data do not fit, we have to assume contamination from several sources (Geldner 1886-96:I, xlviib).

Scribal competence is, though, "memory-based" in the traditions in which manuscripts are ancillary to memory, as is the case of the Zoroastrian tradition (Kirk 2016:115). The role of the scribes of the liturgical Avestan manuscripts is not limited to simply copying a previous original as accurately as possible. Their goal is always to create a manuscript that represents the liturgy as it should be performed.[58] To that purpose, they usually have two sources available: on the one hand, one or several written manuscripts, and on the other, their own experience of the performance and the text they know by heart. The preference they attach to one or the other source depends on many factors: personality of the scribe, authority of the available written sources, historical context (splitting of a community into two different schools, etc.), geographical differences, type of manuscript,[59] and so forth. Thus, they might reproduce a previous copy more or less faithfully, modify it in order to adapt it to the current performance (modernization of the pronunciation, introduction of ritual or textual changes, etc.), or even create new manuscripts with no written source at all, or use manuscripts of other liturgies that are transformed into completely new manuscripts. We must abandon the notion of the copyist of the manuscript as a faithful reproducer of a previous copy, and replace it with one of a priest that produces a guide for the performance of the liturgy that serves both himself and others as an instrument for learning how to perform it and as an aid for memorizing the texts.

Scribes are active agents of the transmission. Sometimes, they can even create new manuscripts without any written source. Yasna manuscripts are the best examples of manuscripts probably made from memory, as it is the basic form of the LL, and the first and best learned by the priests. Some Indian manuscripts, such as ms. 231, reveal infinite phonetic variants that

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[58] Historical interest for past performances does not seem to play any role whatsoever.

[59] Exegetical manuscripts are obviously less influenced by the ritual performance, so they reproduce major deformations of the text (for example, changes in the order of some folios) without correcting them (Cantera 2010).

reproduce the Indian pronunciation, and are quite far removed from the traditional spellings we find even in other Indian manuscripts.[60] They seem to be closer to a record of a live performance than to a written source. Accordingly, we may confidently posit that they were copied directly from the scribe's memory. In general, Indian liturgical Yasna manuscripts tend not to be copied from older liturgical manuscripts, but to be composed at least partly on the basis of the scribe's memory and ritual knowledge. A good example is provided by ms. 100 (B3). Ardašīr Zīvā created a liturgical manuscript in the sixteenth century (ms. 100 [B3]) using as source Mihrābān Kayxōsrō's exegetical Yasna manuscript 510 (K5).[61] Its dependence is clearly revealed by a number of shared bizarre spellings (Cantera 2014:152). Nonetheless, the manuscript produced by Ardašīr Zīvā is very different from its original. Firstly, the initial ten folios (until 11v) include the Paragnā, the preliminary ceremony to the performance of the LL. This ceremony does not appear in any exegetical manuscript, and has most probably been added by Ardašīr Zīvā on the basis of his own knowledge. In fact, the Paragnā is very weakly represented in the manuscripts,[62] except in the Indian liturgical Yasna manuscripts that probably follow the model of Ardašīr Zīvā. Secondly, whenever the liturgical text differs from the one reproduced in the exegetical manuscripts, as is the case of the beginning of the Old Avestan texts,[63] Ardašīr does not follow his written source, but instead his ritual knowledge, copying the text as it is recited in the actual performance! He has also created for the first time (as far as I know) the set of ritual instructions for the performance of the Yasna in Gujarati. Thus, ms. 100 (B3) is a wonderful example of how the oral and the scribal vectors intersect in the person of Ardašīr Zīvā. Similarly, when Isfandyār Anuširvān copied two Yasna manuscripts (mss. 15 and 82) in the nineteenth century, he seems to have used a Visperad manuscript as a source that he has transformed into a Yasna manuscript with all the textual changes[64] that involves (Cantera 2014:118-19).

Sometimes, the scribe, indeed, produced the manuscript of a liturgy on the basis of a different one. The case of the manuscripts of the Vīštāsp Yašt is quite interesting, as this liturgy is the one less frequently performed. Ms. F13 in the Meherjirāna Library is a copy of a manuscript by Āsdin Kākā that contains a Visperad Dō-Hōmāst (ms. 2065) and an abbreviated Vīštāsp Yašt (ms. 5030) (Dhabhar 1925; Martínez Porro 2013:74 and 2014:79). The original belongs to the Mulla Firuze collection and is preserved in the Cama Oriental Institute with the siglum D73 (Dhabhar 1923:87-8; Martínez Porro 2014:77). Āsdin Kākā's manuscript is, in turn, a copy of a previous manuscript by Pešōtan Rām Kāmdīn. Martínez Porro (2020) has noted that the Visperad Dō-Hōmāst is ultimately a copy of Rōstam Mihrābān's ms. 2000 (K7b). Moreover, he has

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[60] In his Ph.D. thesis, J. Martínez Porro has discovered similar features in some Vīdēvdād manuscripts (for example, 4220, 4370, 4410, 4425), but only outside the Vīdēvdād *nask*.

[61] This scribe had at his disposal Mihrābān Kayxōsrō's manuscripts copied in Khambhat, mss. 510 (K5) and 4610 (K1) (Cantera 2014:152).

[62] About this ceremony, see Cantera 2020b. I have also published a first (not yet critical) edition of the ceremony in Corpus Avesticum Berolinense (https://cab.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/exist/apps/cab/pages/tools/ceremony_generator.html).

[63] For these differences, see Cantera 2013a:27-29.

[64] He occasionally did not completely succeed in the adaptation, as he maintained, for example, the number of *barsom*-twigs of the Visperad.

concluded from certain orthographic and paleographic features that Āsdin Kākā's Vīštāsp Yašt (and consequently ms. 5030) also goes back to a lost original by Rōstam Mihrābān.

Interestingly, the initial ritual instruction is identical in the Visperad Dō-Hōmāst and in the Vištāsp Yašt:

> *barsom 33 tāg ud frāgām 2 tāg cīyōn pad yašt barsom bastan ud parāhōm kardan sāzišn hamāg xūb frāz nihādan parāhōm kardan rāy* ***pad har hōmāst*** *pad kamistīh 3 tāg ud urwarām pārag-ē ǰām andak-ē frāz nihišn*
>
> The *barsom* (should consist) of thirty-three twigs and the *frāgām* are two. He should tie the *barsom* like in the *yašt*, prepare the *parāhōm*, and arrange all the implements carefully. For the preparation of the *parāhōm* he has to arrange **for each *hōmāst*** at least three branches of *hōm*, a twig of *urwarām*, and a drop of *ǰām.*

This initial instruction is slightly different from the one we find in another famous Vīštāsp Yašt manuscript, ms. 5020 (K4):

> *barsom 33 tāg ud frāgām 2 tāg barsom bastan ud parāhōm kardan sāzišn hamāg frāz nihādan hōm pad kamistīh 3 tāg ud urwarām pārag-ē ud ǰām andak-ē frāz nihišn*
>
> The *barsom* (should consist) of thirty-three twigs and the *frāgām* two. He should tie the *barsom*, prepare the *parāhōm*, and arrange all the implements. He has to arrange the *hōm*, with at least three twigs and a branch of *urwarām*, and a drop of *ǰām*.

The main difference is that while ms. 5020 requires three twigs of *hōm* and *urwarām* for preparing the *hōm*, ms. 5030 calls for the same quantity for "each *hōmāst*." This indication only makes sense in the previously copied Visperad Dō-Hōmāst. In this ceremony, and besides the standard Hōmāst, there is a second one after the first Yasna Haptaŋhāiti (Cantera 2020e). Accordingly, six bundles of three twigs of *hōm* and *urwarām* are required (three for each *hōmāst*), and not three. Thus, we may postulate that Rōstam Mihrābān's Vīštāsp Yašt was, in fact, an adaptation of a Visperad Dō-Hōmāst.[65] This probably required from Rōstām Mihrābān or the scribe of his original considerable ritual and textual knowledge, even perhaps the use of an exegetical manuscript of the Vīštāsp Yašt.[66]

The Iranian manuscripts of the Vīštāsp Yašt (the oldest are mss. 5010 and 5020 [K4]) hark back, according to their colophons, to an original by Xōsrōšāh Anōšagruwān (Cantera 2014:113-14), who copied it in 1344. Although both manuscripts are copied from the same

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[65] An alternative hypothesis could be that the first ritual instruction was taken from the Visperad Dō-Hōmāst because, for example, the first page of the original Vištāsp Yašt manuscript was lost. We should consider that not the whole introduction to the manuscript is identical to the one of the Visperad, but only this first ritual instruction. The preceding section is different in both manuscripts.

[66] A similar phenomenon lies at the origin of another liturgical manuscript of the Vīštāsp Yašt (ms. 5102). It contains the introduction of a Visperad, revealing that it was probably "reconstructed" on the basis of a Visperad manuscript.

original, one has the ceremony *in extenso* and the other in extremely abbreviated form. Thus, the scribes were able either to extend an abbreviated original or to shorten a complete one. Both procedures require a profound knowledge of the ceremony. More interesting for us is the fact that ms. 5010 has the same ritual instruction that we find in ms. 5030 (the copy dating back to Rōstam Mihrābān), whereas ms. 5020 records the modified one. Hence we should conclude, first, that the Iranian manuscripts also have the same origin as Rōstam Mihrābān's Vīštāsp Yašt,[67] and second, that either Wehmard Frēdōn, the scribe of ms. 5020, or Wahrom Marzbān, as his source, corrected the initial ritual instruction when noticing that it is inappropriate for a Vīštāsp Yašt.

The beginning of the Vīštāsp Yašt provides us with another good example of the changes that the scribes introduced in the manuscripts. Martínez Porro (2022) has revealed a difference between the Vīštāsp Yašt manuscript going back to Rōstam Mihrābān and the Iranian manuscripts. Whereas the Iranian ones (mss. 5010 and 5020) mention that the first performance of the day has to be held with the dedication for the Dēn, ms. 5030 has a similar instruction but with a variant of this dedication, the one for Dēn and Māraspand. As both branches seem to have a common source, this implies that either the Indian or the Iranian branch has adapted the dedication to their actual practice.

Manuscripts are a factor of conservatism in a ritual tradition that, like all ritual traditions, experiences the dilemma between change and continuity. However, conservatism is only possible to a certain extent. The limit is always the link to the real performance. If manuscripts stray too far from daily practice, they become useless. Accordingly, on each occasion the scribes have to define their position in the axis between the two functions of liturgical manuscripts: prescriptive and mnemonic. We can easily understand the dilemma in the case of the adaptation, or not, to the modern pronunciation. The confusion between *ī* and *ū* provides a good example. We already find at least one instance of it in Mihrābān Kayxōsrō at the beginning of the fourteenth century: ms. 500 [K5] *ẏaēš.yąṇtūm* instead of *ẏaēšiiaṇtīm* in Y9.11. The oldest extant Safavid Iranian liturgical manuscripts show that both sounds have merged together in the recitation at the beginning of the seventeenth century. However, the manuscripts copied before 1622 still use two

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[67] This could be confirmed by another striking fact. The regular *wāz gīrišnīh* of the Frauuarāne is the so-called double *wāz gīrišnīh* in the solemn ceremonies (Visperad, Vīdēvdād, and Vīštāsp Yašt) (Cantera 2016:53). By contrast, before the installation of the auxiliary priests and in the Yasna, we find the *wāz gīrišnīh* that starts with the *zaōtar* saying *yaθā ahū vairiiō zaōtā* . . . and continues with the auxiliary priest saying *yaθā ahū vairiiō yō zaōtā* . . . . The only exception to this rule is the Frauuarāne of the second Drōn Yašt (VrS79.0). Here the manuscripts of the Visperad and the Vīdēvdād are the same as in the first Drōn Yašt. Only the manuscripts of the Vīštāsp Yašt (with the exception of ms. 5102) have the double *wāz gīrišnīh*. Interestingly, the indication in ms. 5010 is the same used by ms. 5030 and the standard one in Rōstam Mihrābān's manuscripts: *zōt ud rāspīg wāz gīrišnīh dōgānag kardan*, "The *zōt* and the *rāspīg* have to make the double *wāz gīrišnīh*." Ms. 5020 copies the formula *in extenso*. There are two possible explanations: (1) the manuscripts of the Visperad and the Vīdēvdād have taken the Frauuarāne of the Srōš Drōn and used it incorrectly in the second case; (2) there is a real ritual difference between the Drōn Yašt and the rest of the ceremony, and the simple *wāz gīrišnīh* is correct in the all the manuscripts, except the ones of the Vīštāsp Yašt.

Although there is no certainty, I consider the first hypothesis more likely, as the scribes are usually well aware of the difference between the first and the second Drōn Yašt, and copy them faithfully. Accordingly, the dissimilar *wāz gīrišnīh* in all Vīštāsp Yašt might be a common error harking back to Rōstam Mihrābān's manuscript or his source. If, as it seems, all liturgical Vīštāsp Yašt manuscripts go back to one produced by Rōstam Mihrābān or his source on the basis of a manuscript for the Visperad Dō-Hōmāst, its late creation could perhaps explain the bad state of preservation of the *fragards* of the Vīštāsp Yašt.

different letters for *ī* and *ū*, but frequently in the wrong positions. The manuscripts copied after 1622 all have *ī*, even when they copy from sources still distinguishing both sounds. They no longer claim that the distinction is maintained in the recitation and adapt to the actual performance.

The changes introduced are often more significant than simply modernizations of the pronunciation. We have already seen the changes introduced at the beginning of the Vīštāsp Yašt concerning the ritual instructions and also the dedication. Even more important changes are sometimes introduced. The case of the manuscript K11 (ms. 110 + 2220) is most illustrative. Geldner (1886-96:I, xxxvi-vii.) has rightly recognized that this manuscript must have been copied from an Iranian original. Its scribe, Dārāb Hirā Cāndā, was one of the addressees of the Revāyat of Bahman Isfandyār that was accompanied by a manuscript of the Visperad and one of the Vīštāsp Yašt (Cantera 2014:166-67). However, he has adapted his Iranian original to the Indian practice and introduced the necessary changes in the text. Some years ago, I have noted some textual divergences between the Iranian and Indian performance of the Visperad (Cantera 2014:266-67), namely, in VrS70 (after the Airiiaman Išiia) and VrS93 (following the recitation of the Spəṇtā.maiṅiiū Hāiti at the end of the Āb-zōhr). Both are probably Indian innovations. Although Dārāb Hirā Cāndā has used an Iranian original for ms. 2220, he follows Indian practice, and in both passages has the standard text of the Indian performance. He did not just copy his Iranian original, but adapted it to Indian practice. He introduced ritual instructions in Gujarati and changed the text wherever necessary to fit Indian practice. Despite the quest for ritual information among the Iranian priesthood, this Indian priest was not ready to fully adapt Indian practice to the Iranian one. Accordingly, the manuscript he produced did not just reproduce the Iranian original. He created a guide to the performance as he believed it should be performed.

This capacity for adapting the manuscripts to the actual performance is, of course, imperative for the tradition of liturgical manuscripts. The contrary would have meant its end, as manuscripts would become obsolete sooner or later. The idea of a *Sasanian liturgical archetype* and several *hyparchetypes* that were mechanically copied until modern times is untenable. The comparison of the liturgies as attested in the manuscripts with the Nērangestān shows, as well as obstinate ritual continuity (Cantera 2014:199-216), also the inevitable variation (Cantera 2014:248-58). There are numerous examples of modernization of the text, but the most impressive is probably the adaptation of the manuscripts to the disappearance of the animal sacrifice in the LL. At the time of the drafting of the Nērangestān, the animal sacrifice and the meat offering to the fire were a component of the LL in some of its most solemn performances. The main features of the rite are described in Chapter 47 of the Nērangestān (Kotwal and Kreyenbroek 2003:198-218; Cantera 2014:255-57 and 2022:73-89; Panaino 2017). When the animal was killed during the performance, the slaughter happened at some moment after the consumption of the *drōn* (a sacred bread). To that purpose, the priest bringing the animal is summoned with *pasauuaŋhəm āstaiia*, "I put in place the conductor of the animal." Before Y34.20, the priest in front of the fire says: *aētåsə.tē ātarə zaōϑrå*, "these offerings are for you, o Fire." The offering then took place during the Yeŋhē.Hātā of Y34.20 and Y35.1-2. The Sasanian manuscripts of the LL should at this point have contained ritual instructions similar to the ones found in N47.39. Nevertheless, none of the extant manuscripts shows any trace of these sections.

Why should they? What would be the purpose of including sections that are no longer performed?

The influence between manuscript and performance is reciprocal. The manuscripts intend to consciously shape the performance, and the performance, in turn, leads to conscious and unconscious changes in the manuscripts. Accordingly, the spread of variants should not be attributed exclusively to the copying process. The prevailing ritual practice in a community plays a role in this regard that I consider even more relevant than the copying process. We have detailed numerous generalizations of variants that go far beyond the boundaries of manuscript classes or groups of related manuscripts. They can best be explained as variants that have entered the performance, and from there have spread to manuscripts of different classes. There are numerous examples (Cantera 2012a:305 ff.). Remember, for example, the aforementioned generalization of the Indian variants in all Indian manuscripts of the Visperad and the Vīdēvdād.

The contrary is also true. Errors in the written transmission might enter ritual practice and thus jump to other classes of manuscripts. As I showed some years ago (Cantera 2012a:305-06), a copy-error in V3.14 produced two different variants in the recitation of the Vīdēvdād. The original text as it appears in the Iranian manuscripts and in the oldest Indian ones, such as ms. 4200, 4210, 4240, is:

spaiieti draōšəm
spaiieiti yātuγnīm
spaiieiti aṣauuagnīm

The (*daēnā*) atones for thievery, it atones for killing through wizardry, it atones for the killing of the pious man.

Some Indian manuscript have one of these two variants:

A.	B.
spaiieti draōšəm	*spaiieti draōšəm*
auuaγnīm	*spaiieiti auuaγnīm*
spaiieiti yātuγnīm	*spaiieiti yātuγnīm*
spaiieiti aṣauuagnīm	*spaiieiti aṣauuagnīm*

The variant B is clearly an error of transmission: a scribe omitted two lines and copied the end of [*aṣ̌*]*auuaγnīm* after *draōšəm*.[68] He noticed the omission and completed the missing text after using dots to delete the incorrect *auuaγnīm*. A later scribe, perhaps the scribe of ms. 4250 (O2), the oldest known witness of this error, overlooked deletion through dots and copied *auuaγnīm* as part of the text. The mistake is reproduced in manuscripts 4370 [L5] (1792) and 4400 (1802). They might have been just copies of ms. 4250 (O2), although this is very unlikely because ms. 4400 is, together with 4360 and 4320 (L2), one of the few Indian manuscripts that do not share the error V9.14 *paoruuahe* instead of the correct *grauuahe* (Cantera 2014:47) or the

[68] For the details of this explanation see Cantera 2012a:305.

innovation V9.29 *arəδβəm* instead of the correct *arəδəm* (Cantera 2014:48). It seems instead that this variant entered the performance and from there spread to the manuscripts. Part of the Indian tradition introduced *spaiieiti* through the parallelism with the preceding and following sentences in an attempt to correct the text. The oldest attestation of this variant is already found in Surat in 1759 (ms. 4320 [L2]), and already has a Middle Persian translation in 1815 in Navsāri (ms. 4670). This variant was the most frequent reading in nineteenth-century manuscripts, independently of their genealogical origin. Moreover, this passage is repeated again in V8.29, and the manuscripts recorded exactly the same distribution. This copy-error obviously does not suffice to explain the variant in both passages. The process is much more complex, and the manuscripts' influence on the performance and vice versa is a factor that cannot be disregarded.

We are thus in a better position for understanding the bizarre error Y12.3 *ziiå̊iienīm* discovered and correctly explained by Hoffmann (1969). It is clearly a mistake that took place in the course of the written transmission: while copying *ziienīm*, one copyist mistakenly wrote *ziiå̊* instead *ziie*. He noticed his error, deleted *iiå̊* with deletion dots, and completed the word correctly. Further copyists did not notice the deletion dots and copied it *ziiå̊iienīm*. Hence, he deduced the necessity of a common written hyparchetype for all Yasna manuscripts. Yet other explanations are also possible. This bizarre spelling appears in all kinds of manuscripts in which this passage is included: liturgical, exegetical, Yasna, Visperad, Vīdēvdād, and so forth.[69] Therefore, we must suppose that the spreading did not take place solely through automatic copying. It appears even in the Yasna copies that seem to have no written source, but to have been copied from memory. Thus, this variant must have entered at some point in history the ritual practice, perhaps through the prestige of the scribe that made the original mistake or through other reasons about which we can only speculate. Thus, the performance can have triggered as well the spreading of the variant to all classes of manuscripts. Although we know today that it is the result of a mistake, it was felt by the priests as the right one.

The reciprocity of the influence between manuscripts and memory/performance is the missing link in the apparent discrepancy between philological argumentation and historical plausibility that Tremblay has perfectly described (2012:130):

> En particulier il semble qu'il y ait contradiction entre la démonstration philologique d'un goulet d'étranglement de la tradition, une corruptèle d'un seul manuscrit ayant entraîné tous les autres dans sa chute comme s'ils étaient copiés sur lui, et la démonstration historique qu'il n'a jamais existé de manuscrit unique de tout l'Avesta, ni une lignée unique remontant à un seul manuscrit adamique.

The emphasis on the written transmission and the disregard of the influence of memory as an alternative tradent of the text (reduced to a source of multiple minimal but annoying mistakes and corruptions) is responsible for the discrepancy between the philological postulate of

[69] It is unclear to me how the supporters of the hyparchetypes theory explain the spreading of this error from one archetype to manuscripts of different classes and different liturgies.

the existence of hyparchetypes,[70] and the historical improbability of a single common source for manuscripts belonging to different classes and groups. The Avestan texts survive mainly through their activation in the performance and in the memory of the priests that have to perform them. The manuscripts are simply an auxiliary tool in this process, and not the focal point. Therefore, the analysis of the transmission of the rituals in Avestan languages should eventually consider that ritual practice has shaped the manuscripts at least as much as the manuscripts have shaped ritual practice.

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[70] In this light, the common errors adduced as arguments for the hyparchetypes should be better explained considering factors such as the prestige of single scribes and the reciprocal influence between manuscripts and performance.

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On the Problems of Studying Modern Zoroastrianism

Sarah Stewart

Arguably, the problems of studying modern Zoroastrianism are not dissimilar to those associated with the study of Zoroastrianism in the ancient world. In both cases, the idea of orality and how to deal with it is an issue that demands attention. And in both cases, one of the problems concerns exegesis; in other words, how to interpret or attribute meaning to oral texts that are literally "moving" through time and making themselves relevant to the different social, political, and religious eras they pass through. Only when an oral text is finally committed to writing is it possible to discern the length of its transmission and the various historical eras it may represent. Even then, there are other versions of the same narrative that show different lines of oral transmission. Scholars have learned to recognize which parts have remained static and why, and which have adapted to the times.[1]

Some attempt has been made by the present writer to link the two areas of study, ancient and modern, in an exploration of a Gujarati song, the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, or "Song of the Fire," as compared with the *Yašts*, hymns addressed to divinities of the Zoroastrian pantheon.[2] The song bears the structural characteristics of oral composition in much the same way as the *Yašts*. In both instances, there is little sense of temporality. Not only had the texts moved a long way from their roots by the time they were written down, but they are cumulative, reflecting a multiplicity of times, events, ideas, and people. In the song, we can substantiate some of the poetic allusions to historical events, not least of which is the founding of the *Ātash Bahrām* in Navsari in 1765. This suggests a developed or intentional structure whereby explicit sections in the text allow for new material to replace that which had become obsolete. I have suggested that a similar structure may have existed in those *Yašts* that contain legendary material. The structure of the "sections," *karde*, appears fixed while at the same time sufficiently flexible to allow new material to be added to an existing corpus and older material discarded.

More challenging is the idea that the oral nature of ancient texts has a bearing on the way Zoroastrians understand and speak about their religion today. This is relevant to studies on contemporary Zoroastrianism should we wish to connect the living faith with the teachings of the Avesta and later religious texts. For example, after texts were written down and so became "fixed," regional variations would have continued in oral transmission together with

[1] It should be noted that some of the transcriptions used in this paper, for example "sh," are phonetic and do not necessarily correspond to the letter in the original language.

[2] See Stewart 2007a:145-46 and 2007b:62-64.

accompanying differences in ritual. It is possible too that as priests continued to interpret and attribute meaning to religious texts, lay understanding of those texts moved at a different pace and may have developed differently. As will be seen in the studies below, the laity develops metanarratives as a means of understanding doctrine and teaching. Particular tropes are repeated and appear in stories that serve a specific purpose within a religious context.[3]

If not meaning, then usage may change more readily in an oral rather than a written tradition. For example, the *Ātaš nu Gīt* was composed for the inauguration of an *Ātash Bahrām*. When and why did it then become a wedding song? The performance retained its religious significance because of the purity laws surrounding it. On the other hand, it could have originated in Iran as a "song to the fire," which was celebrated at weddings where the bride and groom circle a fire.[4] It then came to India—where no sacred fires were established for a long time—and was used for the inauguration of the second *Ātash Bahrām* but also retained its association with marriage. We just don't know.

My contribution to this issue of *Oral Tradition* links the notion of oral texts or texts that began in oral transmission to Iranian literature more generally, and to the oral testimony that is increasingly used by those who study contemporary Zoroastrianism, or the "living faith." Its purpose is to explore the question of how to establish a benchmark by which we can analyze or interpret qualitative data, in this case oral testimony, that deals with religious ideas and practices. Two modern studies that have been built around oral testimony obtained in Iran will be drawn upon here. The questions or problems that arise from them will be discussed with reference to my recent project, *Voices from Zoroastrian Iran: Oral Texts and Testimony*.

There are several points to make by way of introduction. First is the fact that the religious texts of Zoroastrianism have been subject to a lengthy process of translation, interpretation, and redaction. As knowledge of the ancient languages, Avestan and Pahlavi, together with knowledge of the Indo-Iranian tradition has increased, so scholars have sought to establish a coherent and stable account of Zoroastrianism through the ages based upon a chronology of language, theme, and text. A contraction of this chronology necessarily conflates the Avestan with the Pahlavi material resulting in a distillation of information on doctrine, teaching, ritual, and observance. This body of material is commonly referred to as the "classical tradition." The problem that arises for those studying the living faith is that this interpretation of the religion may not resonate with Zoroastrians themselves. On the one hand, there is a foundational understanding of what constitutes Zoroastrianism, established mainly by non-Zoroastrians; on the other hand, there is the understanding of the faith by the faithful. While the modern researcher has a clear advantage over those studying the ancient texts insofar as they can engage with informants directly, they still need a benchmark by which to analyze their findings. And they also need to find common ground between their understanding of what constitutes Zoroastrianism and that of those who are the subject of inquiry.

Second, the extant religious corpus of texts is predominantly priestly, that is, compiled or

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[3] For the early transmission of Zoroastrianism, see Kreyenbroek 2013:51-67.

[4] Circumambulating the fire took place either after the wedding ceremony or following the *arush keshi* ceremony when the bride and groom are received at the house where they will live as husband and wife. See Stewart 2020:270; Vahman and Asatrian 2002:39, 96.

composed by members of a hereditary priesthood for use in ritual performance and priestly instruction. Lay religious observance was not part of the body of oral literature that was eventually committed to writing, so there is a paucity of material, and consequently of knowledge, about the laity in ancient times. Lay usage of religious texts is quite diverse. For example, the corpus of daily prayers contained in the prayer book, *Khordeh Avesta*, comprises a composite selection of Avestan, Pahlavi, and Pazand texts. The nature of oral texts means that themes and narratives have passed through different genres of literature at different times. Prayers include verses in Old Avestan (*Gāthās*), Young Avestan (*Vīdēvdād*), and structures and themes from the *Yašts*, as can be found in the *Niyāyeš*. Moreover, the laity does not always distinguish between what we might call popular and religious literature. In Iran, the epic *Shāhnāmeh*, which to some extent draws on the *Yašts*, is revered and memorized in much the same way as are the prayers. Likewise, a performance of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* was traditionally held in the precincts of the fire temple and copies of the texts subject to purity laws.

My third point is to do with methodology. Scholars whose research belongs to the field of religious studies have usually trained in one or more subject disciplines: philology and/or linguistics, literature, history, archaeology, or anthropology. Zoroastrianism as a religion can thus be imagined and constructed by reference to a particular category of expertise. The philologist may apply his or her knowledge to the ancient religious texts linking them to monuments and artifacts, rock inscriptions, epic poetry, and secondary sources. The archaeologist is likely to derive meaning primarily from material culture rather than from texts. In the twentieth century, studies began to emerge about Zoroastrianism as it was being followed by its adherents. In Iran, such studies have mainly been conducted by anthropologists: M. Boyce (1963-4),[5] M. Fischer (1970-71), J. Kestenberg-Amighi (1972-73), N. Fozi (2006-08). Research that engages with those who practice Zoroastrianism in Iran, India, or the diaspora may entail the collection of qualitative and/or quantitative data via interviews and the distribution of questionnaires. Or it may draw on conversations that contribute to other sources of information such as archival, media, or documentary evidence. There are various methodologies employed to gather such data that largely depend on the subject discipline of the study. Thus, the collection of oral testimony, as well as the purpose for which it is being collected, are significant factors when looking at the problems that may arise in its interpretation.

Zoroastrian religious texts do not feature significantly in the anthropological studies noted above, except for Michael Fischer and Mary Boyce's work. In both these cases, a detailed account of rituals, *sofrehs*, and prayers draws on textual material.

Three studies will be discussed here, beginning with Boyce's *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism* (1977) that focused on the village of Sharifābād on the outskirts of Yazd.[6] A similar study, insofar as its focus is the religious practice of the inhabitants of a village in Iran, is

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[5] Mary Boyce was an Iranist with a background in Iranian languages, archaeology, anthropology, and English. Her work in the Zoroastrian village of Sharifābād drew on historical documents and her knowledge of Zoroastrian religious texts but was derived mainly from informants (both priestly and lay) and observation of lay religious practices and priestly rituals.

[6] *Persian Stronghold* was the result of the Ratanbai Kartrak series of lectures that Boyce gave in 1975 and which no doubt shaped the format of the book, which was published just over twelve years after her stay in Sharifābād.

Reinhold Loeffler's *Islam in Practice* (1988). Both this study and my *Voices from Zoroastrian Iran: Oral Texts and Testimony* (Stewart 2018 and 2020) are based on the collection of qualitative data. All three studies adopt different approaches to the question of orality and what constitutes mainstream or "orthodox" religion.

Mary Boyce's ethnographic work in Sharifābād was undertaken over twelve months during which she stayed with the family of the mayor (*kad-khodā*) of the village and head of the Anjoman, Agha Rustam Noshiravan Belivani. She became part of the household whose members shared with her their understanding and knowledge of the religion and allowed her to observe their daily devotional life and to take part in the seasonal festivities as they took place through the year. She was able also to accompany the parish priest, Dastur Khodadad Shehriar Neryosangi—who had married into the Belivani family—on many of his journeys undertaken to perform rituals in neighboring villages.

Boyce's bird's-eye view of Zoroastrianism as practiced in the rural context was accompanied by in-depth studies of a range of topics, from farming to the architecture of Zoroastrian houses as well as religious rituals and observances, that were published following her stay in Iran. These included articles on the sacrificial offerings to fire and water, the Zoroastrian calendars, festivals, and fire temples. Information for these topics no doubt derived in large part from the copious field notes that she made during her stay, which ran to over fifty notebooks. Boyce's fieldnotes are exemplary in their detail and the fact that they cover all aspects of village life including, for example, the *qanāt* irrigation system, the fruit and vegetables grown in the various villages, the climate and topography, demographics, and kinship networks. Religious ceremonies and beliefs are well documented in the notebooks accompanied by detailed sketches of architectural features of buildings, particularly the fire temples, which vary from village to village. Boyce also made recordings of priestly ceremonies and took a great many photographs to complement her writing.[7]

If we regard Boyce's notebooks as a primary source, then *Persian Stronghold* was the scholar's more discursive analysis of the material. It was presented within the context of Boyce's scholarly work on the Zoroastrian religion based on her interpretation and understanding of the religious texts. The book also reflects the contemporary academic milieu concerning anthropological studies, as well as ideas about orality and the oral transmission of texts. In her ethnographic study, Boyce interprets her findings according to her understanding of the religion as a historical continuum (1989:16):

> That the orthodoxy of Sharifabad truly represented that of ancient Zoroastrianism can be established from the scriptures of the faith (the Avesta); from its secondary literature in Pahlavi (dating in the final redactions largely from Sasanian and early Islamic times); and from sporadic notices by foreign writers in the past—Greek, Roman, Syrian, Armenian.

The priestly sacrificial ritual is an example of how Boyce draws on sources from different epochs to trace continuity. Here, she cites Herodotus' description of lay sacrifice performed by a priest in

[7] Mary Boyce's notebooks and photographs are held in the Ancient India and Iran Trust, Cambridge.

the open air with the blood sacrifice she witnessed at Pir-e Hrisht in the 1960s.[8] This connection provides her with a link to the performance of the Yasna she witnessed in Sharifābād when she was there.

Finding and tracing continuities in religious ideas and practices from prehistoric times down to the present day presupposes an original form, which over time can be understood as being "orthodox." In the case of Zoroastrianism, it also tends to project an essentialist notion of the figure of Zarathustra who, in Boyce's view, was prophet, priest, and teacher. The problem here is that we know very little about religious thought and ritual in the context of Zarathustra's purported time and place. As Almut Hintze (2019:27) has noted, the Avesta does not contain a structured account of the prophet's teachings but, rather, allusions to concepts that we can assume were understood at the time when the Avestan language was in use. To reconstruct the religious thought that underpinned such allusions a scholar needs to draw on other sources, such as the Vedas of the Brahmanic tradition in India and/or the later Zoroastrian Pahlavi texts. The distance between the different corpora of texts, both in terms of time and space, means that "different pictures tend to emerge depending on which of the two ancillary sources is given more weight when constructing the conceptual world of the Avesta" (Hintze 2019:27-8). These different pictures can be imagined also as different traditions, rituals, and understandings of texts. Since the priesthood, at least from Sasanian times, formed a discrete hereditary group whose teachings were not always open to the laity, we can assume that they didn't always match the lay understanding of texts once they came to be written down. There was thus room for another layer of variation when it came to religious practice.

The purpose of this paper is not to evaluate Boyce's approach as such, but rather to look at how it determined her view of the oral material she collected. There are three points we can make here. First, there is the notion of orthodoxy and whether or not the villagers Boyce lived amongst shared her views on what constituted orthodox Zoroastrian doctrine, ritual, and belief. For example, there are customs and rituals that in Boyce's view depart from the mainstream orthodox religion. She devotes one of her notebooks, titled "Folklore and Magic," to a detailed description of these practices—mainly undertaken by women to ward off evil spirits (*jinns*)—but is dismissive of them in her book, where she says: "Some weaker souls succumbed, indeed, at times to practicing a mild white magic in an attempt to control these unseen beings and to force them to remove sickness or blight or other misfortunes" (Boyce 1989:21). The *Sopra-ye Sabzī* was a rite that involved the sacrifice of a black hen and invoked Shah Pari, a supernatural figure associated both with malicious deeds and healing. While Boyce considers this rite "thoroughly irreligious," she is sympathetic to those who perform it. The *Sopra-ye Shah Pari*, on the other hand, seems to have been accepted by Sharifābādis more generally (1989:67):

> Although the Sharifābādi elders looked askance even at the *Sopra-ye Shah Pari*, as an unnecessary rite outside the mainstream of orthodox observance, it is readily understandable why their womenfolk, suffering from two great pressures—the need to bear sons and the need to keep the purity laws—should have sought help in diverse ways when they failed under either. There were other small rites . . . . That belonged to folklore and magic rather than to religion.

[8] See Mary Boyce (1982:179-80 and 1989:246).

This passage sums up Boyce's sense of what constitutes religious orthodoxy and what lies outside that continuum and belongs to a different category.

The second point is to do with texts and whether or not Boyce's informants shared her knowledge and understanding of their meaning. While priests and laymen and women with whom Boyce engaged were willing to give detailed descriptions of specific rituals and observances, it is not so clear whether they made the same connections that she did concerning their links to doctrine as set out in the Avestan and Pahlavi texts. For example, priests were familiar with texts such as the *Vīdēvdād* and the rituals surrounding purificatory ceremonies. They were also well versed in the liturgy of the *Yašt-e Srōš* (Yasna), which was solemnized regularly for different purposes (Boyce 1989:214 and n. 5). While it seems that the laity was (and still is) aware of the significance of purity laws and their connection to evil, both in Boyce's time and more recently, the text that many are familiar with in this respect is the relatively late Pahlavi text of the *Ardā Vīrāz Nāmag*, which people read in Persian and which describes explicitly the torments a soul will suffer in hell should its bad deeds outweigh its good ones at the time of individual judgment. According to interviews in *Zoroastrian Voices* Volumes I and II, whether religious education was undertaken by priests, a local teacher, or at home, it consisted of learning the Avestan prayers by rote. There seems to have been no discussion of texts and their transmission, nor of such notions as Zoroaster's radical dualism to which Boyce refers (1989:20). The doctrine of the *Ameša Spentas* (Pahlavi *Amahraspands*), she suggests, "was inculcated in the orthodox from childhood." But whereas Boyce outlines this doctrine with reference to the Pahlavi text of the *Bundahišn*, it is by no means clear that people were taught the creation story from this or other Pahlavi texts or that they thought of it as part of a reform of the old Iranian religion as Boyce describes it (1989:17):

> . . . but Zoroaster saw it as the planned and purposeful handiwork of the supreme Lord, Ohrmazd, helped by the six great Amahraspands whom he had first called into being, and who, with his own Creative Spirit, made up a mighty Heptad.

Although villagers—priest and laity alike—evidently recognized a symbolic representation of the seven creations in the Yasna ritual, it seems likely that they derived this knowledge from the rituals and ceremonies that were passed down through the generations (Boyce 1989:51). These included the recitation of Avestan prayers and—in the case of priests—the Yasna liturgy, but perhaps without an understanding of their place in the religious corpus of texts (see below). Concerning the figure of Zarathustra, it appears that villagers were more familiar with the legends associated with his birth and imprisonment than with the implementation of a new system of belief. Thus, there is no evidence that they understood the intricacies of the various calendar reforms and their impact on Zarathustra's teachings, for example, on the separation of Nowruz from the other *gāhāmbārs*, which Boyce suggests was not Zarathustra's intention when he founded the seven great feasts.

The third point goes back to the problem for researchers of establishing a benchmark by which to evaluate the religious views and observances of informants. In Boyce's case, there exists a tension between the literary version of Zoroastrianism that comprises a collection of doctrines and teachings in different languages compiled orally over a long period and the

religious beliefs and practices of Zoroastrians in the contemporary context. Her approach is to extrapolate from both and meet somewhere in the middle. *Persian Stronghold* was greeted with some ambivalence in Iran. Some resented the portrayal of what to them was unsophisticated, ritually based village Zoroastrianism. Others, however, recognized and admired her rigorous detail, saying she had recorded what was still in living memory with the eye of a camera. Boyce's notebooks, on the other hand, provide a timeless record that could not be faulted by those who provided her with information.

Less than a decade after Boyce completed her fieldwork in Sharifābād, another study was underway in similar circumstances. Reinhold Loeffler spent three years (1970-71 and 1976) gathering information via in-depth interviews with members of a Shiite population in a large tribal village in the Zagros mountains. He returned there from 1980-81 and again in 1983 to compare how religious practices and attitudes towards Islam had changed since the Revolution. There are distinct differences in methodology between Boyce's and Loeffler's approaches. Whereas Boyce made extensive field notes from which she wrote up her account of Zoroastrian religious life, Loeffler's fieldwork involved interviews that he reproduced in translation. As an anthropologist, his study devoted more time to the sociological and less to the historical background of the village. He was not inclined towards establishing continuities in Islam, perhaps because the combined evidence of the Qur'ān and the figure of Mohammad provided a consistency of time, place, and language when compared to the oral transmission of the Avesta. Unlike Boyce, one of Loeffler's main aims was to validate "what we have rather depreciatingly labelled popular beliefs or folk religion" (1988:1). To achieve this, he ignores the Shi'a religion formulated by clerics, and focuses instead on the religious world views of twenty-one informants (selected from a group of seventy-five). Within this group, his primary interest lies with the farming community rather than with those employed in the city or industry. The nature of the relationships he needed to build with informants meant that he did not include women in his interviews. A range of devotional practices, for example, to do with foods prepared for special occasions, as well as women's rituals and rites of passage, were thus omitted.

Loeffler pays scant attention to the different schools of thought within Islam or the distinctiveness of the Shi'a faith and its Iranian context. In avoiding what he terms "doctrines" and "norms" (1988:3), he is more interested in how people understand them and adapt or deviate from them to fit their circumstances. For example, he observes that the "Five Pillars of Islam" do not adapt well to his particular rural setting where people are unable to make the journey to Mecca or to fast during *Ramadan* given the nature of their work in the fields. Such work also makes it difficult to maintain purity rituals. Loeffler suggests that there is a shift away from ritual orthodoxy towards an existential understanding of the religion whereby villagers believe in a compassionate God who will reward them for showing compassion to others: "to give to the poor is better than to make the pilgrimage to Mecca" (14-15). At the heart of the villagers' religious worldview is the notion of giving in order to receive. Thus, Loeffler interprets all the various *sofrehs*, alms-giving, gifts and offerings made in thanksgiving or to ward off evil, as well as rituals for the dead, as being part of an endeavor to seek divine help.

Loeffler outlines his editing methodology in some detail, observing that the written word limits the information transmitted in the original interview. Even though he allows each

informant to present their views and keeps his translations as close to the original as possible, he points out that (1988:4):

> Much of what is conveyed by the immediate impact of the individual's personality is lost. Lost also are the cues and messages transmitted by facial expressions, gestures, enunciations, and intonations which function as a running commentary to the spoken words. And conventions of style and translation suppress subtleties of meaning as the diction of some persons needs more editing than that of others to render meanings intelligible.

Such audio/visual expressions are at the forefront of an oralist's understanding of how to interpret what is being conveyed. It is easier to reproduce passages *verbatim* rather than summarizing what people have said. How researchers categorize their subjects is important here. Loeffler chooses to name his interviewees either by their profession or by an attribute, which has the effect of externalizing that particular quality. He then adds a religious category to their title. For example, "The Old Teacher: Idealistic Humanism"; "The Young Teacher: Rationalism and Orthodoxy"; "The Old Hunter: Familiar of the Jinn"; "The Calm: Grassroot Morality and Cosmic Harmony"; "The Wealthy: Legitimization of Good Fortune"; "The Poor: Suppressed Revolt." While it seems unlikely that these categories would have accorded with people's self-understanding, they serve the author's purpose of shaping the structure of the interviews, which are prefaced by a short biography. For example, the first question addressed to a man who is a prosperous and well respected farmer, "The Wealthy," is: "What do you think is the source of your success?" (Loeffler 1988:213). Questions on religious views form part of all the interviews and add a dimension that only such oral testimony can provide, namely, to illuminate people's views with anecdotal evidence, personal context, and experience. They also enable us to understand how villagers' religious views relate to the author's theoretical framework. In a sense, it is this framework that we could call the benchmark by which Loeffler evaluates and analyzes his material. The synopses provided at the end of the book offer an interpretation of the interviews that belongs to an altogether different context. Here, Loeffler elaborates on the subtitle that he has accorded each person. For example (1988:284-88):

> The style of the CRAFTSMAN [Modernist Purism] is a rather radical form of modernist purism and relativism, in which Islam is supposedly purged from all manipulative, nonsensical, non-essential, and harmful appendages. . . .
>
> The two TRADERS [Virtuoso Devotionalism and Literal Zealotry] maintain a type of traditional, popular orthodoxy, incorporating into the strictly orthodox doctrines an abundance of marginally orthodox, folkloric, and magical beliefs and practices—virtually all are there. . . .
>
> The REPRESENTATIVE [of the People: Islamic Activism] models an Islam of social activism and liberation, put into practice with the zeal and impact reminiscent of an old-testamentarian prophet. . . .
>
> The world view of the YOUNG TEACHER [Rationalism and Orthodoxy] represents a haphazard

> mixture of rationalistic ideas, emphasizing education, unconditional individual responsibility, and psychological explanations, with a firm belief in all fundamental, orthodox doctrines and—somewhat strangely—a variety of folkloric and magical practices.

It seems that though Loeffler is keen to show the villagers to be devout Muslims, he nonetheless makes a distinction—in much the same way that Boyce does—between what he considers to be orthodox and non-orthodox, or popular, religion. Whereas in Boyce's study, the benchmark seems to be tenets of the religion derived ultimately from religious texts, in Loeffler's case, he assumes an established, clerical form of Shi'a Islam in Iran. He draws on social theory and anthropological studies to organize and analyze his oral material (1988:246-50). The religious diversity of his informants and the formation of their world views are not discussed within their codified religious system but rather within the framework of academic disciplines.

The third study discussed here, *Voices from Zoroastrian Iran, Oral Texts and Testimony* (Volumes I and II) had the benefit of both previous studies, together with a methodology developed especially for similar work on the Parsi community in Mumbai in 1994 (Kreyenbroek 2001). The thinking about how to define religion today has become increasingly interdisciplinary. Scholars such as anthropologist Talal Asad (1993:1-3 and 11-13), for example, demonstrate how religion is inextricably linked to the formation of modernity. They are wary of talking about a range of concepts that derive from a particular moment in Western academic work and applying it to different cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. European missionaries took to the colonies a template for what was thought to be the ideal religion, Christianity. From this time forward we begin to recognize this template in early studies of Zoroastrianism, for example, the idea that "belief" and "God" (a transcendent male divinity) are inextricably linked, which leads to the idea that the secularism of today with its emphasis on rational thought, contrasts with belief systems, which are portrayed as "retrogressive and inferior" (Hawthorne 2017:xiv). Western influence may account for the fact that Parsis like to point out that their religion is based on rational thought. Iranian Zoroastrians maintain that their religion emanates from the intellect. The idea of a hierarchy in religions is also characteristic of this period of European expansion. Belonging to the upper category were those that included organized worship and embraced an ethical code resulting in rewards and punishments in the hereafter.[9] Animistic religions, often associated with indigenous peoples, were considered in need of reform.

The question of how to present the idea of religion within one cultural milieu to someone who belongs to another was addressed in the third study with recourse to Zoroastrians themselves. It quickly became evident that there were different understandings about what constituted *din*, the word that translates most directly to "religion." It should be noted here that the word in Avestan, *daēnā*, means "vision" or "world view" (Hintze 2016:77) and is thus associated with thinking and belief rather than with physical vision. People we consulted agreed on four religious functions or categories that came under the umbrella of *din*. The first of these was "revelation/inspiration." Here again, there is no direct translation in Persian for this concept. The words *vahy* and *elhām* come close, though being Arabic words they are associated with the

[9] See Talal Asad 1993:41-43 under the heading, "The Construction of Religion in Early Modern Europe."

Abrahamic religions, and people were not always comfortable with the idea that this concept belonged in Zoroastrianism. They often said that the *din* and the *Gāthās* of Zarathustra belonged to the category of divine revelation whereas other parts of the Avesta were their *mazhab* (broadly equivalent to a "school" of Muslim law).[10]

Translations and interpretations of the *Gāthās* by Zoroastrian scholar-priests, such as Mowbeds Rostam Shahzādi (1912-2000) and Firuz Āzargoshasp (1912-1996), were influenced in part by the reformist ideas they had absorbed during their priestly training in India. They also followed the teaching of Iranian scholars, such as Ibrahim Purdavoud, who owed much to the work of European orientalist scholars such as Bartholomae, Mills, Geldner, and Meillet. Finally, some influences are the product of belonging to a Muslim majority population, for example, ideas put forward about traditional Zoroastrian practices such as *khwēdōdāh* ("inter-kinship marriage") by Muslim scholars like Hāshem Rāzi. As far as the Zoroastrian laity in Iran is concerned there are thus many strands of influence that can be recognized in some of the views expressed in interviews. Examples include approaches to the nature of good and evil and the practice of animal sacrifice (Stewart 2018:12-19).

The second category belonging to *din* is "doctrine and teaching" (*āmuzesh-hā-ye din*). Priests often explain the meaning of religious texts with reference to the great poets such as Abu'l-Qāsem Ferdowsi and Jalāl al-Din Mohammad Rumi with whom the laity are familiar. They sometimes put concepts such as good and evil into metaphorical language to make them more readily understood. Shahzādi maintains his belief in the monotheistic nature of Zoroastrianism when he speaks of creation as being the work of a single deity. At the same time, he conveys a sense of the dualism inherent within the religion when he says (Stewart 2016:358):

> . . . how can day and night, which are so different from each other, have been created by one creator? . . . How is it possible for rose and thorn to have been created thus? When we reach out to pick the beautiful rose, which emits its sweet scent, should our fingers touch its thorns and be injured? . . . How is it possible that a god should give us our lives, and the same should take them away from us?

The term *din dabireh* is used to describe the corpus of the religious teaching contained in the Avesta. It is also the term used for the Avestan script. An interviewee puts this into a contemporary context when asked whether emigration from Iran post-1979 poses difficulties and challenges faced for the Zoroastrian population. She replies (Stewart 2018:218):

> Not at all. I think things are very good. At present the Islamic Republic is working in favor of the Zoroastrian minority. There was a time when I was a student when we did not have to attend religious classes and we were not graded either. Now my child has to attend [Zartoshti] religious classes and he is graded. So his knowledge of religion has increased. He must learn the *din dabireh* script, which I did not have to learn. Now my children's knowledge about our religion is much better than mine, because I went to school in the reign of the Shah. Those who say they are under pressure—to tell you the truth that is not so. I go to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic

[10] See Stewart 2018:10-12 and 20.

> Guidance and they know I am from a minority religion. They show me a lot of respect and they work with us. In any country, in whatever situation, if you act against the rules and laws of that country you will get into trouble.

A clear distinction is made between the *din dabireh* and what is sometimes termed *adabiyāt* literature when referring to the Middle Persian books, which are not thought to have the same degree of authority as the Avestan literature. Shahzādi uses Islamic terminology when he says that, apart from the principal teachings of the Zoroastrian religion which are contained in the *Gāthās*, other Avestan texts resemble the minor rules of the religion (*foru'-e din*), the religious law (*shari'a*), and Zoroastrian thought or interpretation (*fekr*). He also refers to religion in connection with ceremonies or rituals (*din o āyin*), saying that these are not as important as the religion itself. It can be seen here that when breaking down the concept of religion into categories, there are different levels of importance attached to various subdivisions, which need to be understood in order to give meaning to the ideas and views of interviewees.

Concerning the third category of *din*, ritual and the priesthood, people expressed a variety of views and took different approaches. Expectations of priests today include correct recitation of Avestan prayers and the parts of liturgy recited in rituals. This pertains not only to pronunciation but also to the tone of voice. A priest comments on the fact that tone should be melodious and attractive to listen to (Stewart 2018:272). A lady complains that a priest recites the Avesta so badly that she would like to slap his face when he has finished (213). Views are generally divided on whether or not the meaning of the Avestan prayers needs to be taught and understood. For some, the power of prayer lies in being recited correctly and regularly, while others seek to know the meaning of the words (204):

> . . . . Each time we pray we are endowed with a [self-induced] belief which then gives us a power and determination to work better and perform our jobs better. This all depends upon whether we believe in such powers, if we do not believe in such powers, *niyāyesh* will have no effect. Fire ceremonies and *niyāyesh* do not bring you in touch with God, it strengthens your spirit; there is no God present between the *niyāyesh* and us, it is we who become godly through the *niyāyesh.*

The fourth and fifth categories are to do with religious observance or devotional life (*ānce ke mardom anjām midahand*), and faith (*kish*). Both these categories cover a broad range of subjects, and since most of our interviews were with laymen and women rather than with priests, there was much to learn here about people's religious views. I will mention those that demonstrate a distinctly oral understanding of the doctrines and teachings that are enshrined in Zoroastrian religious literature—in other words, how priests make teachings accessible to the laity (as shown in the example above, where Mowbed Shahzādi explains the doctrine of good and evil) and how the laity perceive such teachings when communicating with each other. It is this aspect of religious understanding that can be compared with the approaches of Boyce and Loeffler, discussed earlier in this paper, and how all three studies undertake the evaluation of qualitative data.

Unlike the approach to Zoroastrian texts that resulted in the construction of the "classical tradition," the Zoroastrian laity doesn't differentiate in the same way between categories of texts

(other than those described above regarding the *din dabireh* and *adabiyāt* literature). Rather, they associate certain texts with particular themes. Thus, ideas about the day of judgment and the afterlife are informed more by the Persian text of the *Ardā Virāf Nāmeh*—particularly the illustrated version—rather than the *Gāthā*s or Pahlavi texts such as the *Bundahishn* and the *Rivāyat* accompanying the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*. Eschatological ideas are also informed by people's dreams and visions, as illustrated in secular literature such as the *Shānāmeh* and *Vis u Rāmin*, rather than the Pahlavi texts (Stewart 2018:5 and n. 12).

Notable here is the fact that non-Zoroastrian secular literature, such as the *Shāhnāmeh*, is referred to within a Zoroastrian context. One example is a story told by a man in the Yazdi village of Zeināābād whose family once owned a valuable illustrated copy of the *Shāhnāmeh*, which was stolen from his house in the village. He recounted a story about Rostam and Ashu Zardosht [Zarathustra] from his family's book in which he included details to illustrate a point or a value particularly relevant to Zoroastrianism. He explains how Rostam-e Zāl was sent by Esfandiār to find Zardosht. He arrived hungry and thirsty after a long journey only to find that there was no one to greet him and no music befitting the arrival of a hero. When leaving he sees Zartosht in the distance coming down the mountain. After greeting each other Rostam asks Zartosht where he has been, to which he replies, "A strand of my hair had fallen and I went to bury it behind the mountain because I did not want to pollute or cause a health risk, that is to say, we are very aware of health risks and it is a sin to touch fallen hair." The story continues and Rostam goes into Zartosht's house expecting to be fed but sees there is no fire or bowl or saucepan in place. Despite this, he is given a meal that "tastes of Paradise." As a result of talking to Zartosht about his religion, Rostam realizes that he can no longer go to the desert to hunt or engage in wars and fighting as he is used to doing, because these things are sinful (Stewart 2020:179).

When it came to analyzing responses to the questions from the five categories that constitute "religion" which were drawn up for the *Zoroastrian Voices* project, it became clear that discussion within a notional framework of Zoroastrian orthodoxy was not going to be a useful means by which to measure people's approach to their religion. The question remained, how do we evaluate or interpret people's religious views? All three studies discussed here are not concerned so much with doctrines and norms, but with how people make sense of them. In Loeffler's case, perhaps with the confidence of being able to rely on the well documented tradition of Shi'a Islam, he accepts doctrines and norms as a given and describes how his interviewees deviate from them. In other words, how they adapt and reappropriate the basic teachings enshrined in the five pillars of Islam: ". . . neglect of the orthodox ritual does not make them an irreligious people . . ." (Loeffler 1988:15). Boyce, on the other hand, is at pains to explain how villagers in Sharifābād adhere to the teachings of Zoroastrianism, excusing them from any deviation she encountered. This approach reflects perhaps the fragility of a religious tradition that, unlike Islam, is based on the oral transmission of texts that do not originate with a known person or an identifiable place. The third study, *Zoroastrian Voices*, has tended to sidestep the question of orthodoxy or academic analysis and deliberately avoids placing people's religious

views in a framework or context which they might not recognize.[11] This renders the material more of a primary source than an analytical study.

The problems of studying modern Zoroastrianism are considerable, but perhaps not insurmountable. The challenge is to find a synthesis between an incomplete and abstruse religious corpus, the translation and interpretation of that religious corpus mainly by non-Zoroastrians, and the understanding of Zoroastrianism by its adherents in Iran, India, and the diaspora. The tendency is to view the first two categories as having greater authority when it comes to the true nature of the religion than the third. One of the reasons perhaps is that communities such as those studied by Boyce in Sharifābād or by Loeffler in Southern Iran belonged to an isolated locality whose people were not expected to have the same access to learning as those living in a metropolis. It may have been concluded that their unworldliness might limit their education, knowledge, and understanding.[12] In fact, however, in Iran today the religion is largely preserved and maintained by the laity. Whereas traditionally, Zoroastrian priests were considered the repositories of religious knowledge and the authors of religious texts and authorities on ritual practice, their influence began to diminish from the nineteenth century onwards. In Iran the numbers of the priesthood dwindled, so that today there are few hereditary priests left.

It could be argued that the laity played a much larger part in transmitting the religion historically than is generally accepted. It has been assumed that, since the laity would not have understood the Avestan language once it was no longer spoken, they would have had little or no influence on theological development. It is also thought that since the laity rarely had access to written texts, people's knowledge of the religion would have been limited. But neither of these two factors take into account the oral transmission of texts, upon which the laity was dependent in the same way as priests. The text of the *Ātash nu Git* referred to above, although it now exists in written form, is a characteristically oral account. The domestication of a priestly ritual that took place in a fire temple into a ceremony in celebration of fire that took place in the home is an example of how laypeople adapted (rather than popularized) a religious act of worship.

We can perhaps recognize a generic idea of "laity" in the accounts of villagers in all three of the studies outlined above. One way to mediate the view that there is such a thing as religious "orthodoxy" and that this is constituted mainly by priests, scholars, and written texts, is to take a different approach to the religious community. Here, we might draw on the ideas of the eighteenth-century theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher, when he talked about the theologizing role of the community. He believed "religion" to be a continuous process dependent upon the participation and dynamic activity of those engaged with it, for "Unlike other concepts and perceptions, religious communication is not to be sought in books" (2003:75-76). In his *Fourth Speech*, Schleiermacher asks of his German Protestant audience about the divide between priest and laity that had been labeled as the source of so much evil. He suggests that this is not so much a distinction between people, but merely between situations and functions. Thus, "Each person is a priest to the extent that he draws others to himself in the field that he has specially made his own and in which he can present himself as a virtuoso; each is a layperson to the extent that he

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[11] See for example Borland 2003:320-33.

[12] See Asad 1993:8, where he talks about the notion of being "local."

follows the art and direction of another where he himself is a stranger in religion" (75-76).[13] Theological ideas such as these, though far removed in time, place, and context, can perhaps be drawn upon to better understand expressions of religious behavior amongst Zoroastrians in today's world.

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Singing the Pain: Yezidi Oral Tradition and Sinjari Laments after ISIS[1]

Eszter Spät

Our girls fell into the hands of the kafir
They sold our girls to strange countries
This girl ran to the mountain to flee the kafir and she fell
Hadiya escaped the kafir, but she fell, she threw herself
It is a Great Holiday,[2] *but those in the hands of the kafir have no one*
The Holiday came, but no one visits our dead in Sinjar
The captivity of our girls and youth is even worse than death
The refugees[3] *are sitting in front of the street doors of strangers*
We have become blind from the pain.

The words of the old Sinjari[4] woman echoed among the graves in the Sinjari section of the Yezidi cemetery of Mem Şivan, in the Kurdistan Region, as she mourned for her granddaughter on the eve of Yezidi New Year.[5] The melody to which she composed her words

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[1] This article is based on repeated research trips in the Kurdish Region of Iraq between 2011 and 2017. Two of the *xerîbîs*, or laments, included below were collected in the course of my 2017 fieldwork supported by a generous grant from the Fritz Thyssen Foundation (grant number 2017-00830). I would also like to express my gratitude to George Soros for funding the late Central European University of Budapest, which used to provide a space for my research. My special thanks to Khanna Omarkhali for her invaluable help in transcribing and translating the laments in the article, and to Gulie Khalaf for her useful explanations and comments on the Sinjari expressions and images utilized in the laments.

[2] The New Year of Yezidis.

[3] *Muhacir*; interestingly, Yezidi refugees use this word to denote themselves, though in Muslim societies *muhacir* is usually exclusively used for Muslim refugees.

[4] I shall use the expressions "Sinjari" for Yezidis from the Sinjar region (near the Iraqi-Syrian border) and "Welati" for Yezidis from the region lying east of the Tigris (traditionally referred to as *Welat* or "Homeland").

[5] Yezidi women visit the graves of their dead on New Year and other holidays to perform ritual mourning. However, people said that this old Sinjari refugee, Dêy Şîrîn, came almost every day at sunset, to sing laments at the grave of her granddaughter, who died as a result of an accident after fleeing ISIS. For Yezidi names and geographic names that are not well known, I shall be using the Kurdish alphabet and orthography developed by the brothers Bedirxan. (For pronunciation see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdish_alphabets#Comparison_of_Kurdish_alphabets.)

was traditional, and so was the way Yezidis referred to the lament: *xerîbî* or *dîrok*,[6] the expression of longing, exile, and estrangement. However, the words themselves were new, composed in the wake of the ISIS attack. Her *xerîbî* or lament attested both to the trauma suffered by the Yezidis, a religio-ethnic minority with its unique traditions, and to the creative vitality of a genre which has a special place in Yezidi oral tradition. This article studies the changes Yezidi lament underwent in Northern Iraq in the past few years, reflecting the transformation of the Yezidi community itself. It pays special attention to the impact of the ISIS attack on the Yezidis of Sinjar.

Yezidi Funerals and the *Xerîbî*

Dirges or laments sung at funerals and wakes are, or at least used to be, an important part of Kurdish culture. At the same time, however, laments represent a literary genre that enjoys little prestige and has received limited scholarly attention in Kurdish studies. This is also true for Yezidi laments. While various collections of Yezidi sacred texts have been published lately,[7] there has been much less interest in laments.[8] This lack of scholarly interest possibly reflects Yezidis' attitude toward this genre. As Allison has pointed out in her book on Yezidi oral tradition, "Women's lament does not appear to enjoy the relatively high status of the historical *stran* [song], in Kurdish society" (1996:176). There may be various explanations for this phenomenon. Laments are traditionally perceived as an exclusively female genre. They are sung and listened to by women, which no doubt contributes to their lower social status in the eyes of local informants.[9] Furthermore, as dirges are sung only at wakes and at other commemorative

[6] In her book, *Yezidi Oral Tradition*, Allison refers to Yezidi laments as *dîrok* or *stranêd şînî* ("songs of mourning") (2001:75-76, 176). Estelle Amy de la Bretèque states that the expression *kilamê ser* ("words about") is used for the genre of laments among Armenian Yezidis (2012:131-32 and 2017 passim). According Khanna Omarkhali, Armenian Yezidis use *sitranên şînî* or *stranên ser şînê* (personal communication). During my fieldwork in the Kurdistan Region, the term women usually used to refer to laments was *xerîbî* (as in "they say *xerîbî*," *xerîbî dibêjin*). Some Sinjari women also used the term *dîrok*. Therefore, in this article I shall follow local usage and use *xerîbî*.

[7] English translations of Yezidi sacred texts have been published by Philip Kreyenbroek (1995), Kreyenbroek and Kh. Jindy Rashow (2005), and Khanna Omarkhali (2017). Many sacred texts have been published in the original Kurdish in Iraq, in Armenia, and by the diaspora community in Germany. Beside volumes containing collections of sacred texts, periodicals like *Lalish* (published in Duhok, Iraq) also regularly print transcriptions of sacred texts.

[8] The rare exceptions are Christine Allison in Iraq and Estelle Amy de la Bretèque in Armenia. Allison devoted a detailed chapter to Yezidi laments in her book *Yezidi Oral Tradition* (2001). She also published an article on Yezidi and Muslim Kurdish laments in Iraq (1996). Estelle Amy de la Bretèque carried out extensive ethnomusicological work among the Yezidis of Armenia. It is the topic of her monograph, *Paroles mélodisées: Récits épiques et lamentations chez les Yézidis d'Arménie* (2013). For her other articles on the topic and examples of her audio recordings, see her page, http://www.ethnomusicologie.fr/parolesmelodisees/. Soviet kurdologist Margarita Rudenko published a chapter on laments in a book on ritual poetry (1982). The Celîl brothers also included extracts from Armenian laments in their collection, *Kurdish Folklore* (1978:490-503).

[9] For example, while Sinjari IDPs drew my attention to their acquaintances and friends known as accomplished *tembûrvan*s, no one remembered to mention those who were known to be expert singers of laments, even though due to the frequent funerals and wakes held in the IDP camps, all knew such women.

occasions honoring the dead, not at festive events (weddings, parties, picnics), and as they cannot appeal to national pride, it is hard to find a niche for them in the modern commercial music market. Recordings of laments are not sold in the bazaar, unlike Kurdish pop music or the recordings of traditional singers. Finally, with the fast transformation of Yezidi society, there are regions where the tradition of laments seems to be on the wane. However, as shall be shown in this paper, laments still fulfill an important role among the Yezidis of Sinjar. While other aspects of oral tradition are threatened by the displacement of Sinjari Yezidis after the ISIS attack of 2014,[10] laments not only continue to be sung, but new laments are being composed as Yezidi women try to process and express their traumatic experiences. While these women and their artistic talent receive little or no recognition outside their own social circles, the songs I have recorded demonstrate that laments are a living artistic form of self-expression and literary creativity within an oral cultural framework.

Christine Allison, who carried out her research among the Yezidis of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq[11] in the early nineties, described the singing of laments as still an important constituent of Yezidi culture. Laments were, as a rule, sung at wakes after funerals by relatives, as well as at New Year in the cemeteries, and in her book she describes her experience of a widow performing laments in her home, in the company of women, in the memory of her husband (2001:76, 187-90). According to her, semi-professional singers of laments (that is, singers known for their skills, who were formally invited to sing at *tazîs* and were remunerated for their trouble), still existed and were being invited to sing *xerîbîs* at wakes in the region (2001:76-77, 177 and passim).

By the 2010s, the time of my own fieldwork, the situation had changed, at least in the Kurdistan Region. Though I repeatedly expressed my interest in hearing *xerîbîs* to various Yezidi friends, eager to help me with my research, this turned out to be difficult. As my acquaintances explained, it was no longer felt important to sing *xerîbîs* at the wakes held for elderly people. Singing *xerîbîs* was considered important only in the case of young people who passed away before their time, often under tragic circumstances, or for people whose social position was considered elevated. Women singing in their own homes in memory of beloved ones who had passed away, as described by Allison, no longer seemed to be a practice. As a consequence, the art of singing laments considerably declined in the roughly two decades following the fieldwork of Christine Allison. Even when *xerîbîs* were being sung, these mostly consisted of simple, repeated phrases, rather than the elaborate texts described in Allison's book. Going to the funeral of a young person, whose death was untimely and tragic, was not something I felt comfortable doing, but I could repeatedly observe women singing at the graves during Yezidi holy days. The Yezidi tradition is for women to visit the cemetery either on the eve or at the dawn of Yezidi holidays, taking food for the deceased. Some of the women who were still in mourning for the recent death of a young person, for example a daughter who died of cancer, or a son/brother who

[10] See Spät 2021.

[11] The Kurdistan Region at the time was restricted to the Yezidi villages of Khanke, Shariya, and Baadre. The so-called Sheikhan region, with its many Yezidi villages, was at the time not accessible to people working in Iraqi Kurdistan. After 2003 Sheikhan came under the *de facto* (though not *de lege*) authority of the Kurdish Regional Government.

had been killed in Baghdad for selling alcohol, performed laments at the graves of their beloved ones. These laments were deeply emotional, accompanied by much crying; the text of the laments themselves, however, were very simple and repetitive. Much of it was just repeated phrases (such as: "oh my dear one, my heart oooh; help, help, help oooh"),[12] with the women wailing and ritually beating the chest and face.

It appeared that the art of singing *xerîbîs* declined to such an extent that the presence of experts, or what Allison refers to as "semi-professionals," was no longer felt to be a necessity at important funerals, or perhaps such singers were no longer to be found in the region. During my own research work in Khanke and Shariya, the two big Yezidi collective villages[13] of the Kurdistan Region, no one was ever referred to or pointed out as someone specially accomplished in singing *xerîbî*. Though this does not mean that such person(s) did not exist—after all, *xerîbîs* were not the main focus of my research—this suggests that accomplished singers of laments have either disappeared or were no longer accorded much importance by most of the community. One of the *tazîs* I could observe, held for the mother of an influential and rich Yezidi politician, from a sheikh lineage, provided a good example of this phenomenon. The *tazî* reflected the social importance of the son of the deceased. Great crowds came to express their condolences: not only the inhabitants of the village and members of the tribe of the family, but also members of the emerging Yezidi middle class, as well as non-Yezidi Kurdish politicians, both from the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) and the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan). *Qewwals*, the singers of Yezidi sacred hymns, were invited to perform at the *tazî*, an exceptional event at this settlement.[14] However, no professional *xerîbî* singer was present at the wake. The daughters of the deceased (elderly or late-middle-aged women), seated around the bed of the deceased in the middle of the courtyard, sang laments themselves. However, these were simple laments, merely consisting of the singing of a few stock phrases and sentences, on the pain of becoming orphaned and the loss suffered, repeated over and over again.[15]

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[12] *Oh delalê, dilê min oooooh*; *oh hawar hawar hawar, oooooh*. *Hawar* or help in the context of laments and songs is not so much a literal call for help, rather an expression of pain and hopelessness.

[13] Such Yezidi collective villages were created by the Saddam regime in Sinjar in the 1970s and in the Yezidi regions east of the Tigris ("Welat") in the 1980s. Yezidis were forced to abandon their villages, usually on or at the foot of mountains, and moved into huge collective settlements on the plains, where government control was easier to exert.

[14] Despite the increased ease of travel and communication, it is rare in Khanke to invite *qewwal*s from their traditional home villages of Beshiqe-Behzani near Mosul. In Shariya, another collective town near Duhok, inviting *qewwal*s to funerals and the New Year mourning has been banned outright, or so people said, by community leaders.

[15] Experts, or what Allison refers to as "semi-professional" singers of *xerîbî*s still existed in Sheikhan, bordering the Kurdistan Region. Under the rule of Baghdad until 2003 and separated from Kurdistan by an internal border manned by Iraqi soldiers, the villages of Sheikhan were poorer, less affected by modernization, and more traditional than Yezidi settlements of the Kurdistan Region proper. Once, when visiting the village of Esya in Sheikhan, I ended up, without previously planning to do so, at the *tazî* for a young man who had just been killed in a driving accident. Both *qewwal*s and a semi-professional singer of *xerîbî*s had been invited to perform at the *tazî*. While the mourners themselves sang simple laments, consisting of repeated phrases, just like women did at funerals in Khanke, the professional singer sang several long and elaborate laments.

Sinjari Tradition

The situation was very different in the Sinjar region, near the Iraqi-Syrian border, where a huge Yezidi community has been living for centuries on and around the Sinjar Mountain. Isolated, poor, and suffering from a lack of development, the Sinjari community is widely considered far more traditional and religiously observant than their brethren east of the Tigris, especially the Yezidis of the Kurdistan Region proper. Along with many other aspects of Yezidi culture, performing laments has also so far survived in Sinjar as a living and integral part of traditional customs. The genocidal attack of the Islamic State on Sinjari Yezidis on August 3, 2014, forced most of the Sinjari community into continuing displacement in the Kurdistan Region.[16] While this has had a destructive impact on the cultural heritage of Sinjaris, due to the disruption of traditional social and cultural institutions, performing laments seems to have been one aspect which continues to be observed in the exile. Singing *xerîbîs* is not only seen as requisite for paying respect for the deceased, even if the wake takes place in a refugee camp or some makeshift housing, but it also provides an outlet for female refugees' grief and desperation. During repeated fieldwork carried out after 2014 in the Kurdistan Region, I had the opportunity to get more acquainted with the Sinjari community, now living as IDPs (or internally displaced persons) in and around local Yezidi villages, and learned more about their customs, including their *tazîs*.

Funerals are important social occasions among Sinjari Yezidis. Or maybe one had better say, taking all aspects into consideration, Sinjari funerals (just as funerals among other ethnic and religious groups in the region) are important religio-social-economic occasions. Not only relatives and friends, but generally other villagers and even distant acquaintances, are expected to make an appearance during the *tazî* or the wake period—which in Sinjar may traditionally last three, or preferably five or seven days[17]—in order to pay their respect to the deceased and their family. Failure to attend a *tazî* (or at least to express condolences at a later date together with excuses for not having been present at the *tazî*) is noted and construed as a social offense even among the less (or not at all) traditional.[18] Not only is attendance at a *tazî* a social obligation, but visitors are also expected to contribute toward the expenses of a wake. Such expenses can be considerable, seeing that a huge meal is served each day of the wake. A sheep must be sacrificed right after the body is taken from the house, and its meat is later served to the guests. This is followed by a lunch and dinner every day the *tazî* lasts, up to the last day, the day of the *xêr* (alms, charity), when everybody is expected to come, even if they had been before, and a huge

[16] For more details on the displacement of Sinjari Yezidis, see Dulz 2016.

[17] East of the Tigris, Yezidi funeral wakes officially last three days these days. When Allison carried out her fieldwork, in the early nineties, seven days seems to have been the expected number of days (2001:178).

[18] This social aspect of *tazî* is also noted by Allison (2001:169).

lunch is served. These days it is also customary to rent a huge tent to accommodate the guests.[19] As saying prayers and hymns for the deceased is (at least theoretically) demanded by religious traditions, *'elimdars*, that is, experts of religious texts (literally, "men of knowledge") are also invited. Though there may not be prayers at the funeral itself, which must be carried out as soon as possible leaving little time to locate and invite an *'elimdar*,[20] texts are recited in the evening in the tent, the space reserved for the male guests. Unless the *'elimdar* is a relative or close friend, some form of remuneration is customary for his services. While the religious part of the wake is thus usually restricted to the "male space," *xerîbîs* get to be sung by and for the females in their own separate female space (usually in the house). Some of the *xerîbîs* are sung by the relatives or the friends of the deceased, but sometimes, especially if there are no good singers in the family, women known to be expert *xerîbî* singers are specially invited. Allison refers to such expert *xerîbî* singers as "semi-professionals," as in her understanding they do not make their living from singing, though it is an expected custom to somehow remunerate a singer invited to perform *xerîbîs* at a *tazî*. However, I have found that in Sinjar there are female *xerîbî* singers who sing *xerîbîs* for a livelihood, like Basê Qasim (whose *xerîbî* will be discussed below), from Siba Sheikh Khidir on the southern side of Sinjar. As she explained, she had become a widow with children as a young woman and supported herself through singing laments. However, even she claimed that she never asked for a fixed sum for singing at a funeral, rather people gave what they saw fit.

Transformation of the Genre

Laments are traditionally a genre where each song is composed extempore,[21] even if stock phrases or formulas are used. Thus, despite their traditional nature, *xerîbîs* are subject to dynamical change. Not only are the words recomposed again and again and made to fit the occasion and echo the concerns of the community (as shall be seen below), but the very rules and conditions under which a *xerîbî* may be sung can change, reflecting the economic, social, and technological transformation of society. In fact, the possibilities offered by modern technology

[19] In the Kurdistan Region, the *Bingehê Laliş* or Lalish Yezidi Cultural Center (which has numerous sub-branches in various Yezidi settlements) built huge community halls in the villages, partly to provide the community with a permanent building to hold wakes. Some families and villages still prefer tents erected in the streets, but others use these community halls (sometimes referred to as *mala miriyan* or "house of the dead") to receive the male guests. Women usually congregate in the house of the deceased.

[20] People claimed that in Sinjar prayers were always said during the actual burial. However, in the displacement this definitely was not the case, and the above claim may reflect what is considered ideal rather than what actually used to take place. Welati Yezidis also claimed that prayers are always said at their burials (unlike at Sinjari funerals, they added), but in my experience this is not the case either.

[21] As Albert B. Lord has pointed out in his seminal book, *The Singer of Tales* (1960), performers of oral tradition do not merely recite or perform memorized texts, but they compose or at least recompose them as part of each performance. This is certainly true of the Yezidi *xerîbî* tradition. No two laments I have heard were the same, and it was clear that each singer was composing her own "text," even if using some commonly accepted formulas and traditional images. Therefore, in this article I shall use the word "compose" instead of "perform," as it is a more fitting description of the artistic process.

seems to have a great impact on the formerly rigid social rules governing *xerîbî* singing. When I was making inquiries about *tazîs* and the singing of *xerîbîs* at *tazîs*, Sinjari acquaintances helpfully offered to procure recordings of *xerîbî* singing for me. *Xerîbî* recordings had become a marketable commodity in the past years, as they explained. In order to understand the novel nature of selling recordings of this traditional genre, one has to recall the observation of Christine Allison in the early 1990s. As Allison writes, "the strict social rules governing the occasion of performance of lament made it impossible for me to make a recording of a semi-professional lament" (2001:178).[22] Allison's words make recent commodification of *xerîbî* recordings all the more striking. The explanation should, paradoxically, be sought in Sinjari Yezidis' adherence to tradition. Sinjari customs demand that relatives visit the grave of the deceased every month during the first year, commemorating the death of their loved one, and then every year on holidays or the anniversary of the death.[23] Such visits traditionally included a sacrifice (ideally of a sheep or lamb), taking food to the graveside,[24] as well as women singing *xerîbîs* while ritually beating their faces or chest and crying. However, not all women possess the talent to sing *xerîbîs*. Modern technology, specifically the spread of smartphones, which have become ubiquitous in Iraq, offered an easy solution for this problem. A semiprofessional singer could be invited by the family of the deceased to sing about the departed either during or even after the *tazî*.[25] Based on the samples procured for me by Sinjari friends, singers try to "personalize" their laments on such occasions. They insert the names of various grieving family members and also some details on the deceased among the songs generally describing the pain caused by the departure of a loved one. These *xerîbî* session are recorded by family members and then, during the requisite visits to the grave, the *xerîbîs* are played on the phone, inducing the women to cry, just as the live performance of a *xerîbî* would do.[26]

The opportunities offered by access to new technology have led to another radical change, impacting the strict gender roles connected to laments. *Xerîbîs* have traditionally been sung only by women, and only for women. As Allison writes, "Informants in Badinan were unanimous that lament was a women's genre, and I found no evidence there of any similar songs

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[22] In personal communication, Allison explained that this was not merely because she did not have the chance to take part in a funeral wake (she did participate in "lament singing sessions" in private homes), but also because of the various social taboos surrounding the singing of laments.

[23] After a year is over, the clothes, *duşek* (thin sleeping mattress), quilt, and pillow of the deceased are given to the sheikh who had washed the body, and people are invited to a commemorative lunch. Following this date, the grave has to be visited only on the occasion of holidays, though some people do invite guests to a commemorative lunch on the anniversary of the death of a person dear to them. This latter is however a personal choice.

[24] Some of the food should also be distributed among the neighbors.

[25] Considering the rather low level of background noise when compared to my own recordings at actual *tazîs*, I concluded that the recordings I was given were made not at an actual wake, but rather on a later occasion, with only a few family members present.

[26] A somewhat similar development can be observed in Armenia, where studio recordings are sometimes ordered by the family of the deceased to be sent to relatives living far away. Some professional musicians also make recordings (on the heroic death of famous persons) for commercial dissemination/distribution (Amy de la Bretèqe 2015:238-39). Furthermore, I was recently sent the video recording of *xerîbî*-singing at a *tazî* for Sinjari refugees, where yet another technological innovation was being utilized: the singer was using a mike and loudspeaker to amplify her voice (with the unfortunate result that her voice became distorted and unpleasant.)

performed by men," adding that this was a genre that men looked down on: "Most of the men I questioned about women's lament asked why I was interested in such a 'miserable' genre" (1996:176). This attitude is easy to understand if we consider that while Yezidi society is in general less gender-segregated than Muslim society, men and women are still strictly separated at funeral wakes, and singing *xerîbîs* is restricted to women whose space is not entered by adult males.[27] Furthermore, wailing, crying, or beating of chests (which accompany the singing of *xerîbî*) would be considered unfitting for men. Consequently, *xerîbîs* can traditionally be sung only by women. However, as playing a recording at a grave does not necessitate the actual presence of the singer, whether male or female, recently male singers have also started singing *xerîbîs* for recording purposes. This, in its turn, may have a long-term effect on gender roles where *xerîbî*-singing is concerned.

While technology has brought about some important changes and innovations in the ways *xerîbîs* are performed, recent events, such as the genocidal attack of the Islamic State, have changed the content of the *xerîbîs* themselves. *Xerîbî* has always been a genre composed extempore. Formulas, traditional motifs, and images were mixed with the personal, and no *xerîbî* was ever performed (or expected to be performed) in the same way twice (cf. Allison 2001:176). Laments with traditional motifs (ranging from the description of the pain of those left behind to the vagaries of fate to religious images) are still being sung, but following ISIS' attack on the Sinjari community on August 3, 2014, women started composing new texts which reflect their recent pain and loss. While *xerîbîs* have always included topics like exile (the literal meaning of the word *xerîbî*, as death is seen as a form of exile), being an orphan, having a loved one killed or wounded,[28] or even fleeing to the mountains,[29] the new style of *xerîbîs* sing very concretely of what has happened to the Yezidis of Sinjar. To the old themes of exile, death, and being orphaned, which have gained a painful poignancy in their present situation, they now add references to the fate of Yezidi girls taken as *esîr* or captives and being sold to infidels (*kafirs*) in the bazaars of Raqqa (used to refer not only to the town itself but to the territory of the ISIS Caliphate as well), the unburied bodies left behind, and their existence as indigent refugees. Some laments even refer to concrete events as well as famous personalities in the fight against ISIS.

My first, deeply moving experience of new *xerîbîs* took place on the Yezidi New Year in April, 2015, at the cemetery of Mem Şivan in Khanke. The small hill dedicated to Mem Şivan and other Holy Beings serves as the traditional burial ground not only for the inhabitants of the village of Mem Şivan (consisting mostly of members of the *pîr* lineage of Mem Şivan), but also for a number of other villages in the vicinity. Each village has its own section on the small hill, among the various shrines, where they bury their dead, and after August, 2014, a special plot was

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[27] This was still strictly observed at *tazîs* I attended, both for Sinjaris and Welatis, the only exceptions being the *qewwals*, if they were invited to a funeral to play on the sacred instruments, the *def û şîbab*.

[28] Not a mere symbol in Saddam's Iraq, but often an actual fate that met a loved one.

[29] Allison mentions how she heard a woman singing going to the mountains with her small children and being under attack. Allison concludes that "her reference here to . . . 'the people of Kurdistan' makes it likely that she is referring to the Iraqi army's suppression of the Kurdish rebellion in 1991 and the subsequent mass flight to the mountains" (2001:192).

given to the Sinjaris.[30] As is the custom, women went to the cemetery on New Year, to take food for their dead and to ritually mourn for them, accompanied by the *qewwals*.[31] After the *qewwals* and most of the local mourners had left, I was walking around the cemetery taking pictures of the graves. On the far side of the hill, at the section set aside for the Sinjari dead, I came across a small group of Sinjari women, with an old woman singing and the younger ones around her crying. This singing was different from that of local women who came to mourn at the graves. While the latter mostly beat their chests and faces and repeated a few stock phases or simply just wailed, the singing of these women was both more pain-filled than those of the ritual mourners and more sophisticated, with what seemed like a complex narrative sung by the old woman. The group was soon joined by another old Sinjari woman (apparently one previously not known to them). As I later learned, Dêy Şîrîn,[32] who was also a *xizmetkar* or servant at Lalish,[33] regularly came to sing at the grave of her granddaughter. The young woman died when the family first fled to the Kurdish mountains near Zakho, having fallen from a rock or cliff-face while collecting firewood on the mountainside. Though Dêy Şîrîn was known to those living near the cemetery hill as someone who came almost every sunset to sing at the grave of her granddaughter, she herself did not claim to be an accomplished singer. As she said, in the past she never sang *xerîbîs*, adding, "I only started after my children became captives."[34] As none of her own children (or grandchildren) had been captured, it was obvious that she used "my children" to refer to any Yezidi who disappeared in the hands of ISIS, seeing them, just as the whole community did, like her own children and sharing in the grief over their fate. She sang of how "our daughters" fell into the hands of infidels (*kafirs*), who sold them in the bazaars to strangers coming from all over world; of how the dead lay orphaned (unburied) in Sinjar; of her granddaughter who threw herself from the mountain rather than fall into the hands of *Daesh*;[35] of the whole community being blinded by pain, destroyed, and having to sit in the street in front of doors of strangers.

Much moved by her singing, I showed my recordings to local friends.[36] As they told me, Dêy Şîrîn was not alone in singing about ISIS and of what they had done to the community.

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[30] Some of those who have passed away as refugees were taken back to Sinjar, especially after the major shrines became liberated, but others were buried at local cemeteries.

[31] *Qewwals* do not go to all cemeteries, and in many villages women do the ritual mourning accompanied by local men playing on the drum and *zurna* or without musical accompaniment, but Mem Şivan is considered an important sacred site. For more on Yezidi mourning customs at New Year see Kreyenbroek 1995:151 and 2009:23-24; Spät 2005:64-66.

[32] That is, Mother Şîrîn, "Mother" being the traditional title to address elderly people.

[33] That is, someone who goes to Lalish to help to keep the sacred valley clean and also perform other acts of service.

[34] *Zarokên min girtî bûn*.

[35] Though her granddaughter died in an accident, as an indirect result of being a refugee, Yezidi girls are said to have committed suicide after being violated by ISIS fighters, by throwing themselves off rock walls in the Sinjar mountain.

[36] Sadly, the strong wind, bringing a spring storm, made my recordings aesthetically useless and hard to understand.

According to them, after the refugees first arrived, whenever Sinjari women gathered, they would often start singing *xerîbîs*, recounting both their personal loss and the sufferings of the whole community, until they all dissolved in tears. As time passed such "sessions" of singing their grief gradually subsided, and saying *xerîbîs* was once again mostly confined to *tazîs* and visits to graves at the cemeteries. My friends also advised me against asking women to sing *xerîbîs*, saying that it would remind everybody present of what they had been through and what they had lost and make them cry. As the community was trying to adjust and get on with its life in displacement, this was no longer felt fitting.

I did, however, later on have the opportunity to listen to and record Sinjari laments, both new and old, at *tazîs* and also in Lalish, the sacred valley of the Yezidis. In what follows, I shall describe these occasions and the new *xerîbîs* singing of what is known as the latest *ferman*[37] or attack against Yezidis.

Stranbêj **Singing Laments on Mount Arafat**

Among Yezidis, the name *Çiyayê Erefatê* or "Mount Arafat" does not refer to the hill just east of Mecca, one of the sites to be visited during *Hajj*, but to one of the hills rising above Lalish, the sacred valley of the Yezidis at the Kurdish foothills. Mount Arafat is traditionally considered a place where Sinjari pilgrims set up their tents, just above the Central Sanctuary of Sheikh Adi. Mount Arafat is also the traditional place where Sinjari *stranbêj* (literally: "sayers of songs") or bards congregate on a small level square halfway up the hill, just above a wishing tree. During my previous visits to Lalish during the *Cema'y* or Autumn Assembly, when Yezidis come on a pilgrimage to Lalish from everywhere, I witnessed Sinjari *stranbêj*[38] sit down in this spot on Mount Arafat and sing to their enraptured audience. More than once, there were several *stranbêj*, one taking over the singing from the other, in a friendly rivalry.

The situation was somewhat different in the fall of 2017. The *Cema'y* of 2017 was going to be the first Autumn Assembly celebrated since 2012, the four previous festivals having been canceled on account of mourning and also out of respect for those fighting ISIS.[39] However, in the end this *Cema'y* was also canceled by the *Meclisê Ruhanî* or Yezidi Spiritual Council. As I heard, the reason for this decision was no longer ISIS (who had been beaten out of territories in Northern Iraq), but the death of Jelal Talabani, head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, just a few days before the *Cema'y* and the official mourning announced everywhere in the Kurdistan Region, irrespective of ideological and political loyalties. Though the Assembly was officially canceled and no public rituals were celebrated, the Valley was still full of pilgrims—most of them young Sinjaris. However, instead of the usual male *stranbêj*, I found two women on Mount

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[37] *Ferman*, literally "edict," is used in the sense of attack or "pogrom" among Yezidis. Lately, Yezidis have started to translate the word into English as "genocide."

[38] These days all *stranbêj* seem to be from Sinjar, where traditional *strans* still enjoy a high prestige, unlike in other territories.

[39] The 2013 festival, before the ISIS attack, was canceled in order to show solidarity after a terrorist attack in Erbil, just before the festival.

Arafat. They were not singing the usual songs or *strans*, but *xerîbîs*. They were Basê Qasim and Xanif Muho, originally from the settlement of Siba Sheikh Khidrê on the southern side of the Sinjar mountain. They were both semiprofessional singers of *xerîbîs*, who sang laments not only for relatives and friends, but also for strangers, and during these fateful times, also at Lalish. As Basê Qasim said: "I say [*xerîbîs*] for the martyrs, I go to wakes and I say it for seven days, I go to the graves, I also come to Lalish to say it for seven days; I say it for the dead at the tombs".

It is worth mentioning that both women referred to themselves as *stranbêj*, perhaps to emphasize the professional nature of their singing (as opposed to women who only sing in familiar circles.) When I inquired if they really sang *strans* or songs publicly, the answer was affirmative, though they both added, "now is not the time for *strans*,"[40] meaning that it would have been deemed inappropriate to sing *strans* when the Yezidi community was in mourning for those killed and kidnapped in Sinjar. This also explained the unusual absence of male *stranbêj* on Mount Arafat.[41] Encountering female *stranbêj* was surprising, because all the *stranbêj* I had seen or heard of before were males. Furthermore, while gender segregation among Yezidis is not as strict as among some other ethnic and religious groups in the region, it is hard to imagine women, even if elderly, singing in a mixed company or before men. Though Allison writes that available literature suggests that female *stranbêj* existed at least in some places, and various Yezidis told her about a Sinjari woman named Hezo, "who had been taught various songs of the great *stranbêj* Biroyê Sherqi," she herself never personally met a female *stranbêj* during her extensive fieldwork (2001:78). A young Sinjari man accompanying me also remarked later that even before the ISIS attack women did not sing *strans* publicly, as this would have been considered *'eyb e*, "shameful," that is, not socially acceptable. Singing *xerîbîs* on Mount Arafat seemed to constitute a different category—though as I have said, this was the first time I saw women singing *xerîbîs* on Mount Arafat or in any mixed public space. It seems likely that this was a reflection of what the community had just recently gone through. It may be added that modern technology and the heightened interest in Yezidis and their fate at the hands of ISIS—often presented as an attack on Kurds in general by the Kurdish media—may lead to more changes in attitudes toward the relationship between gender, genre, and public space: the women told me that the following day a German television crew was going to film their singing of laments. This was certainly a far cry from Allison's descriptions of her difficulties in observing and recording laments in 1992, where laments could be performed only under strictly circumscribed conditions and only before a female audience.[42]

On further inquiry as to when and where they sang *strans*, the women went on to explain that they used to sing *strans* "when we were happy in our heart, when we went to collect wood,

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[40] *Ne wextê stran e.*

[41] The Autumn Festival was canceled in 2013, too, following a terrorist attack in Erbil, but some *stranbêj* still came to perform.

[42] Allison writes that "Informants could not simply perform to order; one must wait either for a *taziye* after a death or for a socially sanctioned occasion for the commemoration of the dead." She adds that a semiprofessional singer was requested by a friend to sing a lament for the foreign researcher, but the woman declined saying that singing a lament outside the right context was forbidden (*heram e*). Allison also recalls the Celîl brothers' experience of recording a lament at a commemoration, where they "had to retire from the performance themselves, leaving their recording equipment, as it was an occasion for women" (2001:76).

when we put the wood on our back, we said [sang] *strans*. When we went to fetch water, when we went to the fields, when we went to take care of the animals or to collect wild plants[43]—we sang songs for ourselves." In other words, they sang *strans* when working in a group of women, but not at public gatherings,[44] and certainly not in front of men. One of the women also added, "this was a long time ago, at the time of Saddam and the war of Iran," a reflection on the fact that mechanization of agriculture along with the introduction of modern infrastructure has transformed traditional lifestyle for good even in the Yezidi villages of such a relatively underdeveloped region as Sinjar. As a result, singing while carrying out traditional chores became an obsolete custom, something that people remembered but hardly did anymore.

When asked how and from whom she learned to sing, Basê Qasim said, "my brother was a singer [*şa'er*, literally "poet"], he was a player of the tambur [*tembûrvan*]." She also mentioned a string of names, singers (again referred to as *şa'*e*r*) famous in their own time, claiming them as her teachers (including at least one female, Xazalla Ibrahim).[45] But then, as a counterpoint, she added that she also learned (to sing) from her own "pain and grief" (*ji kul û derda, ji kul û derdêt xwe*) as for thirty years she had "been taking care of her orphans"; her husband had died thirty years previously, leaving her a widow with five children she had to bring up alone. (Xanif Muno's husband had also died, but she had never had any children—a situation that is considered very painful among Yezidis.)

Both women had seen enough trouble and pain in life to "teach" them to sing *xerîbî*, however, the ISIS attack on their community and its aftermath meant a new level of suffering, both personal and communal, which was reflected in their laments. To quote their words:

> After this *ferman* happened, our songs (*dîrok*) became longer.[46] [We sing about how] they beheaded our children; killed the old people, who had been left behind in their homes; all this killing and dying; those who died from thirst on the road [while fleeing]; our girls in the hands of *Daesh* [ISIS], the ones they took for themselves; our honor (*namûs*) was lost, we lost our mind [lit. "lost our head"]; we are refugees (*muhacir*); they surrounded Siba Sheikh Khidir at two o'clock in the morning, we couldn't flee until seven, it was all filled with the groaning of the dying and the wounded; people threw away their children, people threw away their mother and father by the roadside;[47] until we die, we will feel this grief.

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[43] "*Em çûne matanî, em çûne keringa.*" I was not familiar with the word *matanî*, nor could I find it in the dictionary, but according to Gulie Khalaf, *matanî* means "to bring" and refers to collecting wild plants and mushrooms. *Kering/kereng* is tumble thistle or *gundelia*, a wild plant growing in the spring. Its stalks, fried in oil, are delicious and popular.

[44] An exception may have been weddings, where songs used to be sung at all-female gatherings prior to the wedding, according to my Sinjari informants. However, according to the same sources, this custom is now a thing of the past, though men may still get together to sing (and drink) before a wedding.

[45] If true, this would contradict Allison's observation (based on what she had heard) that "female singers tended to learn songs from members of their families; it would not be considered appropriate to send them out to learn from singers who were not relations" (2001:78-79).

[46] *Ew fermane me rabûye, dîrokê(t) me zêdetir bûn.*

[47] A reference to how people were forced to leave behind those too weak or infirm to keep up, when they were forced to flee on the mountain.

Besides being forced into the life of IDPs living in a ramshackle refugee camp and sharing in the grief of the community, they had also suffered personal losses. Three nephews of Basê Qasim, for example, were captured by ISIS, while another nephew suffered a mental breakdown.

> By God, a nephew of mine, when we first came to Lalish, after we fled, in front of Xefûrê Riya [the Holy Being protecting travelers], right in front of his shrine, he got up and shot himself in the head, his blood ran down the steps. He had eight children. All his children and his wife then went and all left for Germany. His grave is over down there, in the valley.

All this she sings about when singing her laments, she said.

Speaking of their singing since the ISIS attack, Basê Qasim also explained how they incorporated what members of their extended family and their various acquaintances had gone through, bringing several examples. Even being invited to sing laments at a commemoration for a stranger could turn into an occasion where new motifs were added. Every time, as they said, when they were invited to sing for the dead, or even for the half-sad, half-happy occasions when someone returned from captivity and a ritual meal with sacrifice was held to give thanks for the return, they learned new details of what had befallen people and added these to their repertoire. This was also true for the song the women sang for me to record. Before they started singing, they consulted among themselves and agreed to sing what they referred to as *Ser Çiyayê Şingalê* ("On the Mountain of Sinjar), though their singing eventually seemed to incorporate other songs as well. As they said, *Ser Çiyayê Şingalê* was not a new song; "our mothers were not yet born, this already existed." However, "after [what happened] it became longer, after our pain and grief became heavy, it became longer."[48] In other words, they have added new words to the old song,[49] to include and commemorate what they and their relatives, friends, and the whole community had just suffered. It is not possible to reproduce the whole *xerîbî* (some twenty minutes long) here, but a short extract should give the reader a good impression of the content of the lament.[50]

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[48] *Pişтê zêdetir bû, pişтê kula, derdê me giran bû, zêdetir bû.*

[49] Or so they claimed. I am not familiar with the "original" or pre-ISIS text of this lament, but it is possible, or rather probable, that each performance was an improvisation, with no fixed text.

[50] The following text and the next two *xerîbîs* were translated with the help of Khanna Omarkhali. The video and audio recordings of the lament by Basê Qasim and Xanif Muno can be found at the OSA Digital Archive of Cultural Heritage. The video of the performance was recorded in two separate files, due to technical reasons: https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:c4157d03-1181-4a0f-95fe-014f67854386 and https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:3ffbd0bf-99d5-4a8a-b6eb-2b253648e5f8; audio file: https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:3b368149-53c5-4c06-8c78-5e1e186675a0.

0:10-2:43	
Hey dilo, çiyayê Şingalê bi te re	O heart, the Mountain of Shingal (Arab. Sinjar) is [mourning] with you
Çiyayê Şingalê bi te re	The Mountain of Shingal is [mourning] with you
Here wan kafira pîş Şamê girtin her çar aliya, her çar kenara	Those infidels closed on Syria from all four directions, all four corners
Yê, mi rebena	Oh, I poor one
Keçk-û-jinêd êzîdiya destê hova da mayê	The Yezidi girls and women remained in the hands of the wild [people]
mirinêt kuştiyayê hestî û serêt ber vî baranê mayê	The murdered ones, their bones and heads remained under this rain[51]
Mala xwîşka minê, ew keçkêt Çiyayê Şingalê hemû li Saudiyê, Reqayê firotin, dana maldara	Oh my sister's family, those young girls of the Mountain of Shingal were sold to Saudi Arabia and Raqqa,[52] [they] were given to the rich [ones]
Were dayê, dengê wan keçk-û-şebaba ev sê sal e Lalişa Nûranî dernayê	Ay[53] mother, it is already three years that the voice of those girls and youths does not come (that is "is not heard") in the Luminous Lalish[54]
Çiyayê Şingalê dayê bi te ra	The Mountain of Shingal, the mother is [mourning] with you
Çiyayê Şingalê dayê bi te ra	The Mountain of Shingal, the mother is [mourning] with you
Dora Sîba Sheikh Xidirê, Koço, Girzerê girtin heta gulê Xetarê,	They surrounded Siba Sheikh Khidir[55]
Dora xortê êzîda, keçka girtin ji xwe ra mêra(?)	They surrounded the Yezidi youth, these men took the girls for themselves
Ez rebena, qîrîn û kutina keçk û bûkêd êzîdiya me	Oh poor me, the crying and screaming of our Yezidi girls and brides[56]
Fermana Çiyayê Şingalê me, dev ji berdine dayik û dota, xwişk û birayê me	It is *ferman* (massacre, pogrom) on our Shingal mountain, [our] mothers and daughters, our sisters and brothers were separated

[51] It remains a very sore point for the surviving Yezidi community that many of their dead have not been buried properly and according to traditions. Some remain in mass graves, while others, especially those who died on the mountain, may not have been buried at all.

[52] Raqqa was invariably used to refer not just to the town of Raqqa, capital of the Caliphate at the time, but to all parts of Syria under ISIS rule.

[53] Lit. "come."

[54] This was sung in the fall of 2017 and refers to those who had not yet returned from captivity at the time.

[55] The reference to Khetar, a village in Sheikhan, is not clear.

[56] That is, young married women.

Hatî wê salê çola me,	That year came into our land[s]
Laşê nehatiye gorhan û mezarê me	The bodies (lit. "body") have not been buried in our cemeteries and tombs
Bila be êzîdî nemînin Şingala xwe şîrîn, bila ew nemînin	Let it be so that Yezidis would not remain in their sweet Shingal, let them not remain
Xwedê, çavêt keçk û bûkêt êzîda girêdan	O God, the eyes of the Yezidi girls and brides were blindfolded
Dîn û dewleta weran kin	[They] plundered [our] religion and [our] land
Xwedê, temam hildin ji xwe re	O God, [they] took everything to themselves
Hey, hey xwîşka minê, çi rojeke reş û tarî	O my sister, what a black and dark day
Hey hatin ser me re	They attacked us
Min dît nalîn kete kuştî birîndara	I saw how crying arose among [people because of] the dead and the wounded
Ê bi Xwedê, min dît zarokêt ber derê dayka nalînêt kûştiya ra bi dest û linga li ber xwe da	Oh by God, I saw the children [before?] their mothers cry because of the dead and crawl on all fours (?)
Welle bi Xwedê, keç û jinêt Çiyayê Şingalê, ê di Koço, Girezêr, Telezêr û Sîba Şêx Xidrê girtin bi hezara vêca bi seda	The girls and women of Sinjar Mountain, those from Kocho, Girezer, Telezer, and Siba Sheikh Khidir, who were captured by the thousands[57]

Singing of New *Xerîbîs* at *Tazîs*

Similar "new" *xerîbîs*, along with ones with more traditional themes, are also sung at funeral wakes for Sinjari IDPs. It may be of interest to describe such funerals here, along with some of the laments sung for the deceased.

In the spring of 2016, an elderly IDP woman[58] from the village of Telezer in Sinjar passed away while living as a refugee in Khanke. Unlike many other IDPs, she had relatives in the Kurdistan Region. Her daughter had been married off to a man originally from Khanke at a very young age.[59] The man eventually moved back to Khanke with his new bride, but the family maintained strong ties with her Sinjari relatives. Three of the granddaughters were married to men from Sinjar and returned to live there. When the Yezidi community fled Sinjar in the wake of the ISIS attack, most of the extended family came to Khanke, where they could count on the support of their local relatives. With so many refugees, accommodation was tight, so the matriarch lived with a number of other members of the extended family in the courtyard of a

[57] Other "novel" elements reflecting on the recent experiences of the community include singing about those (possibly as many as a fifth of the Iraqi Yezidi community) who have left their homeland and gone to strange countries, as far as *Almanya*, that is, Germany, the preferred destination of most Yezidi refugees.

[58] Her relatives claimed she was ninety-five years old.

[59] This was a case of forced *bedele* or exchange of brides. A brother eloped with a girl, and the family of the girl demanded restitution in the form of a bride for their son. At first the other family refused, but under immense pressure, they eventually consented to give their daughter, only twelve at the time, in marriage.

house facing that of her daughter across the street, in a complex of tents and a dilapidated one-room mud-brick house.[60]

As she passed away in April, 2016, when the northern part of Sinjar had already been freed of ISIS and the road between Sinjar and the Kurdistan Region was controlled by the Peshmerga and open to traffic, her body was taken back to Sinjar the same day. She was buried at the shrine of Sheikh Abûl Qasim (or Şabûl Qasim), where her mother and father were also buried, according to her wish. Her *tazî* or wake, however, was celebrated in Khanke, where most of her relatives were living at the time. The *tazî* lasted three days and was visited by a great crowd. Those coming to pay their condolences included both locals and Sinjari IDPs, many of the latter coming from camps at other settlements. However, the family later complained that the *tazî* was small; because the community was dispersed, people were too far to travel to the *tazî*, especially as their financial conditions were strained under the circumstances.[61] At home, the *tazî* would have taken seven days, with far more people coming. As usual, the wake was strictly gender-separated. A huge tent was set up in the middle of the street (blocking all traffic for three days) for the men. Sinjari women paid their visit in the courtyard where the old lady used to live. A make-shift tent (with no sides) was put up for the occasion, to shelter the women from the sun, as there was not enough room to receive and feed everybody in the temporary living quarters. Most local women (who did not know the deceased, but were paying their respect to the local relatives) came only on the third day, the day of the *xêr*, and they were received and served lunch in the house of one of the local granddaughters, apart from the Sinjari mourners.

Food, an important part of any Yezidi wake, was being cooked in huge cauldrons in the front yard of the local relatives by the men of the family (who recruited the help of a friend working as a chef). It mostly consisted of rice, *sawar* (or *bulgur*), and boiled chicken and mutton. While the chicken was store-bought, the sheep was slaughtered on the spot. Beside the sheep sacrificed on the first day, as mentioned above, four sheep were slaughtered on the second day, and five on the third, to be served to the guests. All of this lavish feasting would have put a heavy burden on the bereaved family, but guests contributed toward the expenses, as is generally expected. Some brought boxes of frozen chickens, others arrived with living sheep or goats. Most gave money, which a member of the family diligently wrote down in an exercise book (so when it became their turn to visit a *tazî*, they would know how much they "owed").[62] Spiritual needs were also catered to. On the second day, a *feqîr* versed in sacred texts came to the tent of the men to perform *qewls* or Yezidi hymns.[63] In the women's section laments were sung on the

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[60] Such simple, one-room constructions, sometimes made from traditional mud-brick, sometimes from concrete blocks, used to serve as houses after the inhabitants of the village were moved into their present location in 1985. As their economic conditions improved, people moved into bigger, modern houses, but the original structures were sometimes preserved to serve as storage rooms or for some other purpose. After the arrival of the Sinjari IDPs, many were converted back into living quarters.

[61] I heard similar complaints at other Sinjari *tazîs* I attended, despite what seemed to me a huge crowd.

[62] The family received ten sheep and goats as well as fifteen million Iraqi dinars (roughly $12,500 USD). However, all of this is considered *deyn* or debt, which has to be reciprocated on similar occasions.

[63] In Sinjar most *'elimdar* or *qewl* come from the special lineages of *feqîrs*. For more on this see Omarkhali 2017; Spät 2021:111-12.

second and third days. Even though no semiprofessional singer was invited, there was no shortage of proficient singers of laments, all of them elderly or late-middle-aged Sinjari women from the huge refugee camp near the village. All of the singers seemed to compose their own texts (using traditional motifs and images), and all of them included references to the tragic events which befell the community. Some even devoted the whole lament to singing about what Yezidis had suffered (sometimes with no concrete reference to the circumstances of the *tazî* or the person of the deceased).

Of the various singers who sang at the wake, I have chosen the text of Sheikha Kamo Reşo Paço, as her performance outshone that of the other singers (an impression also shared by my Yezidi hosts). She was an Adani sheikh (or a "sheikh of Sheikh Hassan," as she said). Adani sheikhs are the descendants of the lineage of Sheikh Hesen (the physical incarnation of the *sir* or mystery of Melek Sheikh Sin, that is Angel Sheikh Hesen), the Yezidi Holy Being associated with the Pen (and consequently with writing and books). Traditionally, only the descendants of Sheikh Hassan were allowed to acquire the art of writing and reading. As Sheikha Kamo herself proudly boasted, she never went to school, but still could read and write and was able to use her mobile phone[64] and even knew some English. She attributed this to her special abilities as an Adani sheikh and claimed that her father, uncles, and grandfathers had the same abilities, without attending school. She was also knowledgeable about Yezidi religion, which she had learnt from her family,[65] Yezidi oral history, and knew how to sing *strans* or traditional songs. She was also considered a talented singer of *xerîbîs*. Though with several sons serving as officers in the Iraqi army (with steady salaries) she was perhaps financially in a safer place than most refugees, she was deeply affected by the destruction of the Sinjari community. She was chain-smoking (a habit she attributed to the stress she was suffering) and had claimed to have lost several stones in weight since August, 2014. Like others, she had many stories of loss and pain to tell, including the fate of one of her young relatives, recently freed from ISIS captivity, who set herself on fire after dreaming that she was back in the hands of ISIS. The ongoing vitality of the oral tradition of *xerîbî* is demonstrated by her references to Qasim Şeşo and his nephew Heydar Şeşo, who became symbolic figures for many Yezidis as the leaders of armed resistance against ISIS.[66] The Şeşos first took up arms in August, 2014, successfully defending the shrine of the holy being Şerfedîn (considered the protector of Sinjar) on the northern side of the mountain. The defense of the shrine of Şerfedîn gained almost mythical status among Yezidis and various miracles came to be associated with it.[67]

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[64] Most Yezidis have their own cell phones these days, but many women, especially the elderly, have to ask for help when trying to call someone, as they cannot read the names in the phone's memory.

[65] Sema TV, a Yezidi program on local Kurdish TV, even made a recording with Sheikha Kamo, where she recites and explains a Yezidi myth (the video in question, accessed on YouTube in April, 2019, has since been removed).

[66] English-language news articles refer to them by the name of "Shesho."

[67] See Spät 2020:24. The lament of Sheikha Kamo Reşo Paço can be found at https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:ff0f37a9-2d35-46f1-a1b7-69f872a539a8#.

0:10-0:51	
Mixabin fermana wa êzîdiya giran e, min go serê me ferman e!	Oh [such] sorrow, this *ferman* on the Yezidis is heavy, the massacre is on us!
Ezê diçime, ez dikim û nakim Ez xortê wê êzîdiya, va can û cila, wan zarokêt kiçik Ezê ji destê wan kafira tu cara wa ez ‘efu nakim.	[Wherever] I go, whatever I do, I will never forgive those infidels [who killed] the youths of Yezidis, these bodies and clothes, those small children.
Me dêrane malêt êzîdiyayê, malêt ê miriyê, Malêt bediliyê, malêt kesiriyê, xortêt êzîdiyayê.	The houses/families of Yezidis, the houses of the dead, the houses of the exhausted, the houses of sorrow, the youth of Yezidis were scattered.
Ezê gêlûka xerbê banê geliyê Şêx Xidrê bikim We ezê bêjim: “Delalê dilê mino, Rabe, geliyê hezarê li mezare".	I will call out in the West of the valley of Sheikh Khidir And I will say so: “Oh, beloved of my heart, Rise, in the valley thousands are in the grave.”
1:23-1:56	
Ezê bêjime li serê Çiyayê Şingalê ketim, wêle mala minê wê bi dara çar kinare me xayîn bûyn.	I say, I went to Mount Shingal, Oh poor me (lit. “oh my home”), we were betrayed from all sides (lit. “four corners”).
Xwedê, mala Çiyayê Şingalê birine mîratê, Destê me kirine bin dar û bera,	By God, [they] took away (lit. “inherited”) the house[s][68] of Sinjar Mountain, [They] put our hands under the trees and stones (i.e., left us helpless).
Me zarokê xwe avîtine ber taqane Welle me avîtine ber dîwara.	We threw our children down by the wall, oh we threw them by the wall (i.e., we became beggars).[69]
Zarokêt me temam li ser Çiyayê Şingalê, Serêt wan qîrîn e, serêt wan qutîn e.	All our children on Shingal Mountain, [They] were crying, [they] were screaming their heads off.
Ez bêjim, Xwedê, de ka em çi bikin, çi nakin, Xwedê, ne parek nan e, ne xetek nan e, mala minê Ne dilopek avê xortê êzîdiya, wêle deyka, nemaye, ti çara me nîne.	I say, oh God, what should we do, By God, there is not a bite of bread, not a piece of bread left, oh poor me. Not a drop of water is left for the youth of the Yezidis, oh mother, we have no solution.

[68] *Mal* here refers not just to the house, but to all of the property belonging to a house, including women and children.

[69] According to Gulie Khalaf, in the Middle East destitute people sit around in front of walls and beg money from the passersby. The expression “throw our children by/at the wall” is a way of saying that the children were left on the street as beggars by the walls. That is, the parents could not care for their children and were forced to leave them in the worst conditions.

4:01-4:13	
Xwedê, wa ezî hatim, we ez sekinîm, Lê (bi) çavêt xwe dîtim, el ber Şerfedîn rûniştim. Min got êvarêt di êvara ser me beşera, Min go êvara wê le me be reş û tarî.	By God, I came and I stood, I saw with my own eyes, I sat down in front of [the shrine of] Şerfedîn. I said, the evening of all evenings [is coming] upon us people, I said, an evening will be upon us black and dark.
4:49-5:38	
Bêjin sehabê êzîdiyane ku ciwamêrê Sherfedînê ji me bûye xayî . . .	Say to the holy beings[70] of the Yezidis that the brave men of Şerfedîn became our protector(s) . . .
De gelî dak û xûşka banî Qasimê Şeşo kirê, banî Heyderê Şeşo kin Go mêrî şêfa bike bilezîne xebateke mêra bike.	Oh mother(s) and sister(s), [they] called out to Qasim Shesho, (and said:) Call out to Heydar Shesho Said to the man: Come to the rescue, hurry up, show your bravery (lit. "do the man's job").
Em banî keç û bûka kin, go min bi Xwedê kin, hûn ji xwe re birevin, Bi Xwedê, top û selah heka me xilas bin, Atqateke me nîne.	Let us call out to the girls and brides, By God, escape (lit. "run for yourself"), By God, if we are not to be rescued by the cannonballs and weapons, We will not have hope (lit. "trust") [left].
Go Xwedê, keça me û bûkê vê êzîdiya Wê qudrê bavê me qelînin Zîret û namûsa me birine.	By God, the girls and brides of these Yezidis, the honor of our fathers were destroyed (lit. "burned"), [They] took our children and *namûs* (i.e., women).
6:50-7:40	
Xwedê mamo,[71] em ketine welatê xerîba, Oooh gelî dak û xûşka, ezê bê(ji)m hatine ba me, sewrandin wan dewletê 'ecnebiya	By God, oh Dear (lit. "oh uncle"), ended up in strange lands (i.e., became exiles), Oh mothers[72] and sisters, I say, [they] came to us [from] those foreign countries to film us.
Xwedê, halê me wê êzîdiya ne xweştir e ji halê kurd û kafira.	By God, the situation of the Yezidis is not better than the situation of the Kurds and infidels (i.e., *kafirs*).
Hey mala minê, Xwedê, min teva . . . iş mal û mezela şekirî bûne muhacir, emê ketine ber kolan û deriya.	Oh poor me, oh God, we all . . . from (our) sweet home and houses became refugees, we found ourselves on the streets and (sitting before) the gates (of strangers) (i.e., because destitute and homeless).

[70] *Sehab* (Ar.), just like *xudan* (Kurd.), means both "owner" and "protector" and can refer to the Yezidi *xas* or holy beings.

[71] According to Gulie Khalaf, the word "Mamo" (vocative form of "uncle") is often used in conversation in Sinjar to address others, even women. According to her the nearest English expression is "Dear" as an expression punctuating conversations.

[72] According to Gulie Khalaf this is addressed to the (female) audience.

Ezê bînim çiyayê Shingalê xanaa çiyayê Shingalê xanaa.	I'll see the Shingal Mountain (which) is visible (?) the Shingal Mountain (which) is visible (?).
Xortê me temama kir bûna qesaba malêt me kiribûne talana.	All our youth were butchered. Our homes were plundered.
Ji me re li Koço hezer û heft sed xelas kir, Mi(n) got ibadet j cema' êzidiya re Hey li mala minê, wa gulî sore li me kiribûne talana.	In Kocho a thousand and seven hundred of us were finished/killed, I said, worship/respect to the feast of the Yezidis.[73] Oh my poor head . . . they plundered (us?) with (red?) bullets.

Tazî in a Refugee Camp

In the fall of 2017, I had the chance of attending another wake held in the huge refugee camp on the outskirts of Khanke. I did not know the deceased, an elderly woman from the village of Gabara on the southern side of Sinjar, or any of her relatives. My attendance at the *tazî* came about as pure chance. Her funeral took place just as I was visiting the *micawirs* or "guardians" of the shrine complex of Mem Şivan, near the collective village of Khanke. While I was sitting with members of the guardian family in front of the shrine of Sheikh Şems (the spot they usually chose to receive the daily trickle of pilgrims to Mem Şivan), men appeared from the sprawling refugee camp on the outskirts of Khanke, to dig a grave in the Sinjari plot. An elderly Sinjari lady had passed away of kidney complications in a Duhoki hospital and, as tradition dictates, the burial was arranged at the greatest speed possible. While the men dug the grave, the women first took the body, wrapped in blankets, to the shrine of Sheikh Şems, from where it was ceremonially carried, amid ritual wailing and chest- and face-beating, to the fresh grave.

Once the body was in the grave, slices of fresh fruit (apple, banana, and orange) were distributed among the mourners, already near a hundred despite the short notice, but no other ritual, whether a prayer or a lament, was performed. These were to take place back in the refugee camp, during the course of the next two and a half days as relatives and acquaintances came from all over the camp and other camps to express their condolences. As in the case of the other *tazî* described above, a special tent was put up for the men on one of the main thoroughfares of the camp, where a local religious expert was invited on the second evening, to perform *qewls* or hymns after sunset. On the first and second days women visited in the "family-compound" and were seated in the "rooms" of the family.[74] On the third day, the day of the *xêr*, a separate tent

[73] This may be a reference to the fact that the ISIS attack took place on a Yezidi holy day, the feast celebrating the end of the forty days of the summer fast. Though this fast is not observed by most Yezidis, the feast itself is an important celebration.

[74] In this particular camp, camp authorities allowed the inhabitants to build small structures, thereby providing them with at least a semblance of private space, unlike in some other camps, which consisted of tight rows of tents erected side by side. These "family compounds" consisted of several small rooms built of concrete bricks ("blocks") with blankets, tent canvas, and nylon sheets spread over thin wooden beams for roofing. The space between the rooms and the tent functioning as a kitchen was covered with nylon sheets, so family members could move around in the "compound" in rainy weather.)

was set up for the women as well to congregate and sing *xerîbîs* in. (At noon, lunch was also served in the various rooms of the family compound, as the tent was too crowded to comfortably feed all the guests there. As in the case of the *tazî* described above, the food was mainly cooked by men in huge cauldrons.)

On the second day, most of the singing was performed by the relatives and friends of the deceased. Unlike in the *tazî* observed a year earlier, this time the events that befell the community received less attention, at least as regards the content of the *xerîbîs*. The sister of the deceased, perhaps in her late seventies, for example sang only laments which appeared to be traditional in content, about fate and the grief at the loss of a beloved one, occasionally making references to Yezidi sacred spots, Holy Beings, and even mythical stories.[75] However, she appeared to make no specific mention of the present displacement or ISIS. Another visitor, in her late middle age, mixed traditional motifs (on the topic of death) with descriptions of the circumstances of the deceased's hospitalization and death, as well as with occasional references to the ISIS attack (including mentioning various persons present who still had relatives in ISIS captivity).[76] However, compared to the *xerîbîs* sung at the *tazî* described above, the *ferman* against Yezidis received limited attention in her singing. When one of the women described how four of her children had disappeared and her husband, uncle, and other family members had been killed, this made one of the expert singers present break out in singing a *xerîbî* to express her emotions and convey her feelings of compassion. The text of her lament, though, was traditional and did not recreate the details just told her. On the third day, the focus of the laments shifted back to the ISIS attack. On this day, the day of *xêr*, most of the singing was dominated by one singer, Şîrîn Ibrahim from the village of Siba Sheikh Khidir, though from time to time, as she took a rest, the other women sang together, forming a choir of repeated phrases. Though she was the "star performer" of the event, Şîrîn Ibrahim was not a professional singer either. In fact, she was yet another one who claimed that before the coming of ISIS she did not sing laments. Seven men of her family were killed by ISIS, with guns in hand, as Siba Sheikh Khidir was one of the few places where locals fought the attackers, giving other Yezidis a chance to flee to the safety of the mountains. The rest of her family then ended up in a refugee camp, with no realistic prospect to return to their village in the foreseeable future. Her songs, however, concentrated not so much on the plight of her own family, but far more on the tribulations of Yezidi women "in the hands of the *kafirs*" (*keçk û jinêd ezidiyan*). One of the central motifs of her laments was the probably apocryphal story of how ISIS militants killed Yezidi babies and served their flesh as food to the unsuspecting mothers, who were told what they had eaten only after the meal. This grotesque story of forced cannibalism was often quoted in conversations as proof of the utter moral

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[75] The lament of Esmer Kurto Yunis can be found at https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:4493ce18-c2d0-434f-a3cb-609c024e2537.

[76] The ability and willingness of women singing laments to extemporize were eloquently demonstrated by her repeatedly singing the phrase, "Oh sister without a brother" (https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:8424426f-7c38-4b9b-9901-39dc76d2a962#). This was addressed to me (the foreigner recording her), as she was shocked to learn during lunch that I had only a sister, but no brother. (This information was often treated with amazement or even dismay by Yezidis, especially elderly Sinjaris, where having a son, or for a sister a brother to protect her, is considered of great social importance.)

depravity of ISIS fighters. While it is dubious that this has really happened,[77] its frequent retelling reflects the depth of trauma experienced by the community. The *xerîbî* also weaves together two tragic events: the ISIS attack and the terrorist attacks on the Yezidi settlements of Telezer and Siba Sheikh Khidir on August 14, 2007, when coordinated bombings killed at least 796 Yezidis. The lament makes frequent references to a "mother of Ziyad." It is not clear whether she is the singer or someone else, but we are made to understand that Ziyad was killed in the Telezer bombing.[78]

0:45-2:50	
Ezê girîm li ser keçik û jinê êzîdxanê Çavê dayka daydakevit Eger ew keç û jinêd êzîdiya ji xwe re birin.	I am crying over [the fate of] the girls and women of the Yezidis The eyes of the mothers are falling out[79] Since they took the Yezidi girls and women for themselves.
Ew miletê êzîdiya talan kirin Ew şuxulê bê qanûn, ew şuxulê bê delîl bi keç û jinê êzidiya kirin.	They plundered the Yezidi nation They did lawless things, They did things never seen (lit. "witnessed") before to Yezidi girls and women.
Ew miletê êzîdiya talan kirin Ib çep û çengê xorta girtine Il ser şar'e û zikaka kûştin Mala minê, mala minê.	They plundered all Yezidi people They grabbed the young men by their arms[80] They killed them on the roads and on the streets Oh my poor head, my poor head.
Fermana wê êzîdxanê çavê dayka Ziyad derkevê Xwedê fermana li me rakirin.	There is a *ferman* against the Yezidis, may the eyes of the mother of Ziyad fall out By God, they started a *ferman* against us.
Ev çi dayika Ziyad û vê gotinê Ev çi dayika Ziyad û vê gotinê Ew keçk û jinê êzîdxanê bûn Çavê min derkevê! Danîne ber mezetê û biwatil danîne ber firotinê.	What is it that the mother of Ziyad and this one are saying These were the girls and women of the Yezidis. Let my eyes fall out! They were auctioned off, oh pity they were taken to be sold.

[77] None of the women who actually returned from captivity recounted having seen or heard of such a thing; I only heard it from those who did not have a firsthand experience. (The story was also printed in some Western tabloids, but not in fact-checking publications.)

[78] See for example, 4:45-5:25, where it is described how they are looking for Ziyad in the aftermath of the bombing. The details of the text are extremely hard to understand. The lament of Şîrîn Ibrahim can be found at https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:5e4c0b6e-cc87-403f-b502-0fd021d551d0.

[79] Eyes, as something precious, are part of many Kurdish expressions. Here the words express the pain of the Mother of Ziyad (who may be the singer herself).

[80] According to Gulie Khalaf *çep û çeng* means "arms and wings; the two words together is understood as the whole arm and there is a connotation of rough handling."

Wana birine hudûdê Syriayê	They were taken to the border of Syria
pê derbas kirine, birine sûka dekayê	They passed through (the border), they were taken to the bazaar . . .
bajar û welata geran heta Iranê	They were brought through the cities and countries, as far as Iran
. . . bajar û gunda hemû pê ve derbas kirin,	. . . In all towns and villages that they passed through
ish xwe re danîne ber mezatê . . .	They took [the women] to auction off among themselves
kuçik baba, çilo keçk û jinê êzidxanê yek û du bar kirin.	Sons of dogs,[81] how they bargained over the girls and women of the Yezidis.
Ew derdê bê derman e,	The great pain without solace (medicine) is
Go pişta kur û bavê wî êk û dû daxil kirin	That they tied father and son back to back
mala minê şer e	Oh upon me, it is the war
axê berdana serî,	They threw soil over their head (i.e., buried them)
çavê dayka Ziyad derkevî	Let the eyes of the mother of Ziyad fall out.
Ew destê wan zincir û kilinca kirin	They [ISIS] chained and handcuffed their hands
çavê dayka Ziyad derkevê,	The eyes of the mother of Ziyad are falling out
çilo abayê reş il serê keçê êzîdiya kirin	How they covered the Yezidi girls in black *abayas*/veils
Ew şuxulê bê qanûn, ew şuxulê bê delîl	They did lawless things to Yezidi women and girls
bi keçêd êzidxane kirin	They did things never seen (lit. "witnessed") before
Xwedê, firovîna û taştiya wan çêkirin	By God, they [ISIS soldiers] made them [the women] breakfast and lunch
çavê dayka Ziyad derkevî,	The eyes of the mother of Ziyad are falling out
gotin zarokêt me birin ji me re	They [the women] said, bring to us our children
Ma na gotin hûn goştê zarokêt xwe (di)xwin	Didn't they say, you are eating the flesh of your own children
xwînê xwe nas nakin	Don't you recognize your own blood?
çavê dayka Ziyad derkevê	The eyes of the mother of Ziyad are falling out
Go ji we re kirine firovîn û taştê	They made lunch and breakfast [of/from the children] for you
hey biwatil ser biwatilê.	Ey pity, endless pity.
Hêy fermana, fermana vê Ezidxanê rabû,	Ey, there is a *ferman*, a *ferman* was started against Yezidis
çavê dayka Ziyad derkevê.	The eyes of the mother of Ziyad are falling out.

Conclusion

Oral tradition has been on the decline among Yezidis in the past few decades, due to the sweeping transformations the whole Yezidi community has been undergoing. Tales told just a generation ago over long nights in front of an enraptured audience have been replaced by television (and lately the entertainment offered by the ubiquitous smartphones). Music bands with modern equipment belt out Kurdish pop music at weddings, instead of the wedding party singing traditional songs. Even the number of those willing to memorize and able to perform the

[81] Lit. "father of dogs," a derogatory expression in Kurdish, corresponding to "son of a dog."

long sacred texts, which form the very basis of Yezidi religion, has been on the decline, and published texts have been steadily gaining ground, changing the face of Yezidi oral religious tradition.[82] However, there is one oral genre that still seems to have retained its vitality and artistic creativity, at least among the Yezidis of Sinjar, namely, that of laments. This may be due both to the immense social and psychological importance of this genre and to its flexibility. Laments are not merely ritual signs of respect toward the departed, who deserve to be mourned in style. They also serve as important tools for expressing grief both on a personal and the community level. This is amply demonstrated by the new Sinjari *xerîbîs*, which sing the sufferings of Yezidis at the hands of the Islamic State. These laments clearly function as psychological safety valves, helping to relieve tension through giving voice to deep-seated emotions and impotent frustration over the loss suffered and the hopeless situation of the community. What enables laments to function as an outlet for pain and loss, giving words to what the community has experienced, is the remarkable flexibility of this genre. Laments have always been a traditional oral genre where traditions don't have to be observed "literally": that is, where the words can be recomposed with each performance and adapted to the situation. This paradox of "non-traditional oral tradition" has made it possible for the *xerîbî* tradition to meet the demands of the changing circumstances of the community, from technological innovations to societal transformation to the psychological challenges of a violently displaced community.

It is hard to make any prognosis on the future of laments as an oral tradition among Yezidis, when the future of the whole community is so painfully uncertain at present. However, one may perhaps hazard that it is an oral genre which may outlive other forms of Yezidi oral tradition. While sacred texts may be taught to the new generation from schoolbooks, tales may disappear for good, and even the *stranbêj* complain of the declining interest in their art, laments, in their thousand forms and recomposed with each performance, will live on as long as Yezidi women see them as the main vehicle to express their grief.

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[82] See Omarkhali 2017:255-96; Spät 2008 and 2021:111-19.

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The Village Chronotope in the Genre of Iraqi Yezidi Wedding Songs

Allison Stuewe

Introduction

Among the world's roughly one million Yezidis, adherents of a monotheistic faith that does not accept converts or allow marriage with outsiders, as many as half are living in exile, with the highest concentration of refugees outside the homeland living in Germany. Yezidis, originally from parts of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran, have a long history of violent persecution, including the 2014 genocide in Shingal at the hands of ISIS where thousands were killed and thousands more (mostly women and children) were captured and enslaved. The influx of Yezidi refugees to Germany has created conditions that complicate and expand the already rich community and scholarly debates about Yezidi identity and the future of the religious minority (Ackermann 2004; Ali 2019; Allison 2014; Arakelova 2010; Maisel 2014 and 2017; Nicolaus and Yuce 2019; Rodziewicz 2018; Spät 2018). Indeed, Yezidi identity is contested and negotiated by Yezidis responding to complex political and social pressures in Germany and in the homeland. Such pressures include discrimination and racism despite sympathy in international media and the German government, disruptions in employment and asylum hearings in Germany caused by COVID-19, statements from German politicians that refugee status should only enable temporary residency (Vulliamy 2016), and ongoing tensions between Kurdish political parties. In diaspora in Germany, the stresses of forced migration and assimilation create tension in the Iraqi Yezidi refugee community about what it means to be Yezidi and how a good Yezidi should behave. I argue elsewhere (Stuewe 2018) that weddings and marriage practices are salient sites for analyzing these issues in the Yezidi diaspora.

This paper highlights a specific case of identity negotiation through an analysis of a selection of songs sung at Iraqi[1] Yezidi wedding parties in Germany over the past few years. Routine use of what I call here the "village chronotope" in these songs projects the image of a good, moral Yezidi who appropriately maintains traditional practices and views despite living in Germany. The village chronotope is a repeated projection of the "then and there" of Iraqi Yezidi

[1] While the inquiry of this paper focused specifically on songs sung at Iraqi Yezidi wedding parties, similar moralizing discourses are likely present in songs sung at the weddings of Yezidis from other countries as well. Possibly, the spacetime projected by the "village chronotope" is interpreted differently in Iraqi Yezidi contexts than in other Yezidi contexts, however, given the location of the 2014 Shingal genocide. The 2014 genocide, which I suggest is itself a chronotope of sorts produced through references to Shingal, contrasts and clarifies the meanings conveyed in the "village chronotope."

villages prior to the 2014 genocide into the "here and now" of the diaspora in Europe. This chronotope emerges, for example, in references to the routines of village living and in dialect choices that indicate Shingali heritage. The village chronotope works to strengthen relationships between Yezidis who were born in Iraq and remember life there while also signaling proper Yezidi behaviors, attitudes, and values to those who might have "forgotten" or never knew. In this way, the village chronotope is also a spacetime that indexes a particular character: the good and moral Yezidi who lives an honorable life and follows tradition.

Analyzing Weddings and YouTube Wedding Videos

This paper is based on observations made at four weddings I attended in northern Germany in the summers of 2016 and 2017 and on an analysis of song lyrics transcribed[2] from YouTube videos of Iraqi Yezidi weddings that occurred in 2017 and 2018.[3] My observations of weddings and analysis of song lyrics are supported by data from interviews conducted in December of 2018 with three prominent Iraqi Yezidi singers: Tarek Shexani, Xalid Dinay, and Daxil Osman. My analysis of songs as they are performed in videos uploaded to YouTube was a practical choice for lyric transcribing, but it also highlights the "second life" of Yezidi weddings in the viewing of videos long after the wedding has taken place. Many Yezidis opt to have their weddings filmed and uploaded to YouTube where they can be enjoyed by family members and friends of the wedding party and by individuals with no connection to the wedding party who simply want to listen to Yezidi music.

The songs analyzed here include pieces written by several of the most popular Yezidi wedding singers. They were selected because they exemplify the use of the village chronotope and because my Yezidi interlocutors described them as songs they have heard at weddings. Additionally, I have included an example of a song not written by a Yezidi or intended specifically for a Yezidi audience. While some wedding singers sing popular Iraqi songs written by non-Yezidis, they often incorporate these songs into the flow of the wedding party music in a way that the lyrics meld with other songs written by and about Yezidis. This song is an important inclusion in that it exemplifies how the village chronotope is set off against the developing spacetime of the Yezidi diaspora. Moreover, the singer's decision to perform this song at a Yezidi wedding highlights the unique positioning of the Yezidi community and the important role of the Yezidi wedding singer. Tarek Shexani explained to me that the singers of the Iraqi Yezidi community are the "messengers of the community." As one responsible for voicing the joys, challenges, and concerns of the community, Shexani explained that at weddings he brings together old Yezidi folk songs with popular music to compose an original set that expresses the diverse influences on Yezidi life. Additionally, the seamless incorporation of popular Iraqi songs

[2] I am grateful for the assistance provided by Saeed Bakr, Qayssar Hussain, and Linda Hussain in translating the songs included in this article. I could not have written this without their translation assistance, notes on regional dialects, and feedback on my ideas.

[3] The inclusion of these particular excerpts should not be interpreted as a statement that these songs are commonly performed at weddings. My interviews suggest that these are songs that one might hear at an Iraqi Yezidi wedding, but I do not have data to suggest anything about the frequency with which these specific songs occur.

into the music sets at Yezidi wedding parties exemplifies the coherence of the Yezidi wedding party song genre, which, as is necessarily characteristic of any genre, includes similar "thematic, stylistic, and compositional elements" (Hanks 1987:670).

In addition to the linguistic features that make up the allusions to pre-2014 Shingal that I call here the "village chronotope," non-linguistic aspects of Iraqi Yezidi wedding party music, like the melodies and the corresponding dances, also contribute to the moralizing work accomplished by the village chronotope. The melodies are appropriate for certain kinds of group dances and are generally played in a similar order at each wedding to facilitate the mood appropriate for that time in the wedding party's events. For example, songs that are made for some of the more complicated dances are not generally played at the beginning of the wedding party. Knowing how to dance contributes to a sense of Yezidi community building. The ability to perform the popular dances well is a socially valuable skill that is strongly associated with Iraqi Yezidi culture.

The instruments and performance of the songs are also important aspects of the performance of "good" Yezidi cultural identity, which is the central message of the "village chronotope." The songs themselves usually feature, in addition to the main singer, a keyboard and a *tanbur*, an instrument similar to a lute from the Kurdish areas of Iraq and Iran. Today and in recent generations of Iraqi Yezidis, it is not uncommon for Yezidis to know how to play the *tanbur*. Xalid Dinay explained the cultural significance of the *tanbur* in the production of Iraqi Yezidi cultural identity. When I asked about his concerns about his children growing up in Germany without complete immersion in Yezidi culture, he showed me a video of his young son playing the *tanbur* and singing a song written by his father. The sharing of this video in response to my question about Yezidi identity loss highlights the importance of the *tanbur* and Yezidi music in Yezidi cultural identity formation.

The Village Chronotope

In this article, I analyze the way village life is referenced in songs performed at Iraqi Yezidi wedding parties. These references frame pre-2014 Shingal as an example of "narrative spatio-temporal frames" (Glick 2007:291), or chronotopes. Originally analyzed by Bakhtin (1981) in a 1937-38 article, chronotopes can be understood as "historically configured tropes" that project "how-it-was" into present contexts to "affect what can and does happen in discursive events" (Blommaert 2015:111). Without the violent and cruel rupture of the 2014 genocide, references to the past may simply have been heard as mere allusions to the way Iraqis lived historically, but given the brutality of the genocide and the mass migration it necessitated, these references are, I argue, now heard as value-laden "invokable histories" (Blommaert 2015) that are set off against the dangerous spacetime of current Yezidi diaspora life in Europe.

In "*Ezê vegerim welatê xwe*"[4] ("I Will Return to My Homeland") by Xalid Dinay, salient aspects of Iraqi Yezidi life are described. An Iraqi Yezidi friend who helped me transcribe this

[4] The Kurdish texts in this article were transcribed according to the *Hawar* system by the editors. I am grateful to Khanna Omarkhali for her review of my transcriptions.

song said that every time she hears this song, it "takes" her back to Iraq. The village chronotope, which works to "transpos[e] selves across discrete zones of cultural spacetime" (Agha 2007:324), is effectively invoked by Dinay in this song. The emotionally loaded examples of village life in Iraq referenced do more, however, than simply remind my friend of her nostalgia for pre-2014 Shingal. Chronotopes also have "consequences for how social actors in the public sphere are mobilized to think, feel and act" (Agha 2007:324) in the current moment and place. One such consequence is the moralizing work of the village chronotope that calls on Yezidis in the diaspora to be "good" Yezidis by not forgetting traditional Yezidi values and practices. In Dinay's song, he references spending time with family and the simple pleasures of summer breeze and hot bread. These are calls not only to remember what life was like in Iraq for many Yezidi refugees, but also to reject the isolation, alienation from family, and consumptive excesses of diaspora life.

"*Ezê vegerim welatê xwe*" ("I Will Return to My Homeland") sung by Xalid Dinay[5]

1	*Dê vegerim welatê xwe*	I will return to my homeland
2	*Nav dost û hevalê xwe*	To my dear ones and friends
3	*Li warê xwe yê kevnar*	To my ancient home
4	*Ba deyk û babê xwe*	To my mother and father
5	*Şev xweş kem nav male*	Hang out at home
6	*Cîran û met û xale*	Neighbors and aunts and uncles
7	*Tucar ij bîrê me narê*	We will never forget (this)
8	*Bê welat jiyan betal e*	Without the homeland, life is worthless
9	*Ku ew xewê havînê*	Where is summer sleep
10	*Li ser banê xanî*	On the house roof
11	*Lê wî bayî xerbî*	That western breeze
12	*Muhla Şingalê il min da*	Yearning for Shingal hit me
13	*Taşte il ber seha sibehî*	Breakfast in morning shade
14	*Û mast mehî û bizîne*	And yogurt of sheep and goat
15	*Nanê germê tanûr*	Hot bread from the *tanur*
16	*Ez xulam destê daykê.*	I appreciate mother's hands.

As others have noted (Glick 2007; Stasch 2011), verb tense can be an important aspect of chronotope use. In this example, the author oscillates between the here-and-now and the imagined past, which is emphasized through verb tense. Line 1 begins with a future tense verb, but the imagined journey is to a place which the author, and audience present at a wedding in Germany, now associate with the past. This connection between future and past highlights the chronotopic dislocation created by references to village life. Lines 2 through 6 contain no verb; nothing is, was, will be, but rather we hear a list of semantically loaded descriptors. Given the

[5] A note on song authorship: according to my Yezidi interlocutors, some of these songs were not actually written by the singer referenced here, but I could not determine the original authors. Additionally, many singers make slight changes to an older song when they sing their version. The singers referenced here are then to be understood not as the original authors, but as the author of the particular iteration of the song I viewed.

violence of the 2014 genocide and the destruction it caused to Shingali villages, the romantic tone here implies the author is speaking here about a time in the past. The listener has been transported to the spacetime of Iraqi Yezidi village life prior to the genocide of 2014 and the diaspora. The use of "ancient" (*kevn*) and references to mother and father (*dey* and *bab*) also exemplify a key feature of the village chronotope: the connection to ancient traditions and values. Indeed, the lyrics evoke a spacetime of the Iraqi Yezidi village prior to the 2014 genocide, but one that does not start at any time. Rather, the spacetime of the village chronotope extends back in time to ancient history. The moral associations of the village chronotope then imply that "good" Yezidis live the way Yezidis always have lived and always should.

Lines 7 and 8 are situated back in the here-and-now and serve as a contrast to the village chronotope. The author's command to the audience to "never forget this" (*tucar ij bîrê me narê*) and his following statement that "without the homeland, life is worthless" (*bê welat jiyan betal e*) further emphasize the moral significance of village life; the value of life is inextricably linked to a way of being in an older time and place. Notably, the first statement also features a marker of a dialect spoken by speakers of the Dinayi tribe living in Shingal. According to some of my Yezidi interlocutors in the United States, Shingalis from other tribes would say "*tucar ij bîrê me naçê"* instead of "*tucar ij bîrê me narê*." This statement, like line 12, narrows the spacetime considered to the region of Shingal and, because of the salience of Shingal in recent history, to the time prior to the genocide. Indeed, "Shingal" itself functions as a kind of chronotope given its connection to the genocide carried out by ISIS in August of 2014. This is further evidenced by the way the word "Shingal" appears in social media profile pictures as a reference to the horrors faced by the Yezidi community.

Lines 9 through 16 take us from the spacetime of diaspora back to the spacetime of the pre-2014 Iraqi Yezidi village. Dinay highlights salient aspects of village life, which project a kind of person associated with these village realities. The final line, "I appreciate mother's hands" (*ez xulam destê daykê*), does more work to "produce specific kinds of person" (Blommaert 2015:109) by concluding that the person who remembers all of these important aspects of Iraqi Yezidi village life also respects the mother and the work she does. In the context of Iraqi Yezidi village life, the work of the mother is particularly significant for the management of daily life as fathers are often away from home because they are earning money through some of the jobs most accessible to Yezidi men: itinerant labor in other countries and military service. Women are then responsible for tending to animals, gardening, maintaining the home, cooking, and rearing children. The reference to the hands of the mother also sets the spacetime of pre-2014 Iraqi Yezidi village life off from the spacetime of the European diaspora, where the mother's hands do different tasks and where children may be less respectful. Iraqi Yezidi refugee mothers in Germany likely are still responsible for childrearing and food preparation, but they are less likely to have animals or gardens to tend. Moreover, the differences in daily life for children and adults, like in the number of hours spent in school, can result in children with greater access to and understanding of German public life. A feared consequence of this is that Iraqi Yezidi refugee children will not appreciate their parent's authority in the same way as they did prior to relocation.

Another feature of the village chronotope is the use of semantically loaded vocabulary. Line 5, for example, includes the noun phrase "*şev xweş kem*." This locally meaningful

expression describes the late-night socializing of close friends and family in their homes. Similarly, lines 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15 use nostalgia-laden phrases that describe practices that are not possible for most Yezidis now in the diaspora. Most Yezidis do not live in housing that would allow for summer sleep (line 9) on the house roof (line 10), the keeping of sheep and goats (line 14), or the storage of a *tanûr* (line 15), a large clay or metal oven for baking bread. *Mast* (yogurt) and *nan* (Iraqi flatbread), referenced in lines 14 and 15 respectively, are extremely culturally significant among Iraqi Yezidis. The reference to *mast* and *nan* also lends a multivocalic feel to the song, as "*nan û mast*" ("bread and yogurt") are mentioned in other familiar contexts, like the Kurdish proverb: "*nan û mast xwarina rast*" ("bread and yogurt is the true food").

While Dinay's song "*Ezê vegerim welatê xwe*" ("I Will Return to My Homeland") evokes the simple beauty and uprightness of a time in Shingal prior to the genocide, other instances of the village chronotope evoke the long history of oppression chronicled in the Yezidi oral tradition. My Iraqi Yezidi refugee contacts in Germany often describe the Yezidi community as an ancient peaceful community that only wants to be left alone but has been continually persecuted for their different beliefs and practices. While the history of victimhood is certainly a part of the village chronotope, the references to violence highlighted in the song by Daxil Osman and Xemgîn below also function as a chronotopic allusion to the spacetime of the 2014 genocide itself. While we might think of this as a distinct chronotope requiring further elaboration separate from the village chronotope, this article interprets allusions to violence as a part of the village chronotope's projection of ancient suffering.

"*Ey hawar*" ("Help") sung by Daxil Osman and Xemgîn

1	*Ey Xudan*	Oh Lord
2	*Kesek nema ji me pê va*	There is no one left with us
3	*Di vê cîhanê*	In this world
4	*Ma behra me?*	Is it our share?
5	*Me ya kuştin û ferman*	Ours is [to be] murdered and exterminated
6	*Ezîdî me*	I am Yezidi
7	*Ji ser dînê xwe nayême xwar*	I will not leave my religion
8	*Ey hawar, ey hawar*	Oh help, oh help
9	*Êriş me diken*	They attack us
10	*Weka gurê birçî û har*	Like hungry, ravenous wolves
11	*Napirsin ne li mezin û zarokan*	[They] ask neither old people nor children
12	*Ku vexwin weke av xwîna me*	When [they] drink our blood like water.
13	*Wa ez im neviyê*	I am the one who is the grandchild
14	*Warê Şingalê*	From the place of Shingal
15	*Va li me rabû eve heftî û çar ferman*	To us the seventy-fourth genocide stood up here
16	*Sozê didem Tawûs, ola êzdiya,*	I swear by Tawus, by the Yezidi religion
17	*Bi şehidan, bi egîdan xwînê xwe dan*	By the martyrs, by the heroes [who] gave their blood
18	*Biparêzin Laliş û ol û îman.*	Protect Lalish and religion and faith.

Daxil Osman's and Xemgîn's song "*Ey hawar*" *may* seem a surprising choice for a wedding party, but Iraqi Yezidi wedding parties might include a few sad songs that reference times of violence against the Yezidi community. My Iraqi Yezidi interlocutors report that this is especially true at Yezidi parties since August, 2014, because, as they say, a Yezidi cannot possibly observe a large gathering of Yezidis now without thinking about the genocide and all of those who are not present. The title of the song also speaks to this feeling of group loss. *Ey hawar* does not easily translate to any single word (lit. "call" or "cry for help") in English but is a culturally significant plea for help often addressed to God. It is generally used when a family or friend dies and is often cried aloud by women when they cry and beat themselves in a funeral procession. In a large group of Yezidis, when the singer repeats the refrain "*ey hawar*," this serves to transpose all of the funerals of the past onto the present moment. According to Yezidi oral tradition, the August, 2014, genocide was the seventy-fourth genocide to have marked the Yezidi community.[6] Given this shared knowledge of a history of persecution, the phrase "*ey hawar*" calls into Yezidi consciousness not just the moment of the 2014 genocide, but the moments of all previous genocides, and projects the persona of a village person who has known extreme violence and suffering.

Like the Xalid Dinay song, *Ey hawar* makes use of verb tense in a way that reconstructs the unspecified village past into the present Yezidi diaspora. Rupert Stasch's (2011) article on travel writing about the Korowai of West Papua outlines the use of the historical present as a strategy for making the experience of reading seem to iconically resemble the author's actual past experience of being in West Papua. Similarly, the use of the historical present in lines 9 ("they attack us"), 11 ("[they] ask neither old people nor children" [which here means that the inflictors of violence do not discriminate in who they target]), and 12 ("when [they] drink our blood like water"), makes the experience of listening to the song iconically resemble the multiple historical moments in which the Yezidi community was attacked. This effect is furthered by lines 4 and 5 ("is it our share? / ours is [to be] murdered and exterminated"), which project past instances of violence into the present and beyond as if violence against Yezidis is constant.

The use of vocabulary in this instance of the village chronotope, which references violence under the Ottoman Empire, illustrates the way a history of violence against the Yezidi community is projected into the present. In line 5 the author uses the word *ferman* (translated here as "extermination"), which simultaneously invokes the recent genocide and a specific history of violence against Yezidis at the hands of the Ottoman empire. The word *ferman* is a Turkish (originally Persian) word meaning "edict" or "decree," but, given the history of violence against Yezidis "by edict" under the Ottoman Empire, the word is used by Yezidis to mean genocide or an act of extreme violence against Yezidis. The implication is that any decision made by a non-Yezidi occupier always means death for Yezidis. Through the use of this word, the aggressor in the most recent *ferman*, ISIS, is conflated with the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the multivocality of the word *ferman* works as a part of the village chronotope to project the character of an Iraqi Yezidi who knows suffering and is ever wary of non-Yezidi leadership. Additionally, this highlights the political nuances of the village chronotope. I have suggested that the village chronotope should be understood as a call for Yezidis who have found safety in the

[6] There is some debate about this number depending on how one defines a genocide.

diaspora not to lose what are understood to be traditional values. That said, the emphasis on historic suffering in the village chronotope might also be interpreted in light of the demands of recent Yezidi Nobel Prize winner Nadia Murad for international protection for the Yezidi homeland, which would allow Yezidis in the diaspora to one day return.

This example of the village chronotope from Daxil Osman and Xemgîn contributes to the sense of a shared experience of and responsibility for Shingal and the Yezidi faith. The song specifies the spacetime of the village chronotope through references to a shared Shingal ("from the place of Shingal") (line 14). Moreover, the projection of a prior shared Shingal into the present, where the audience and the singers have been relocated as refugees in Germany, allows us to imagine Shingal as less a physical place and more an expression of cultural values, which "good" Yezidis in diaspora guard closely. This interpretation is supported by line 16's reference to Tawûs and *Ola Êzdiya* and the final line's reference to Lalish, the holiest Yezidi site, which is located in northern Iraq. Tawûs literally means "peacock," but here it means Tawusî Melek, the Peacock Angel. I have translated *Ola Êzdiya* as "Yezidi religion," but here it means something larger, like the Yezidi way of life and traditions. In my interviews with Yezidis in Germany, I have heard differing opinions about the importance of Lalish as a physical space. Some Yezidis report that longterm separation from this place will be problematic for Yezidis, but others suggest that Lalish is just a physical manifestation of Yezidi beliefs, traditions, and values, which can be replicated elsewhere in diaspora. Families also often display in their home in diaspora either a physical replica of Lalish or a picture. This suggests that the Lalish which the ideal Yezidi is to protect is not a physical place but something more abstract. The reverence for these religious and cultural concepts in this song represents more than merely loyalty to the community; I argue that the commitment to and projection of these religio-cultural ideas from the context of pre-2014 Shingal into the spacetime of the contemporary diaspora emerges in the form of the village chronotope as a call for Yezidis to resist the temptations of European re-settlement and instead contribute to the building of a good, moral community.

Similarly, other words and phrases distinguish the ideal Yezidi persona from the Iraqi Yezidi in the diaspora who has failed to stay true to the values expressed in the village chronotope. This is exemplified by the verse, "I will not leave my religion" (line 7). This simultaneously references the past use of forced conversion by aggressors against the community, including ISIS's demand that Yezidis convert to Islam during the 2014 genocide, and the current concern that young Yezidis will abandon their religion. An interviewee in Germany explained to me the potential consequences of assimilation in diaspora, arguing that assimilation is the seventy-fifth *ferman* against the Yezidi community and will result in greater casualties than any of the prior *ferman*. In this way, "I will not leave my religion" has multiple associations. The value of commitment to the religio-cultural community evoked in the village chronotope is at once a demand that past injustices must not be forgotten and also a warning about the future. The linguistic and content features of the village chronotope are meant not only to evoke a particular moral persona but are also intended to stand off against the persona of an amoral person seduced by the perceived excesses and meaninglessness of diasporic living.

"*We neke*" ("Don't Do It") sung by Nishan Baadri

1	*Çend ciwan e gulê sor*	How pretty is the red rose
2	*Nava porê te da*	In your hair
3	*Hêde hêde êd maşiya*	Slowly, slowly she was walking
4	*Nava gundê me da.*	In our village.
5	*Ciwaniya xwe û xemla xwe*	Your beauty and your appearance
6	*Nîşa xelkê me nede*	Don't show to our people
7	*Tirsa min ji wan kesan xeşîm*	(Because) my worry is from foolish people
8	*Le ser hala me da*	In our situation
9	*We neke, we neke*	Don't do it, don't do it
10	*Keçê ciwanê we neke*	Beautiful girl, don't do it
11	*Ciwaniya te li ser rengê gul e*	Your beauty is the color of flowers
12	*Ciwaniya te li ser rengê sêv e*	Your beauty is the color of apples
13	*Yarê ij ber hatina te*	My love, because of your coming
14	*Gul barîn, gul bişkivîn*	It rained roses, the roses bloomed
15	*Hiş û aqlê min ferîn*	My consciousness and mind flew away
16	*Ji ber dîtinê te*	Because I have seen you
17	*Maçekî bide min ji wan lêve*	Give me a kiss, from those lips
18	*Bi xêra meta te*	In the name of your aunt
19	*We neke kecê dînê we neke.*	Don't do it, crazy girl, don't do it.

This example illustrates the kind of persona projected by the village chronotope through both the content of the verses and the verb forms. In this song, the singer is voicing a young man talking to a young woman who is the object of his romantic attention. The lyrics are a mix of compliments about the young woman's physical appearance (lines 1, 2, 5, 11, 12, 14) and commands that she not behave indecently (lines 6, 9, 10, 19). Content-wise, the lyrics speak to the morality appropriate for the good Iraqi Yezidi projected by the village chronotope. For women, the ideal character is modest and responsive to the requests of her male lover. For men, the ideal helps control the sexuality of the women they are associated with in order to hide their beauty and protect them from "foolish people" (line 7). In the context of a wedding, these prescriptions highlight how the production of a chronotope works as a frame that influences the kinds of responses open to the audience (Blommaert 2015). In this case, I focus not on the kind of linguistic responses that are available to the audience, which are limited by virtue of the genre of the wedding party song, where only the singer is given the right to speak into the microphone, but rather on the way the village chronotope is used to shape the nonverbal reactions of the audience. Because weddings are one of the few places where young Yezidis have been able to initiate romantic connections—though of course that is changing in diaspora—they are sites where people have a heightened awareness of young men's and women's sexuality. As such, when the wedding singer voices the young man in the imagined encounter with his love, the singer is also voicing commands meant to affect the young men and women in the wedding party audience. This voicing works as a performance of the village chronotope because the young man in the song is framed as a moral exemplar of village life and because the use of past tense verbs

in lines 13 and 15 situate the couple in the past in the space of the village. The use of voice and chronotope can accomplish similar tasks. As Asif Agha notes, both the use of voice and chronotope allow the speaker to "link a frame of representation to a frame of performance" (2007:330).

Like the other songs analyzed, this song also invokes the village chronotope through the use of semantically loaded language. In this example, multiple verses rely on references to natural symbols: roses (lines 1 and 14), flowers (line 11), apples (line 12), and rain (line 14). These are significant comparisons because, as many of my Iraqi Yezidi interlocutors have reported to me, the Yezidi religious tradition is focused on reverence and respect for natural phenomena, which are seen as wholesome and pure. The selection of these words then projects into the here-and-now of the urban lives of most Iraqi Yezidis, the natural values of Iraqi Yezidi village life from the past. Specifically, women's bodies, while in need of control, are also discursively tied to the natural world, becoming representations of Iraqi Yezidi village life. In this sense, there is arguably more at stake for women in the village chronotope than for men. The comparison of a woman with loaded natural symbols of the past (pre-2014 Shingal) highlights how women and men are differently implicated by the village chronotope.

كذاب الذي يقول الغربة تنراد/"*Kadhaab aldhi yaqul al-ghorba tanraad*" ("It Is a Liar Who Says Living in a Strange Place is Needed") sung by Tarek Shexani

1	كذاب الذي يقول الغربة تنراد	It is a liar who says that exile is needed
2	والله وهمان	I swear it is an illusion
3	بكينا على الغربة ولقينا الغربة ذل	We cried about exile, and found exile to be humiliation
4	بكينا وأتينا إلى الغربة والغربة ذل	We cried and we came to exile, and exile is humiliation.

A final example highlights an alternative way of being in the diaspora that is contrasted with the village chronotope. As Agha writes, "the concept of chronotope is of vanishingly little interest when extracted from a frame of contrast" (2007:322). Without contrast, a chronotope is just a "possible world" (322) or a simple reference to an imagined spacetime, but when embedded in a broader landscape of linguistic tropes, a chronotope becomes value-laden. Moreover, the "dialogical relationships" (Wirtz 2016:349) between chronotopes produce new layers of meaning. The excerpt sung by Tarek Shexani at an Iraqi Yezidi wedding in Germany speaks to the development of a contrasting chronotope to the village chronotope: the chronotope of diaspora. While this chronotope is arguably less well established in the Iraqi Yezidi community in Germany, given that ways of speaking that evoke diaspora life appear to be varied and complex in my interviews, it is a useful counterpoint to the village chronotope. Here الغربة (*al-ghorba*), translated as "exile," represents the spacetime of present diaspora life in Germany. Compared with all of the words used in the previous examples that are meant to associate village life with honor, this song associates the strange spacetime of diaspora with shame and humiliation (ذل [*dhul*], lines 3 and 4). These associations are reflected in the sociopolitical realities of diaspora living, where many of my interviewees have reported humiliating experiences of exclusion from German society. While I argue that this song excerpt represents an alternative to the village chronotope, it was still incorporated into a wedding music set and was

reworked by the singer to stylistically match the other songs. This demonstrates that the village chronotope exists only as a part of the broader ecology of Yezidi oral culture.

This example also serves as an illustration of how language ideologies factor into the production of chronotopes. I argue that Kurmanji Kurdish, especially its Yezidi variants, is an essential part of the Iraqi Yezidi village chronotope.[7] In the diaspora, many Iraqi Yezidis have become increasingly concerned with parsing out what aspects of Iraqi Yezidi cultural and religious practices are *really* Yezidi and which are a result of influence from Islam. Given these concerns, some Yezidis have started to reject specific Arabic phrases they consider to be particularly close to Islam (examples include إنشا الله [*in shā'allāh*], "if God wills," and الحمد الله [*al-ḥamdu li'llāh*], "praise be to God"), and some Yezidis have even stated to me that they will no longer speak Arabic at all. Given these associations, it makes sense that an alternative chronotope that projects a spacetime in contrast with the village chronotope would be produced in Arabic. That this Arabic song was still performed in a wedding and stylized to fit with the Yezidi wedding song genre, however, emphasizes again the diversity of linguistic associations and ideologies (which sometimes even directly contradict each other) in the Yezidi community.

Wedding Singers and Authority

Weddings are important events in the social lives of Iraqi Yezidis living in Germany. Shifts in traditional Yezidi authority structures over time, including a broad decline in the social and political capital of the upper castes and members of the supreme spiritual council and changes in transmission of religious knowledge (Ackermann 2008; Allison 2001; Leezenberg 2018; Omarkhali 2014), have arguably created new opportunities for Yezidi individuals to emerge as political and cultural leaders. In this context, I suggest that wedding singers have a unique role. Wedding singers are able to write and perform songs that comment on Yezidi identity, proper Yezidi comportment, and cultural values without much controversy. There are only a few men who routinely sing at Iraqi Yezidi weddings, and they have garnered significant followings. It has been my experience that most Iraqi Yezidis are familiar with these wedding singers and their music. While the popularity of these singers does not itself suggest that they have a significant role in shaping Yezidi identity, I argue that their popularity enables broader circulation of the messages in their music. Moreover, in an environment where people (especially from younger generations) desire more clarity about Yezidi culture and identity, the messages in popular songs might have a more significant impact than they would in other contexts. Even if people do not necessarily agree with or even consciously reflect on the messages embedded in the songs performed by popular wedding singers, the repeated performance of popular songs results in broad recognition of the common tropes, like the village chronotope.

The cultural authority of Iraqi Yezidi wedding singers also shapes their performance of the village chronotope. When wedding singers perform songs with the set of features and moral framings of the village chronotope, they themselves become representatives of the moral persona

[7] There are a few Yezidi villages in Iraq, however, where Yezidis do not grow up speaking Kurdish and instead speak mostly Arabic.

projected by this chronotope. In the excerpts above, the singers themselves become the subjects they voice in the songs; the first-person pronouns in the lyrics become references in the moment of performance to the singers. As Hilary Parsons Dick (2010) notes, when speakers articulate a chronotope, it might result in an association between the possible personae projected by the chronotope and the speakers themselves. Moreover, in my interviews with wedding singers, they all conveyed their interest in representing Yezidi cultural values. The association of Iraqi Yezidi wedding singers with the moral values represented in the village chronotope was also present in my discussions with other Iraqi Yezidis in Germany and the United States. Daxil Osman, for example, is respected by many of my Yezidi contacts for his commitment to the community following the Shingal genocide. He stayed in Iraq to fight to protect Shingal until he became ill and came to Germany for treatment. For Yezidis who know this information about Daxil Osman, it arguably enhances the effectiveness of the village chronotope evoked in his music as Daxil Osman's respected character merges with the moral persona evoked by the village chronotope in his songs.

While I have argued that Iraqi Yezidi wedding singers have a special cultural role, my ethnographic data and analysis of songs performed at weddings indicate the need for additional research on the cultural significance of Yezidi popular culture figures. Scholarship has thoughtfully addressed the way globalization and diaspora have enabled new opportunities for charismatic individuals (Ackermann 2008; Omarkhali 2014), but little scholarship addresses the influence of popular culture figures. In other contexts, anthropologists and sociologists have described the cultural significance of popular culture personalities in identity debates (Bilaniuk 2016; Roda 2015; Shipley 2013). Given the rapid changes over the past years in authority in the Yezidi community and growing popular attention to Yezidi identity, I argue that similar ethnographic projects focused on popular culture are particularly needed at this moment in time.

Yezidi Wedding Party Songs as a Genre

Wedding party songs are one of several melodized speech genres important in the Iraqi Yezidi community. A song played at a wedding party, called *dûrik* (lit. "a song") by my interviewees, is distinct from other forms of melodized speech like *qewl*, holy hymns that allude to religious stories and are memorized by certain Yezidis; *stran*, epic songs; or *kilamê ser*, melodic expressions of sadness about a loss or traumatic event.[8] It is important then to understand Yezidi wedding party songs in the context of Yezidi "communicative ecologies" (Shoaps 2009) as an understanding of the many Yezidi oral forms indicates there is a widespread appreciation among Iraqi Yezidis of melodic speech as a medium for conveying information about Yezidi culture, religion, and history. A Yezidi interviewee in the United States explained the significance of melodized speech arguing that "Yezidis only know who they are through songs."[9] Wedding party songs are arguably some of the most accessible songs for

[8] See Estelle Amy de la Bretéque's (2012) analysis of *kilamê ser* in Armenia.

[9] The interviewee, in this context, used "songs" to describe all of the forms of Yezidi melodized speech events.

Yezidis as they are readily available on YouTube, unlike the religious *qewl*, and because Yezidi weddings, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, were quite frequent and large: more than 1,000 guests is not unheard of.

I argue that wedding party songs are a discrete genre with each example bearing similar stylistic features, but the understanding and appreciation of individual examples of the wedding party song genre also varies based on the time and place of performance. As William Hanks (1987) suggests, genres at once have features that exist in each iteration of the genre across space and time and that allow for its performance and interpretation in the context of very different historical circumstances. Informed by Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) theorization of "habitus," Hanks argues that a genre carries a set of instructions for the speaker and audience of that time and place leading to historically situated variations on the genre. In the context of Yezidi wedding party songs, this duality between standardization across examples and specificity in different historical contexts is important given how recent Yezidi history affects the interpretation of what are, according to my interlocutors, longstanding features of Yezidi wedding party songs. Specifically, Yezidi contacts have told me that references to village life are and long have been quite common in songs performed at Yezidi parties. Given the 2014 genocide, however, and the mass displacement of Iraqi Yezidi populations in the homeland and abroad, I argue that these references have taken on new associations coalescing into what I refer to here as the village chronotope. Indeed, what might have seemed to be general references to village life, have become positioned in the village chronotope as more specific projections of village life in Shingal prior to the genocide.

Conclusion

The significance of the village chronotope lies in the reality that what it means to be Yezidi in Germany is currently deeply contested and eagerly explored. This article is an attempt to outline some examples of seemingly mundane linguistic strategies—like those in popular songs—that demand an alignment to the moral and ideological associations of what I have here described as the village chronotope. My analysis of the village chronotope aims to highlight the cultural significance of songs performed at Yezidi weddings, the features of certain kinds of allusions to pre-2014 Shingal life, and the consequences of these specific references to pre-2014 Shingal life for Iraqi Yezidis living in Germany. As other scholars have noted, chronotopic analysis is particularly useful for explicating the social and political challenges created in a community split across borders (Chávez 2015; Dick 2010). In the context of Iraqi Yezidis living in Germany, I argue that chronotopic analysis of songs performed at Iraqi Yezidi weddings offers a concrete way to understand the mechanisms by which framings of life in Iraq shape Yezidi identity today in diaspora.

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The Yezidi Religious Music: A First Step in the Analysis of the Acoustic Shape of *Qewls*

Estelle Amy de la Bretèque and Khanna Omarkhali

1. Introduction: Types of Performances and Learning Techniques

While the Yezidi religious textual tradition, including its collection, translation, and analysis, has already become a separate subject of investigation in the field of Yezidi Studies,[1] its religious music remains largely unstudied. Based on the analysis of Yezidi religious vocal performances, this contribution aims at understanding the concept and uses of *kubrî* ("melody"), as well as the relation between text and music. The meaning of a particular oral "genre," or a category, depends not merely on the text and its verbal performance, but also on rich nonverbal features, such as music and the special role of instruments, ritual ceremonies, the interaction between the reciter and his audience, and so forth.

This exploratory study is a first step towards an understanding of the acoustic shape of the Yezidi religious hymns, *Qewls*, based on two religious hymns. We will compare their words and acoustic shape in order to find out the parameters of changeability of the variants in performance. The soundtracks analyzed, which can be found in the eCompanion to this article, were recorded by the authors during fieldwork conducted in Armenia, Iraq, Russia, and Germany between 2006 and 2010. Five of the recordings are variants of one *Qewl*: two were performed in a ritual setting and three were recited at our request in the houses of the informants. In the same period, moreover, Khanna Omarkhali recorded two variants of another *Qewl*. This second *Qewl* is known to be uttered using two different "melodies" (*kubrî/kubir*). We will analyze the differences between the two melodies of the second *Qewl* and compare them with the five variants of the first *Qewl*.

A few aspects of music among Yezidis have already been studied. Estelle Amy de la Bretèque conducted research on melodized speech among the Yezidis of Armenia, where mourning, exile, and heroism are expressed through a specific system of melodized utterances. Combining ethnographic and linguistic approaches, as well as acoustic analysis, she showed in her book *Paroles mélodisées* (2013) that this use of the voice constructs a form of ideal life,

[1] Most of Yezidi religious texts were published in the following collections: Celîl and Celîl 1978a and 1978b; Silêman and Cindî 1979; Hecî 2002. Some were translated into English, notably in: Kreyenbroek 1995; Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005; Omarkhali 2017. The authors are grateful to Ourania Lampropoulou for her very insightful comments on the musical analysis.

linking the living to the absent and deceased. The book is accompanied by sixty-five audio and video recordings.[2]

In her monograph on the Yezidi religious textual tradition, Khanna Omarkhali (2017) recorded, listed, and (without musicological analysis) briefly described the extant *kubrîs* of the Yezidi religious texts. This is the first near-comprehensive collection and recording of the extant *kubrîs* of the Yezidi religious hymns. The accompanying CD contains recitations of the seventy-one Yezidi religious texts including variants—sixteen video files and fifty-five audio tracks (total time: 208:43).[3]

Nura Cewarî (2009:204-18) wrote an article in Kurdish about the melodies of the religious texts of the Yezidis in Armenia, providing a few musical transcriptions. Another relevant study is Scheherazade Q. Hassan's (1976:53-72) article on the musical instruments of the Yezidis in Iraq, with the focus on the contexts in which these instruments are used, as well as the status of musicians.

Yezidi religious performances take place in different situations, from the highly planned (for example, big religious feasts) to the impromptu. The recitation is done only from memory; no notes are used during performances. Some modern experts, however, use notes and published collections for "refreshing" their memory before performances. Omarkhali (2017:161) proposes a general classification of performances of the Yezidi religious oral texts according to their function, that is, (1) as liturgical texts during religious rituals and gatherings; (2) for teaching and learning purposes, as well as for edification; and (3) as "rehearsals" to prevent the reciter from forgetting his (in very rare cases: her) own repertoire.[4]

The first text chosen here for analysis is *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Siltan e* ("The Hymn: Sheikh Hesen is the Sultan"), which in Armenia and Georgia is also called *Qewlê Bore-borê* ("The Hymn of *Bore-borê*") because of the repeated refrain: *Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor, merge ya bor, ya bor, ya bor*.

In Armenia and Georgia, the hymn *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Siltan e* is recited at the grave, practically always by two or three "priests" together. The performance is similar to that during the funerals, with the audience standing quietly around the grave.

While some poetic compositions of the Yezidis are recited without any "melody," the majority of them have their own distinctive "melody," called *kubrî* in Iraq and *kubir* in Armenia and Georgia. The "melodies" are called the *kubrî* of such and such a *Qewl*, or the *kubrî* of such and such a *Beyt*, and so forth. The recitation of the Yezidi religious poetic texts may vary from speech-like or fast recitation without melody, to intoned recitation and melodic performances (Omarkhali 2017:92).

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[2] They are available at http://ethnomusicologie.fr/parolesmelodisees.

[3] They comprise fifty-two *Qewls* (with variants), eight *Beyts*, and eleven recitations of other texts. Besides five audio recordings, another fifty audio files and all the video files were recorded by Omarkhali during her fieldwork in Iraq (Baʿdre, Beʿshiqe, Khanke, Lalish), Armenia (Jirarat, Qamishlo, Shamiram), Germany (Celle, Nienburg, Nienhagen, Oldenburg, Sehnde) and Russia (St. Petersburg). The CD also includes rare recitations of religious texts by women.

[4] For more on the religious teaching and learning practices among Yezidis and the types of performances, see Omarkhali 2017, Chapter IV.

If a text has a *kubrî*, then experts would prefer to (and often do) recite the text in public (for example during funerals, feasts, open gatherings, and so on) with the melody, while during other types of performances, often private or in a close small gathering, teaching sermons, and so on, they might recite the text without a melody. The impact of the religious texts becomes stronger with the *kubrî*, and they are often performed with these melodies in public. If the audience is smaller, the experts might also recite the same *Qewl* without melody, which demands less energy. As far as the teaching and learning of the melodies is concerned, *kubrî*, as well as the texts, are to be recited regularly to prevent their forgetting.

A novice learns the texts stanza by stanza, word for word. The master teaches him a part of the text every day, its length depending on the capacity of the pupil. Traditionally, there are two ways of learning. The first is to begin directly with the text and its *kubrî*, the second is divided into two steps: first learning the words of a religious composition, and later studying its melody. Sometimes a few months pass between these two steps. The melody may not be learned by a *qewlbêj* ("a reciter, expert on religious texts") at all. The melody of the text is also studied stanza by stanza. Some informants mentioned that they were forced to learn the text by one preceptor and the *kubrî* by another (Omarkhali 2017:140).

Kubrîs are always linked with the words of specific texts; they do not exist without words. When people try to remember a *Qewl*, they recite the words without a *kubrî*. Omarkhali (2017) listed the melodies of about one hundred *Qewls* in "Part II, Survey of *the Qewls*" of her monograph. Omarkhali (2017:92) writes that Yezidi experts characterized various types of *kubrî*, for example as *bilind*, "high," *giran*, "heavy," or *bi lez*, "quick"; these terms may vary slightly or significantly in Iraq (also between the communities of Sinjar, Sheikhan, Beʿshiqe, and Behzane), Syria, Turkey, Armenia, and Georgia.

Unlike the *Qewls*, which may or may not have *kubrî*, all *Beyts* and *Qesîdes* have *kubrî*. The most complex forms of recitation are found in the melodies of the *Qewls*. They might include two or three different melodies in one text; or different melodies of the same text depending on the religious occasion on which they are performed. Based on extensive fieldwork, Omarkhali (2017:93) came to the following conclusions: there are about forty *Qewls* that do not have any melody. Around forty other *Qewls* have a *kubrî* that is unique to these religious texts. There are a few *Qewls* that are recited with the same *kubrî*. She writes (2017:93):

> Usually, a *Qewl* has one melody for the whole text (for example *Qewlê Axiretê*, *Qewlê Koçeka*, *Qewlê Meha*, *Qewlê Şêşims*). In some cases, though, one hymn has more than one melody, for instance, the beginning of the *Qewl* has one kind of melody, in the middle it changes, and the last part of the *Qewl* has yet another melody; or the melodies might be different depending on the ritual (for example *Qewlê Firwara Şêx Fexir*, *Qewlê Kofa*, *Qewlê Makê*, *Qewlê Mezin*). Sometimes this is because a number of text units have been combined into one. There is a group of *Qewls* that have different melodies depending on when they are performed. Thus, it can be assumed that the melody in the Yezidi religious tradition helps to memorize the texts better and helps to distinguish them from others. The melody also provides the more sacral and solemn style of performance.

Description of the Recordings

The authors analyzed five variants of the "same" hymn: *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e*. One of them was recorded in Russia (consult the eCompanion, recording 3), two of them in Armenia (recordings 4 and 5), and two from Yezidis of Iraq (recordings 1 and 2). All of them are performed by members of endogamous religious groups (Pîrs and Sheikhs) with the exception of one performance (recording 1). One version is performed by a woman, the other four are performed by male experts. Recordings 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7 were collected and recorded by Khanna Omarkhali during her fieldwork in 2007 and 2010, not in a ritual context. Recordings 4 and 5 were recorded by Estelle Amy de la Bretèque during her fieldwork among Yezidis in Armenia in 2007 during funerals.

The first recording is the recitation performed by Merwanê Xelîl during an interview in Oldenburg (Germany) in July, 2007. Merwanê Xelîl is not a member of a religious endogamous group (Sheikhs and Pîrs), but he is known as a *qewlbêj* or expert on religious textual tradition. The second recording was performed by a woman Sheikh, Dayê Xemê, the sister of a known expert on religious knowledge, Sheikh Deştî in Khanke (Iraq) in 2010. The third recording was collected in Saint Petersburg (Russia) in September, 2007; it was performed by Sheikh Şamilê Kereman at Khanna Omarkhali's request.

The fourth recording was recorded in Arevik (Armenia) in September 2007 at the funerals of Yurîk. Two Sheikhs (Sheikh Agit and Sheikh Kiniazê Tayar) and one Pîr performed *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e* on the way to the cemetery located a few kilometers from the village. Following the huge crown of flowers, the men from the "priestly" groups, all in black, uttered the *Qewl*: the Sheikh leading the performance uttered the entire stanzas, the two other men joined for the refrain. Under the burning sun, they were followed by the coffin (closed because the death occurred days before as the body was brought back from Germany) and an endless crowd of silent men and weeping women.

The fifth recording was performed by Sheikh Kino and recorded in Alagyaz (Armenia) in February, 2007, at the funerals of Rexbet. Sheikh Kino performed *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e* on the way to the cemetery located about one kilometer north of the village on the top of hill. The procession included a man holding a big crown of white flowers, two men carrying the top of the coffin, Sheikh Kino performing *Qewls*, a female Pîr with a bowl of "bread of the deceased" (*nanê miriya*),[5] the coffin with the deceased carried by four men (and still open), and a crowd of villagers, first men, mostly silent, and at last women, crying and weeping.

In this study, we compare the first hymn to two versions of another hymn, namely, *Qewlê Kofa* ("The Hymn of Headdress"). Both versions were recorded by Omarkhali during her fieldwork from an expert on religious knowledge, Merwanê Xelîl. Recording 6 is a recitation of *Qewlê Kofa* with a quick *kubrî*, while recording 7 is a recitation with a "heavy" or slow *kubrî*.

All recordings are subtitled by the authors.

[5] *Nanê miriya* is the food distributed in the name of the deceased.

2. Description and Analysis of the *Qewls*

2.1 The Hymn: Sheikh Hesen is the Sultan

The *Qewl* we chose to analyze first is *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e* (recordings 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in the eCompanion). *Qewls* are religious hymns that occupy the highest position in the hierarchy of religious literature. They are traditionally believed to be ultimately of divine origin. Among them, *Berane Qewls* ("Rams' *Qewls*"; also called *Qewlê beranî* or *Qewlêd beran*) are considered the most sacred and rich in content regarding the Yezidi religion. The interpretation of such *Qewls* may be complex because different layers of meanings exist there. In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, a Yezidi reciter of religious texts may memorize *Berane Qewls* and learn its interpretation only if he already possesses adequate knowledge as an expert in Yezidi religious texts. *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e* is considered a *Berane Qewl*.

Among Yezidis from Iraq *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e* is mainly recited in *Sema'* ceremonies. It is one of the hymns that are recited at a grave (*ser mezela*). This *Qewl* is recited upon request of a member of the deceased's family. The type of performance during the funerals is solemn, the audience stands or sits quietly, and two (in some cases three) people may recite the *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenê Siltan e* simultaneously. When *Qewls* are recited during funerals by Yezidis in Armenia, they are very often recited by two people, usually a Sheikh and a Pîr at the same time. It is not recited for the death of children or young people. In Iraq this *Qewl* is often recited together with *Qewlê Kofa* (Omarkhali 2017:541).

The hymn tells about grief and fate, and about the miraculous power of Sheikh Hesen. In the oral tradition, words may vary slightly from one performance to another.[6] To give an idea of the textual content of this *Qewl*, here are, as an example, the words uttered at the funerals of Yurîk in 2007 in Armenia (recording 4).

N	Original text	English translation
1	*Şêxê Hesenî Siltan e, ey Siltan e* *'Ezîzê mala bavê mino* *Bavek ji bavê qelpê re'man e* *Mîrê qelendera, mîr herê mîrê.*	Sheikh Hesen is the Sultan, hey, he is the Sultan O dear one of my father's house Such a father whose heart is merciful The Prince of the *qelenders* ("wandering dervishes"), the prince, the eternal prince.
	Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor, *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor.* *Ya hekîmî mêrano* *'Ezîz Siltan Şîxadî hemû derdanî bi dermane.*	*Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor,* *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor*.[7] O healer of men O dear Sultan Sheikh Adi, a remedy for all pains.
2	*Şêxê Hesenî se'îd e, ey seîd e* *'Ezîzê mala bavê mino* *Bavek ji bavê qelpê mirîde* *Mîrê qelendera, mîr herê mîrê.*	Sheikh Hesen is the Sayyid, hey is the Sayyid O dear one of my father's house Such a father whose heart [belongs] to the *Mirîds* ("laymen") The Prince of the *qelenders*, the prince, the eternal prince.

[6] On the variability of religious texts read more in Omarkhali 2017:177-253.

[7] *Dîwan* (lit. "assembly"); *Mergeh* is used for Lalish.

	Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor, *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor.* *Ya hekîmî mêrano* *'Ezîz Siltan Şîxadî hemû derdanî bi xebîre.*	*Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor,* *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor*. O healer of men O dear Sultan Sheikh Adi, [he] knows [how to cure] all pains.
3	*Şêxê Hesenî mezin e, ey mezin e* *'Ezîzê mala bavê mino* *Bavek ji bavê qelpê momin e* *Mîrê qelendera, mîr herê mîrê.*	Sheikh Hesen is the great, hey is the great O dear one of my father's house Such a father whose heart [belongs] to the believers The Prince of the *qelenders*, the prince, the eternal prince.
	Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor, *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor.* *Ya hekîmî mêrano* *Qapiya miraza, miraz-xasa qapiya Melek Şîxisin e, ciyê gilî gazinane.*	*Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor,* *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor*. O healer of men The gate of wishes, those who wish, is the gate of the Angel Sheikhisin, the place of complaints.
4	*Şêxê Hesenî esed e, ey esed e* *'Ezîzê mala bavê mino* *Bavek ji bavê qelpê semed e* *Mîrê qelendera, mîr herê mîrê.*	Sheikh Hesen is the lion, hey is the lion O dear one of my father's house Such a father whose heart [belongs] to the Throne The Prince of the *qelenders*, the prince, the eternal prince.
	Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor, *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor.* *Ya hekîmî mêrano* *Hezar serî neyê malê.*	*Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor,* *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor*. O healer of men A thousand people will not come home.
5	*Şêxê Hesenî feqîr e, ey feqîr e* *'Ezîzê mala bavê mino* *Bavek ji bavê qelpê mîr e* *Mîrê qelendera, mîr herê mîrê.*	Sheikh Hesen is the *feqîr*, hey is the *feqîr* O dear one of my father's house Such a father whose heart [belongs] to the prince The Prince of the *qelenders*, the prince, the eternal prince.
	Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor, *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor.* *Ya hekîmî mêrano* *'Ezîz Siltan Şîxadî hemû derdanî bi dermane.*	*Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor,* *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor*. O healer of men O dear Sultan Sheikh Adi, remedy for all pains.
6	*Şêxê Hesenî 'emer e, ey 'emer e* *'Ezîzê mala bavê mino* *Xaliqekî minî her bi her e* *Mîrê qelendera, mîr herê mîrê.*	Sheikh Hesen is the red, hey he is the red O dear one of my father's house My eternal Creator The Prince of the *qelenders*, the prince, the eternal prince.
	Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor, *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor.* *Ya hekîmî mêrano* *Bi firwara Siltan Şîxadî ciset qalibî ruhê . . . dermanê.*	*Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor, .* *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor*. O healer of men At the behest of Sultan Sheikh Adi, the body, the form of the soul . . . remedy.
7	*Şêxê Hesenî dur cemal e, ey dur cemal e* *'Ezîzê mala bavê mino* *Borekî qudretê yî siyar e* *Mîrê qelendera, mîr herê mîrê.*	Sheikh Hesen is the beautiful pearl, hey, is the beautiful pearl O dear one of my father's house [He] is the rider of the mighty steed The Prince of the *qelenders*, the prince, the eternal prince.

	Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor, *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor.* *Ya hekîmî mêrano* *'Ezîz Siltan Şîxadî hemû derdanî bi dermane.*	*Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor,* *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor*. O healer of men O dear Sultan Sheikh Adi, a remedy for all pains.
8	*Şêxê Hesenî dur cemal e, ey dur cemal e* *'Ezîzê mala bavê mino* *Borekî qudretê yî siyar e* *Mîrê qelendera, mîr herê mîrê.*	Sheikh Hesen is the beautiful pearl, hey is the beautiful pearl O dear one of my father's house [He] is the rider of the mighty steed The Prince of the *qelenders*, the prince, the eternal prince.
	Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor, *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor.* *Ya hekîmî mêrano* *'Ezîz Siltan Şîxadî hemû derdanî bi dermane.*	*Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor,* *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor*. O healer of men O dear Sultan Sheikh Adi, a remedy for all pains.
9	*Şêxekî mi hebû Hekar da, ey Hekar da,* *'Ezîzê mala bavê mino* *Zor kewanê qudretê palda* *Mîrê qelendera, mîr herê mîrê.*	My Sheikh was in Hakkari, hey in Hakkari O dear one of my father's house [He] laid down the strong power (?) The Prince of the *qelenders*, the prince, the eternal prince.
	Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor, *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor.*	*Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor,* *Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor*.

Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e is known to have a characteristic *kubrî*.[8] Our analysis shows that four versions are very similar, while the last one is quite different. In order to compare these recitations, we conducted a comparative analysis based on several parameters: words, melodic curves/cadence, rhythm, and breath groups (see transcriptions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, below). Afterwards, we compared this hymn with *Qewlê Kofa* (see transcriptions 6 and 7), which is known to have two different *kubrîs*.

Words

A *Qewl* consists of different *sebeqs*, often translated as "stanzas" or "strophes." The *sebeqs* are not metrical. The words and the order of stanzas/lines of the *Qewl* may vary slightly from one performance to another. The table below shows the differences for the first stanza within our five recordings.

Recording 1	Recording 2	Recording 3	Recording 4	Recording 5
Ê Siltan e, ê Siltan e	*Şêxê Hesenî Siltan e, î Siltan e*	*Şêxê Hesenî Siltan e, oy Siltan e*	*Şêxê Hesenî Siltan e, ey Siltan e*	*Şêxê Hesenî Siltan e, ay Siltan e*
O ay ezîzekî mala bavê mino	*Ey ezîzekî mala bavê mino*	*Ezîzekî mala bavê mino*	*Ezîzê mala bavê mino*	*Ezîzî mala bavê mino*
Bavê qelpê rehmen e	*Bavê qelpê rehmen e*	*Bavê qelpê rehmen e*	*Bavek ji bavê qelpê re'man e*	*Bavê qelpekî momin e*

[8] For more details see Omarkhali 2017:527-44.

Mîrê qelender e.	*Mîrê qelender e.*	*Mîrê qelendera.*	*Mîrê qelendera.*	*Mîrê qelendera.*
Ay li min ayê ê yê yê ê yê ê	*Ey li min ayê êy*		*Mîr herê mîrê.*	*Mîr herê mîrê.*
Laliş yevol, oy dîwan yevol	*Laliş yevol, dîwan yevol*	*Laliş yevol, dîwan yevol*	*Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor*	*Laliş ya bor, dîwan ya bor*
Merge yevol yevol yevol	*Merge yevol yevol yevol*	*Merge yevol yevol yevol*	*Mergeh ya bor, ya bor, ya bor*	*Merge ya bor, ya bor, ya bor*
Ya birîndarê mêrano Siltan Şêx Adî hemû derd e yî derman e.	*Ya birîndarê mêrano Siltan Şêx Adî hemû derd e yî derman e.*	*Ya ezîzê mêrano Siltan Şêx Adî hemû derd e yî derman e.*	*Ya hekîmî mêrano 'Ezîz Siltan Şîxadî hemû derdanî bi dermane.*	*Ya hekîmê mêrano, Siltan Şêx Adî hemû derdanî bi xebîr e.*
Way derman e.	*Yay ezîzo.*	*Ey li min.*		

We can mainly observe two kinds of variations:[9] (1) change in semantic content, (2) change in interjections or ornamental syllables/words. The differences in semantic content are often linked to repetitions or omissions of words. Sometimes there is also the use of different words. For example, towards the end of the first stanza we have three different versions: *Ya birîndarê mêrano* (recordings 1 and 2), *Ya ezîzê mêrano* (recording 3), *Ya hekîmî/hekîmê mêrano* (recording 4 and recording 5). In case 2, words/syllables such as *yay*, *oy*, *ayê*, *yê*, *way*, *ey li min ê* or *ay li min ê*. These syllables/words have no clear semantic content, but they have a strong emotional impact. As described in Amy de la Bretèque (2013),[10] these syllables/words recall a whole set of emotions and feelings related to loss and pain. They are uttered at the beginning or at the end of breath groups, that is the vocalization produced between two inhalations. They may also constitute entire breath groups as in recording 1 (*Ay li min ayê ê*) and 2 (*Ey li min ê yê êy*). In this case they constitute entire autonomous melodic patterns.

Structure of the Stanza and Rhythm

The structure of the first stanza is similar from one utterance to another. Each stanza starts with a recitative pattern uttered alone (when several representatives of the "priestly" groups are present). Then a refrain (often, but not necessarily, similar within one performance) is uttered by one or more persons in a slower tempo. The stanza ends with a last recitative section, shorter than the first one, uttered alone.

[9] On the question of variation, change, and stability in the process of transmission of the Yezidi religious texts, see Omarkhali 2017:177-253.

[10] On the use of non-semantic syllables with a strong emotional content in Yezidi laments and epic songs, see Amy de la Bretèque (2013:103-04). Similar uses of non-semantic syllables in utterances linked with sadness, loss, and pain have been described in other traditions: *eleleu*, *aiai*, and *ototoi* in Ancient Greece (Loraux 1999; Svenbro 2004), or *terirem* in Byzantine music (Jefferey 1992:109; Conomos 1974:261-86). Some genres are even named after non-semantic syllables: *lailailar* in Azerbaijan (Amy de la Bretèque 2005) and *amanedhes* in Rebetiko (Holst-Warhaft 2003:172-74).

The length of the first stanza varies greatly from one utterance to another: from thirty-two seconds (recording 4) to one minute and twenty seconds (recording 1).[11] This variety may be explained by different parameters. *Qewls* are uttered with a "free" rhythm (or non-isochronic one, that is, a rhythm without a regular pulsation, which means that it is not possible to clap hands[12] during its performance). The number of breath groups (represented by measure bars in the musical transcriptions) and length of silences between breath groups may vary.[13] Speech prosody may also vary from one performer to another: length of pauses on specific pitches within musical phrases may vary. Nevertheless, notions of time and tempo are not foreign to this repertoire: some syllables are stressed with longer pauses on one or several pitches, while others are uttered on a fast tempo (probably much faster than daily speech[14]). One pattern is a recitative one, with a large number of syllables uttered in a fast tempo and on few joint pitches. Another pattern used mainly for non-semantic syllables is more melismatic (each syllable is uttered on several pitches). A third one, used in the refrain, has a rhythm that is regular, but the four repetitions of melodic/rhythmic sequences are not aligned by a common pulse (there are small gaps between them). Finally, the last syllable of each breath group is longer, a particularly remarkable phenomenon.

Scale and Melodic Patterns

Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e is uttered on stable pitches. Except for recording 5, the performances are based on the same scale and have very similar melodic patterns.

Recordings 1 to 4 follow melodic patterns well known in areas using *makam*.[15] Although performers of *Qewls* are probably not aware of the *makam* theory, they most certainly are familiar with melodies following *makam* patterns. In recordings 1 to 4 the melodic patterns are very typical of the tetrachord *uşşak* (part of *uşşak makam* according to Ottoman/Turkish terminology, or *bayyati maqam* in Arabic terminology).[16] This tetrachord is characterized by the following intervals: Re -Mi∂-Fa -Sol. The symbol ∂ means that the Mi is uttered slightly lower, by one comma, in ascending path, and slightly lower—until 2.5 commas in descending path.[17]

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[11] Recording 4: thirty-two seconds; recording 5: forty-six seconds; recording 3: forty-eight seconds; recording 2: one minute and one second; and recording 1: one minute and twenty seconds.

[12] This parameter has also been noticed by Cewarî (2009:213).

[13] Numbers of breath groups for the first stanza are the following: recording 1: ten breath groups; recording 2: thirteen breath groups; recording 3: ten breath groups; recording 4: eight breath groups; and recording 5: eight breath groups.

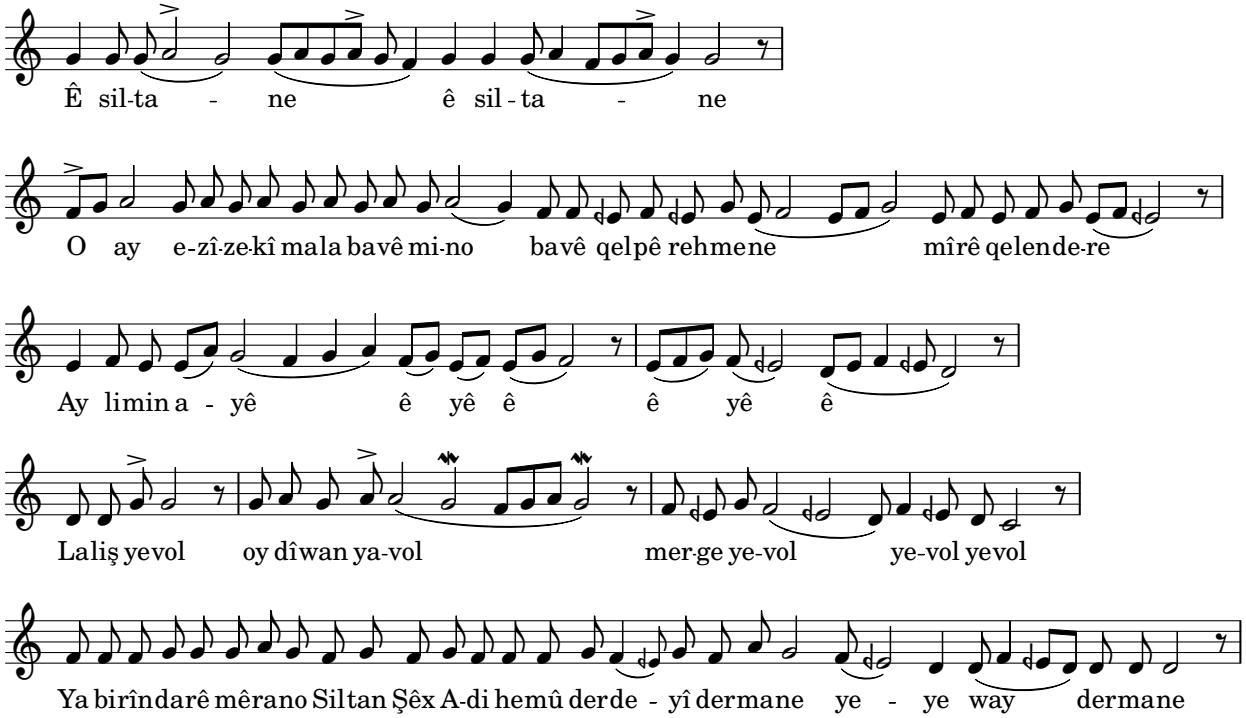
[14] For an acoustic analysis of speech (*axaftin*) among the Yezidis of Armenia, see Amy de la Bretèque et al. 2017.

[15] *Makam* (or *maqâm*, *mougham*, *maqôm* . . .) is a system of melody types used in musics of a vast area ranging from Maghreb to Western China. This system provides a complex set of rules for performance. Each *makam* has a unique intervalic structure and melodic development.

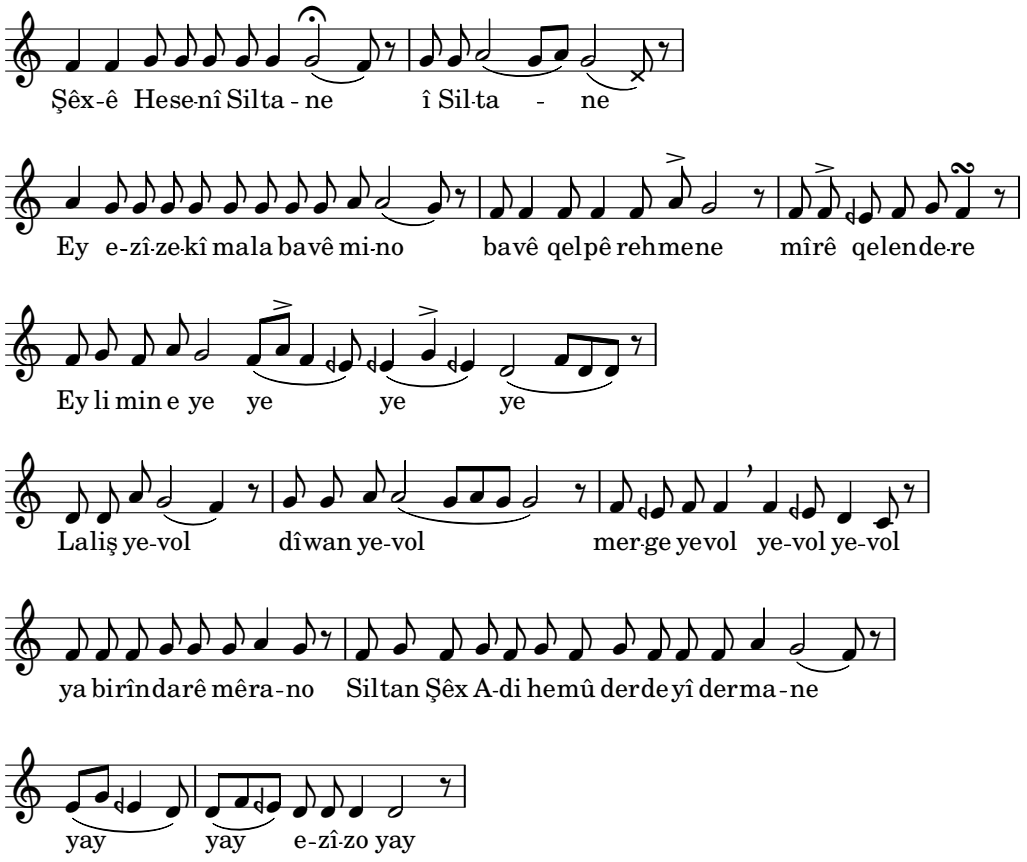
[16] For more detail on *uşşak makam* (and on *makams* more widely), see for example Aydemir 2010:108-10.

[17] A comma is a very small interval. One tone contains nine commas.

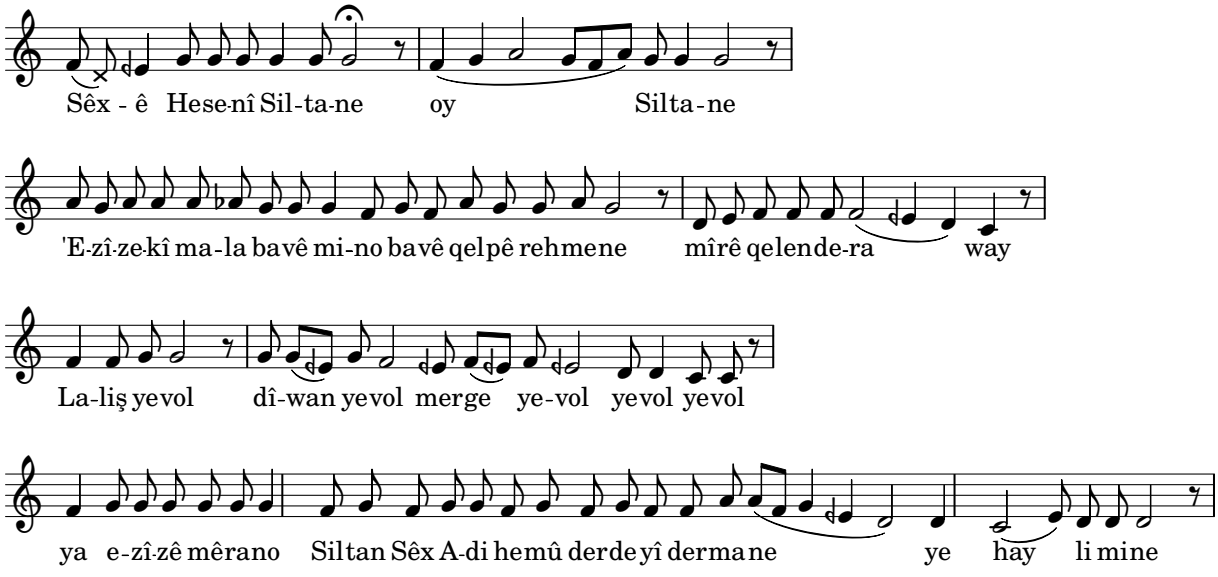
In recordings 1 to 4 the first part (up to the refrain) evolves around Fa, Sol, and La (in recording 4 up to Do) in a recitative fast tempo pattern. All of them end on the lowest note of the melodic range: Re (or Do in recording 3, a possible addition to the tetrachord *uşşak* at the end of melodic phrases). When non-semantic syllables have been added at the end of this section (recordings 1 and 2) the melody is more melismatic and with a slower tempo. The refrain starts with an ascending path (Re-Sol or Fa-Sol) and then follows a clear descending path up to Re or Do. The rhythm is close to a triplet (with no regular pulse in silences). Then the end of the stanza is again a fast tempo recitative pattern on Fa and Sol (Mi and Fa for recording 4) ending with a descending curve towards Re, except recording 2 which still remains on Fa. When non-semantic syllables have been added at the end of this sentence (recordings 1, 2, and 3), they also end on Re. In recording 2 it is in this last part, which is more developed and melismatic, that the performer utters a descending melismatic pattern towards Re.



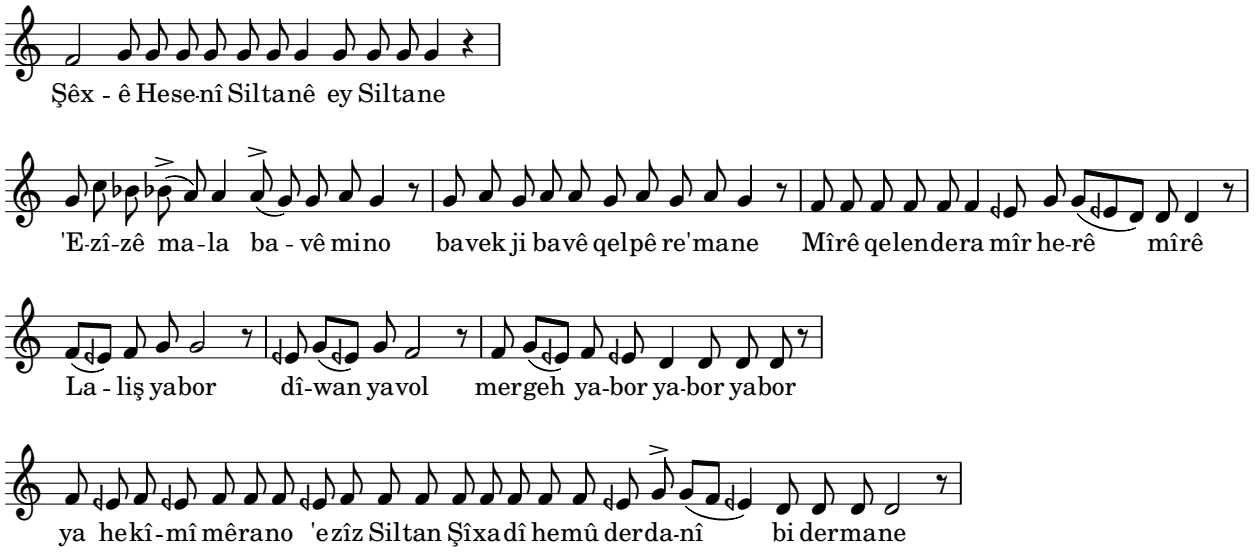
Musical transcription 1. Merwane Xelil, *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenê Sultan e.* (Please see the appendix on musical transcriptions at the end of the article.)



Musical transcription 2. Sheikh Daye Xemê, *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e.*



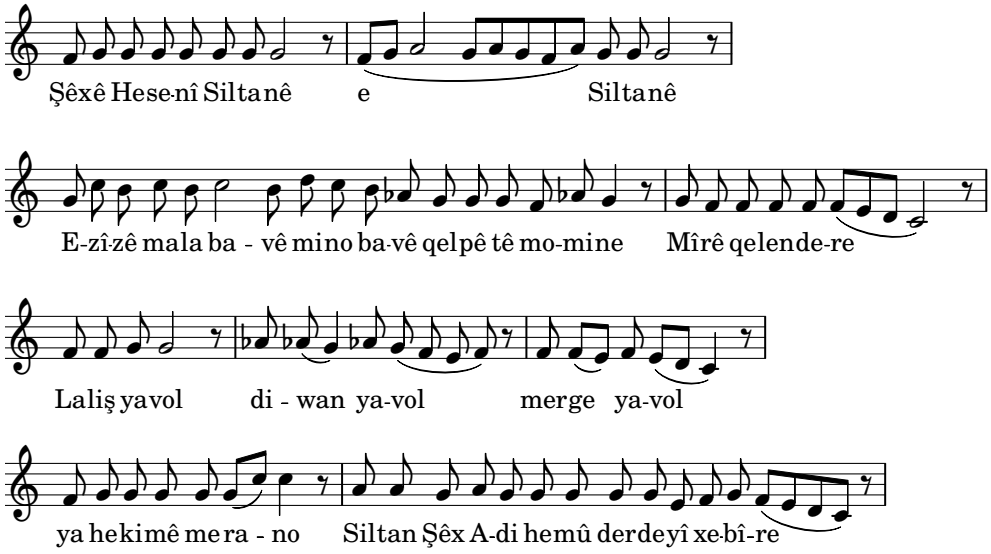
Musical transcription 3. Sheikh Şamilê Kereman, *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenê Sultan e*.



Musical transcription 4. Sheikh Kiniazê Tayar, *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenê Sultan e*.

In recording 5 the intervals are not the same and the melodic range is larger: more than one octave (Do-Re-Mi-Fa-Sol-La-Si-Do-Re). This scale gives the color *rast*. But in two melodic phrases the La becomes La*b,* which gives a color similar to *suznak* (or *suzinak*) in the *makam* theory (although to fit with *suznak*, the Mi should be uttered slightly lower). As a consequence, the authors prefer not to link this utterance with any specific path of *makam*.

The general melodic shape is quite similar to the other recordings: the first part (up to the refrain) follows a recitative fast tempo pattern, the refrain starts with an ascending path (Fa-Sol) and then follows a clear descending path up to Do, and the end of the stanza is again a fast tempo recitative pattern ending with a descending curve. It seems that there is a similar global shape, but the scale used is different.



Musical transcription 5. Sheikh Kino, *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenê Sultan e*.

Conclusion

In the five versions of *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e*, some parameters remain identical: the structure of the stanza and the use of a non-isochronic rhythm. Other parameters are not similar in all versions. The scale and melodic path are shared by four of the five versions. It seems to indicate a preferred (or at least more common) way to utter this *Qewl.* The existence of the fifth version, which is different (recording 5), raises interesting questions. Can we consider that the melodic line in performance 5 is a variant of the melodic line in performances 1-4? Is it possible that the performer mistakenly sings another *kubrî* (because his knowledge of *kubrîs* and their differences is not very good)? This hypothesis would be in line with the fact, mentioned earlier, that this utterance does not behave as if it was sung with a clear *makam* structure in mind. However, performance 5 was recorded in a ritual setting: to judge by the sounds of this performance, the deceased was taken to the cemetery and buried surrounded by people, and nobody complained. In the ritual performance, this utterance was efficacious! Then, would any melodic line fit if uttered by the right person (a religious specialist)? To answer these pragmatic questions, more ethnography is needed.

On a theoretical level, the five versions of *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e* tends to indicate that a *kubrî* is not defined by stable intervals between pitches. Should it be analyzed as an indication of the flexibility of a *kubrî?* Or should we reconsider our definition of *kubrî*? The understanding/definition of *kubrî* is probably related to a general musical shape including a combination of distinct patterns (recitative or more melodic/rhythmic), general melodic curves (ascending, descending), and rhythmic accents on some syllables. The analysis of another hymn —*Qewlê Kofa*—will help us in defining the concept of *kubrî* further.

2.2 "The Hymn of the Headdress"

Qewlê Kofa, "The Hymn of the Headdress," also called *Qewlê Kofiya*, *Qewlê Pîrê Libnana* ("The Hymn of Pîr Libnan"), or *Qewlê Dilê Min î bi Kovan e* ("The Hymn 'My Heart is Sad'"), is an example of the hymn that has different melodies (*kubrî*) depending on the ceremony during which it is recited. Often it is recited together with *Beyta Cindî* ("The Beyt of the Commoner"), as well as with *Sema'ya Şêxê Hesen* ("*Sema'* of Sheikh Hesen") and *Qewlê Babekrê Omera* ("The Hymn of Babekirê Omer"). When this hymn is recited with the *Sema'ya Şêxê Hesen* and *Qewlê Babekrê Omera*, it is performed with a much slower "melody," but when it is recited with *Beyta Cindî*, it has another *kubrî*, which is quicker (Omarkhali 2017:534-35). *Qewlê Kofa* is believed to have been composed by Dawidî bin Derman.

In variant A (recording 6 in the eCompanion) presented below, which is recited with a special recitation marked by the expert as "quick" (*bi lez*), the *refrain* is recited not after each stanza, but once after three stanzas. Variant B (recording 7) is recited with a so-called "heavy" (*giran*)[18] *kubrî*, which is quite slow and is recited with a refrain after every stanza.

Below is the table with the wording of the analyzed excerpt from both recitations by the same expert of the *Qewlê Kofa*.

N	Variant A: quick *kubrî*	Variant B: heavy *kubrî*	English translation
1	*Dilê minî bi kovan e* *Pîrê bi nav Libnan e* *Pîrê Libnano, giyano zeynê bi sura Şêxalê Şemsa ne.*	*Dilê minî bi kovan e* *Pîrê bi nav Libnan e* *Pîrê Libnano, giyano zeynê bi sura Şêxalê Şemsa ne.*	My heart is sad The Pîr is named Libnan O Pîr Libnan, dear one, adornment of the Mystery of Sheikh Alê Shemsa.
		Ay Pîrê way ez bim xulamo.	Hey Pîr, let me be your slave.
2	*Kofiya te ye bi qewî ye* *Lê cema bûn ewliya* *Pîrê Libnano giyano berê zeynê bi sura Şêxê Adî ye.*	*Kofiya te ye bi qewî ye* *Lê cema bûn ewliya* *Pîrê Libnano giyano berê zeynê bi sura Şêxê Adî ye.*	Your headdress (*kofî*) is strong The saints (*ewliya*) gathered around it O Pîr Libnan, dear one, adornment of the Mystery of Sheikh Adi.
		Ay Pîrê ez bim xulamo.	Hey Pîr, let me be your slave.
3	*Kofiya te ye cî da* *Lê cema dibûn mirîde* *Pîrê Libnano giyano zeynê bi sura Siltan Êzîd e.*	*Kofiya te ye cî da* *Lê cema dibûn mirîde* *Pîrê Libnano giyano zeynê bi sura Siltan Êzîd e.*	Your headdress (*kofî*) is in its place The Mirîds were gathering around it O Pîr Libnan, dear one, adornment of the Mystery of Sultan Ezid.
	Ay Pîrê ez bim xulamo.	*Ay Pîrê ez bim xulamo.*	Hey Pîr, let me be your slave.
4	*Kofiya te ye mezin e* *Lê cema bûn momine* *Pîrê Libnano, giyano zeynê bi sura Melik Şêxisine.*		Your headdress is great The believers gathered around it O Pîr Libnan, dear one, adornment of the Mystery of the angel Shekhisin.
5	*Kofiya te ye bû kêr* *Wa dinya bûye dukir* *Pîrê Libnano, giyano zeynê bi sura Şêxûbekir.*		Your headdress is pure It appeared in the world O Pîr Libnan, dear one, adornment of the Mystery of Sheikhubekir.

[18] *Giran* literally means "heavy" but can also mean "slow" and "serious," when it describes a context, a circumstance, or a form of speech. This use is not limited to *Qewls*. Some types of Kurdish dances, for example, *govend*, may also be defined as *giran*.

6	*Kofiya te bi nar e* *Lê cema bûn babzere* *Pîrê Libnano, giyano zeynê bi sura Şêşimsê Tetere.*		Your headdress is luminous Good people gathered around it O Pîr Libnan, dear one, adornment of the Mystery of Sheikh Shems the Tatar.
	Ay Pîrê ez bim xulamo.		Hey Pîr, let me be your slave.

Words

Qewlê Kofa also consists of different *sebeqs* ("stanzas"). As with *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e* the stanzas of this hymn are not metered. The textual content of the two variants of *Qewlê Kofa* is identical. This may be explained by the fact that the two recordings are uttered by the same person. Very few non-semantic syllables are used in these two utterances of *Qewlê Kofa*: *ay* (at the beginning of the refrain) in both, and *ay* within the refrain in the text recited with the "heavy" *kubrî*.

Structure of the Stanza and Rhythm

In these two utterances of *Qewlê Kofa* the structure varies. With the quick *kubrî* the structure is the following: first stanza—second stanza—third stanza—refrain, fourth stanza—fifth stanza—sixth stanza—refrain. Thus, the refrain (*Ay Pîrê ez bim xulamo*) comes after three stanzas. With the heavy *kubrî* the structure is as follows: first stanza—refrain—second stanza—refrain—third stanza—refrain, that is, the refrain comes between all stanzas.

The rhythm of this *Qewl* is here again "free" or non-isochronic. The length of each stanza varies greatly from one utterance to another: from nine seconds (quick *kubrî*, recording 6) to twenty-four seconds (heavy *kubrî*, recording 7).[19] The quick *kubrî* is uttered fast with few and short breaks. The heavy one is uttered much slower with longer breaks. In both utterances the rhythm of the prosody mainly follows a recitative pattern uttered on few joined pitches, with the exception of some syllables which are more ornamented. Non-semantic syllables are all ornamented.

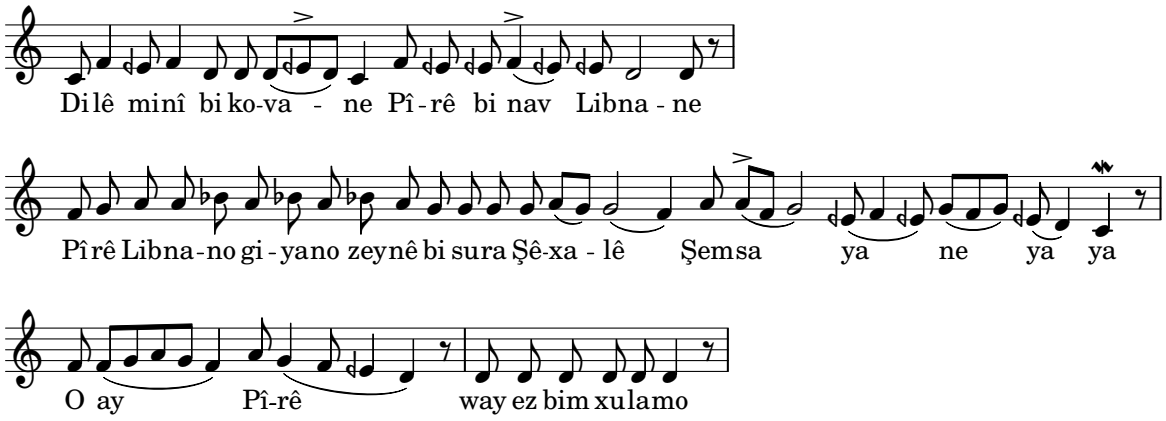
The breath groups (represented by measure bars in the musical transcriptions) also vary considerably. With the quick *kubrî* we count six breath groups up to the refrain (three stanzas plus the refrain). Breath groups do not follow the melodic/semantic lines. They do not cut melodic patterns or semantic lines, but they sometimes encompass more than one line/pattern. As a result, the breath does not always follow the structure of the stanza. For example, the last line of the first stanza (*Pîrê Libnano, giyano zeynê bi sura Şêxalê Şemsa ne*) and the beginning of the second stanza (*Kofiya te ye bi qewî ye*) are uttered within the same breath. With the heavy *kubrî*, breath groups are synchronized with melodic lines (and to a certain extent to semantic lines as well). We count four breath groups (for one stanza plus the refrain) uttered on the following words: (1) *Dilê minî bi kovan e, Pîrê bi nav Libnan e*; (2) *Pîrê Libnano, giyano, zeynê bi sura Şêxalê Şemsa ne*; (3) *Ay Pîrê*; (4) *way ez bim xulamo*. For the refrain, which is cut into two parts, the breath underlines the two different melodic models that constitute the refrain: a first one

[19] Measured on the first stanza without the refrain.

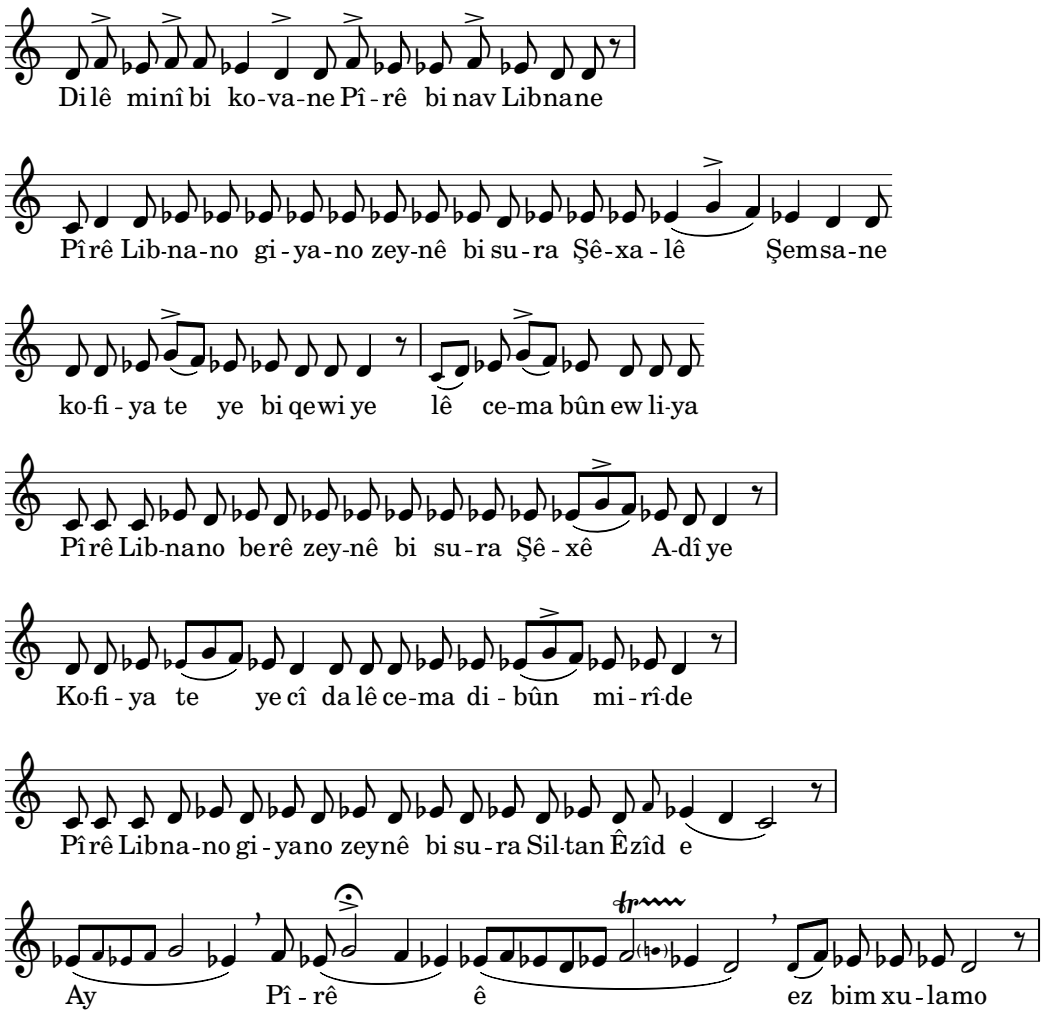
which is melodic and a second entirely recited on one note (Re). Breath groups 3 and 4 are introduced by a non-semantic syllable.

Scale and Melodic Patterns

Qewlê Kofa is uttered on stable pitches. Recording 6 has a melodic range of 3.5 tones (from Do to Sol). Recording 7 has a melodic range of five tones (Do to Si*b*). But for both recordings Do, the lowest note of the ambitus, appears very rarely and mainly in the last notes of the melodic phrases. The last note is in most melodic lines a Re. The Do appears then as a possible "addition" to the scale (as described with recording 3). We can consider that for recording 6, the scale in which the melody of the *Qewl* is uttered is from Re to Sol and for recording 7 from Re to Ti*b*.



Musical transcription 6. Merwane Xelîl, *Qewlê Kofa*, Quick *Kubrî*.



Musical transcription 7. Merwanê Xelîl, *Qewlê Kofa*, Heavy *Kubrî*.

In both versions of *Qewlê Kofa* the first part of the stanza (*Dilê minî bi kovan e / Pîrê bi nav Libnan e*), uttered within one breath group, is composed by two short melodic lines nearly identical on the lower part of the ambitus. It is followed by a recitative part up to the refrain (for the heavy *kubrî*) or up to the next stanza (for the quick *kubrî*). Both versions end this second part with a descending curve: on Do for the heavy *kubrî*, and on Re or Do for the quick *kubrî*. With the quick *kubrî* these two parts are repeated three times before the refrain, while with the heavy one, the refrain is added each time. The refrain can be divided in two parts in both versions: a first melodic part (on *Ay pîrê*) with melismas on few syllables, and a second part (on *ez bim xulamo*), which is recitative on few notes.

Recordings 6 and 7 share a common general melodic shape, but they are not uttered on the same melodic scale. In recording 7 the melodic patterns are very typical of the tetrachord *uşşak* (as described for recordings 1, 2, 3, 4 of *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e*). The *Qewl* is uttered within this tetrachord (Re-Mi♂-Fa-Sol). Two notes are added at the two ends of this tetrachord: low Do for the beginning and the end of melodic phrases, and high Si*b* as an ornament with La in a recitative pattern (line 2 in transcription 7). In recording 6 the intervals used are close to

recording 7, but the ambitus is shorter, and the Mi is always flat. We have, then, the following intervals (Do-)Re-Mi*b*-Fa-Sol. This scale is characteristic of tetrachord *kurdî*. The note Sol however is quite rare and uttered systematically in descending path, which makes the scale in use close in perception to the trichord Re-Mi*b*-Fa. *Uşşak* (recording 7) and *Kurdî* (recording 6) are modes considered within the same family of *makam*: their mood and behavior are very similar. Thus, the scale of recordings 6 and 7, although not similar, can be understood as close in their mood and behavior. This is an interesting result. One might have thought that the *kubrîs* are different because their "mood" is different. In fact, however, their melodic modes are all within the same "mood" (as in the *makam* theory).

Conclusion

The heavy *kubrî* and quick *kubrî* differ in many ways, namely, in their scale, speed, and breath groups. But they share a common melodic shape: first stanza uttered on two short melodic lines and on the lower part of the ambitus followed by a recitative part ending with a descending curve. In the local typology of vocal performances, quick and slow *kubrî* are considered as different: they constitute two separated *kubrîs*. Which parameter/s then differentiate two *kubrîs*? According to our analysis, it could be either the scale, the speed, or the repartition of breath groups, or all of these aspects. The fact that the two versions share a general melodic shape does not seem to be enough to make it the same *kubrî*.

3. Conclusion: Towards a More Accurate Understanding of a *Kubrî* Concept

Among the seven recordings analyzed, five followed the path of the tetrachord *uşşak* (recordings 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7), and one followed the path of *kurdî*, which is a related scale (recording 6). Recording 5 is the only one with a totally different behavior, close to *rast-suznak*. The analysis of *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e* shows that a *kubrî* is not defined by a stable succession of pitch intervals (as long as different melodies are considered as one *kubrî*). Our first hypothesis is that the definition of *kubrî* is probably more related to a general musical shape including a combination of distinct patterns (recitative or more melodic/rhythmic), general melodic curves (ascending, descending), and rhythmic accents on some syllables. The analysis of *Qewlê Kofa* shows that, on the other hand, a common general musical shape is not enough to "make" one *kubrî*. Indeed, the two *kubrîs* ("quick" and "heavy") of *Qewlê Kofa* share a general musical shape but are considered by Yezidis to be two different *kubrîs*.

Nûra Cewarî (2009) defined *Qewls* as *sitran*, which can be translated into English as a "song." The word *s(i)tran*, however, is not used by Yezidis in the religious discourse. In the Caucasus the word *s(i)tran* is used exclusively for songs with a regular pulsation (often accompanied with dance). In Iraq *s(i)tran* is used also for epic/historic/heroic songs, a repertoire composed of exclusively recitative patterns (Allison 2001). The terminology may vary from one region to another, but the vernacular typology of vocal performance is quite explicit. As described in Amy de la Bretèque's work, for nonreligious repertoires the performances are divided into two groups: repertoires to accompany dancing and repertoires to be listened to

quietly, such as epic/heroic songs or laments (Amy de la Bretèque 2012; Amy de la Bretèque et al. 2017). According to Cewarî (2009:208), the majority of the melodies of *Qewls* are close to those of the old traditional songs (*sitranên gelêrî yên kevin*). The acoustic shape of *Qewls* indeed shares common points with both nonreligious repertoires mentioned above: for example, they include recitative patterns (as in epic songs), as well as melodic parts (as in dance songs). The melodic parts, however, are not uttered in a regular tempo, which makes *Qewls* profoundly different from dance songs. Moreover, the recitative parts are more fixed than in epic/heroic narratives: the words vary less than in epic songs, and variations are added mainly on non-semantic syllables. Additionally, in the vernacular typology, *Qewls* are not compared or defined on the basis of this typology (dance songs vs. epic songs). In Yezidi discourse, religious repertoires constitute a separate category.

Yezidi religious music has hardly been explored until now. The present paper offers some initial conclusions and paves the way for further research. In order to understand the concept and uses of *kubrî* better, more ethnography is needed. More comparisons such as those in the present study may provide further insights. But this study already raises questions that can only be answered on the basis of more ethnography. For instance: when the performers of recordings 1-4 listen to performance 5, do they actually hear the same *kubrî*? How much of the *kubrî* typology is actually shared by the Yezidis in general (Sheikh, Pîr, Mirîd, in the Middle East, in the Caucasus, in the European diaspora, and so on)? Or how much of it is shared by the people whose performances are analyzed in the text? Also, ethnographic enquiry would seem to provide a direct way to understand what happened in "curious" performances like recording 5, or why the *kubrîs* of recordings 6 and 7 are said to differ. To answer these questions, ethnography is a key factor. Apart from this, a more exhaustive analysis of different *kubrîs* of each *Qewl* would give a better understanding of the relation between a *kubrî* and the text in which it is uttered, a more precise definition of *kubrî*, and would suggest new approaches for researching this repertoire, such as studying the emotional content of *kubrî* or the modes of memorization of melodies. Also, a study of the acoustic shape of a wider range of religious texts, including for example *Beyts*, *Qesides*, and so on, would help to gain a deeper understanding of the religious repertoires of the Yezidis and the musical characteristics of each category of religious repertoire.

Appendix: Musical Transcriptions

Our transcriptions are an attempt to write on a musical staff the first stanza of each recording that is analyzed in the article. We used the following conventions:

Durations. Since there is no stable pulse in these *Qewls*, in these transcriptions the durations are only approximate. We chose to use only three values: half note, quarter note, and eighth note. Half notes are used to transcribe notes with a really long length and stable pitch. Eighth notes are used to transcribe recitative fast speed syllables. Quarter notes are for the in-between length. Bars do not indicate measures but breath groups.

Pitch. We transposed the transcriptions in order to facilitate their comparison. We transcribed recording 1 in real pitch, and the following recordings were transposed according to the same tonal center as the first one. (Real pitch of recording 2 is 1.5 tones higher than

transcription, real pitch of recording 3 is 1.5 tones higher than transcription, recording 4 is uttered 2.5 tones higher than transcription, and recording 5 is voiced 0.5 tone higher than transcription). For *Qewlê Kofa* we transcribed recording 7 in real pitch, and the transcription of recording 6 is 2.5 tones lower than the real utterance.

Transcriptions and Recordings:

Transcription 1: *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e*. Recording 1 in the eCompanion
Transcription 2: *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e*. Recording 2 in the eCompanion
Transcription 3: *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e*. Recording 3 in the eCompanion
Transcription 4: *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e*. Recording 4 in the eCompanion
Transcription 5: *Qewlê Şêxê Hesenî Sultan e*. Recording 5 in the eCompanion
Transcription 6: *Qewlê Kofa*. Recording 6 in the eCompanion
Transcription 7: *Qewlê Kofa*. Recording 7 in the eCompanion

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The Religious Textual Heritage of the Yārsān (Ahl-e Haqq)

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The Yārsān

This paper will discuss the complex "textual" heritage of the Yārsān of western Iran and northern Iraq, which is mainly transmitted orally but has partly been made available in writing in recent decades. The Yārsān ("Group of Friends"), also known as Ahl-e Haqq ("People of Truth"), and in Iraq as Kāka'i ("Members of the Brotherhood"), are a religious minority whose members are mainly ethnic Kurds, although there is also a large Turkic-speaking group. Large communities live in western Iran, in the Guran[1] region to the west of Kermanshah, and in and around the town of Sahne to its northeast. Further groups live in Iranian Azerbaijan, Hamadan, Lorestan, Tehran, Karaj, Save, and Kelardasht. In northern Iraq Kāka'i communities are found in the regions of Erbil, Mosul, Kirkuk, Khaneqin, and Halabja. Some diaspora communities exist in Europe, notably in the Scandinavian countries. There are no reliable data on the numbers of the Yārsān; estimates vary from one to four million.

There is disagreement, both among the Yārsān themselves and among scholars, as to whether the Yārsān religion is essentially a form of Shia Islam with a strong admixture of pre-Islamic elements, or rather an independent religious tradition with some Shiite components. The striking similarities in social structure and mythology between Yarsanism and Yezidism, and to some extent the tradition of the Alevis of the Dersim region, play a role in these discussions (Kreyenbroek 1996).

A major schism in the Yārsān community is that between "modernists" and "traditionalists." The modernists follow a new interpretation of the religion proposed by Hājj Ne'matollāh Mokri Jeyhunābādi (1871-1920; see Membrado 2012) and his successors, Nur 'Ali Elāhi (1895-1974) and Dr. Behram Elahi (born 1931). The present paper is not concerned with this branch of Yarsanism, which is now an international organization run from Paris. Among the traditionalists in Iran there is a distinction between the highly conservative Guran group, which rejects all connections with Islam, and the tradition of Sahne, which accepts links with the Shia. The question of the possible adherence to Islam plays a much less central role among the communities in Northern Iraq.

[1] For geographical names, no diacritics will be used here.

Languages

Religious or "sacred" Yārsān texts exist in a number of languages. There is a considerable corpus of texts in a Turkic dialect closely akin to Azeri Turkish (Geranpayeh 2007), and some texts in Persian and in a form of Kurdish. However, the main body of "sacred" texts is in "Literary Gurani" (hereafter LG; see Kreyenbroek and Chaman Ara 2013), an idiom that was once a highly prestigious vehicle for the verbal art of the eastern Kurds. From a grammatical point of view, LG could be described as a simplified form of Gurani, a group of dialects that were once spoken in the Guran region, and by some communities in northern Iraq, including Kāka'is. In Iran these dialects are now dying out and, perhaps as a result, knowledge of LG also is rapidly declining in the Yārsān community. Texts are increasingly becoming objects of reverence rather than bearers of meaning. In Iraq, on the other hand, forms of Gurani are still spoken.

The Religious World of the Yārsān

Socially, the Yārsān distinguish between two hereditary "castes," the laity and the "priestly" Sayyeds. Most communities recognize twelve lineages or "families" (*khāndān*) of Sayyeds, who are thought to descend from figures who once played important roles in the history of the religion. All members of the community must have a "religious guide" (*Pir*), that is, a Sayyed who is responsible for their religious life. Such relations are hereditary; a Sayyed "inherits" his followers (*Morid*), and communities generally have ties with a particular *khāndān*.[2]

The principle of "recurrence" plays an important role in the religious world of the Yārsān. Their view of history is a cyclical one, which means that each "period" (*dowre*) of history essentially repeats the mythical period of Creation, and that the essence of individual beings can return in another form (*dunāduni*, "moving from form to form").

According to the Myth of Creation, God first created a Pearl that contained the elements of this world in embryonic form. He then created Seven Beings (*Haft Tan*), to whom he left the control of the world. God and the Seven then gathered in a first "meeting" (*jam*); a bull or deer appeared and was sacrificed, after which the Pearl burst and the world came into being. All later "periods" of history are marked by the "appearance" (*zohur*) of humans who incorporate the essence (*zāt*) of the divine beings. "Great" *dowres* are marked by the presence of incarnations of the Leader and all other members of the *Haft Tan.* Most Yārsān are agreed that the current *dowre* began with the appearance of Soltān Sahāk, perhaps in the fifteenth century CE.[3]

Such truths are part of a hidden "inner" (*bāten*) reality that underlies and informs the "outer" (*zāher*) existence we all experience. Hidden reality can partly be understood only by those who have studied the sacred poems and other religious lore, and by "seers" (*dideḍār*) who perceive aspects of the *bāten* world directly. Much of the religious knowledge of the Yārsān is

[2] The sub-group of Sayyeds who used to function as "Dalils" has now lost much of its relevance in Iran.

[3] In the Guran region many people believe that a new *dowre* has been initiated by Sayyed Brāke in the nineteenth century, but this view is rejected by other Yārsān.

concerned with knowledge about the *bāten* essence of certain figures and periods, and the *zāher* appearance of divine beings during various *dowres*. Furthermore, there is a corpus of myths, narratives that are known in some form to most members of the group and are referred to in an allusive manner in the religious hymns (see below).

The central ritual of the Yārsān is the *jam* ("meeting"),[4] in which a minimum of seven male Yārsān must participate, sitting in a circle which they may not leave whilst the ritual is going on. Others may follow the ritual standing outside the circle. A Sayyed must be present to supervise the ritual, and a *kalāmkhwān* ("singer of holy poems") leads the musical part of the performance. During the *jam*, a bowl of water and some food (for example, sweets or apples) are handed round the circle and ritually partaken of. After this, the ceremony largely consists of rhythmic music, singing, and clapping in an ever-increasing tempo, which towards the climax may induce an altered or ecstatic state of consciousness. Towards the end of the ceremony the music slows down again, and the Sayyed formally ends the ritual.

Where members of other religions pray or listen to sermons, the Yārsān sing. Religious knowledge and emotion are bound up with music in a striking manner. Music is indispensable to the creation of a ritual atmosphere, indicating and establishing the passage to a holy communal experience. It is a key element of the *jam* and many other performances of a religious or semi-religious nature. During the *jam* the music of the sacred instrument, the *tanbur* (a long-necked stringed instrument), accompanies the singing, where solos by the *kalam-khwān* alternate with communal singing. The *tanbur* is exclusively used to accompany songs that are felt to be "religious" (*haqqāni*). Texts of a "semi-religious" character (*majāni*) are accompanied by different instruments (see further below).

Texts and Classifications of the Oral Literature of the Yārsān

A key difficulty in describing the religious "literature" is that different speakers, and sometimes even a single speaker, may use different terms for the same concept, whilst texts that clearly have different functions may be spoken of as if belonging to the same category. Thus the functional difference between the relatively short poetic compositions that are normally sung during the *jam*, and the long poetic texts that represent the core of Yārsān religious knowledge, often appears to be ignored in Yārsān discourse and terminology. For the sake of clarity, we will here use terminology that is most often found in academic publications on the Yārsān, is used in the titles of several such texts, and is sometimes used by members of the group. Thus, a single "long poetic text" is here called a *kalām*, although that word can also be used for the shorter texts sung during the *jam*, which are here called *nazm.* For these long texts some Yārsān also use words like *daftar* (collection of poems) or *dowre* (period, see below), neither of which appears to be more apt to describe a single text than *kalām*.

The classification most often employed by Yārsān treats all compositions as if they were essentially songs. They are divided into three categories: wholly religious or *haqqāni* ("related to God"); semi-religious or *majāzi* ("virtual"); and non-religious or *majlesi* (for worldly

[4] On some of these concepts see also Hooshmandrad in this volume.

gatherings). This paper is not concerned with the latter category. The well-known Yārsān musician, Ali Akbar Moradi, using a slightly different terminology said:[5]

> There are three categories of songs, *kalām-e Perdiwari* [i.e., *haqqāni*],[6] *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:[7] it begins slowly and gradually gets livelier, 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 Perdiwari music. The instruments employed are typically the *kamānche* [a string instrument] and the *shamshāl* [a type of flute] . . . . 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.

The *Haqqāni* Texts

These mainly comprise the long "sacred" poetic texts (*kalām*), and the "songs" (*nazm*)[8] that are performed during the ritual. The *kalām*, in turn, are divided into "Perdiwari" and "non-Perdiwari" texts. The former are said to have existed at the time of Soltān Sahāk, and many are believed to have been composed during earlier "periods" of Yārsān history. The Perdiwari *kalāms* are closely linked to the *dowre* or historical period when they are thought to have been composed. This association is so strong that the term *dowre* can denote both a period of mythical history and a collection of poems, and many Yārsān have difficulty distinguishing between the two. Ali Akbar Moradi[9] defined the Perdiwari *kalāms* as "religious poetry that has existed for a long time and to which no additions or deletions were ever made." The Perdiwari *kalāms* are mostly concerned with the religious or mythical history of the community. Many refer to the experiences of holy figures during earlier "periods." On the other hand, a few other, well known *kalāms* are not explicitly connected with a particular *dowre*, but are concerned with some other aspect of religious knowledge.

The later, non-Perdiwari *kalāms* notably include the compositions of the so-called "Thirty-Six Poets" (*si-o shesh shā'er*), who are connected with the figure known as Sayyed

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[5] Conversation with the author, Göttingen, May 3, 2011.

[6] The reference appears to be to the *nazm*; see above.

[7] Note that this informant does not distinguish between the texts that are sung during a *jam* (*nazm*) and the long, more formal hymns (*kalām*).

[8] On the *nazm* see Hooshmandrad 2004:96-98. Sayyed Fereidoun Hosseini states that the *kalām*s may be recited in their entirety at certain festivals (see below). This seems to refer, however, to teaching sessions where the texts are recited and discussed, not to recitation during a *jam.*

[9] Conversation with the author, Göttingen, May 3, 2011.

Brāke, who lived in the village of Tutshami in the nineteenth century, and whom many Gurani Yārsān believe to have possessed the Divine Essence.

The main difference between the ancient and later groups of *kalāms* lies in language and style, the language of the later compositions being simpler and easier to understand. While the Perdiwari texts tend to refer to Yārsān sacred history and mythology, the later texts are more often concerned with religious emotions. Some Yārsān argue that the later *kalāms* show more Islamic influences. There is also a difference in prestige: the authority of the Perdiwari *kalāms* appears to be greater, and they are largely studied and recited by learned Yārsān, whereas the later texts are more widely known.

Majāzi Texts

These semi-religious works notably include texts and performances connected with the Iranian epic tradition. This genre, which found its best known expression in Abu'l Qāsem Ferdowsi's written Persian *Shāhnāme* (c. 1000 CE), also plays a considerable role in the oral and written literature of the eastern Kurds (Chaman Ara 2015). It is particularly prominent in Yārsān culture, because the ancient Iranian heroes are believed to have been incarnations of prominent divine Beings. Sayyed Fereidoun Hosseini said:[10]

> 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 [an Iranian epic hero] 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 or soul of Bābā Yādegār [an early Yārsān leader] . . . . 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*.

Religious Discourse and the *Kalāms*

The storylines that form the basis of Yārsān religious knowledge can be expressed in many forms, from bedtime stories, via references in Yārsān discourse and the *nazm* that are sung during the *jam*, to the formal, allusive poetry of the *kalāms*. Many discussions on religion, at least by Sayyeds and others who have studied the religion, are interspersed with quotations of lines or stanzas from the religious hymns.

Religious knowledge—both esoteric (*bāten*) and mundane (*zāher*)—plays an important

[10] Quotations from Sayyed Fereidoun Hosseini are translations of long discussions in Persian between Sayyed Fereidoun and the present writer from 2008 until the present time, in person or by telephone, in various places in Iran, Norway, and Germany. All translations from Persian texts and narratives in this paper are by the present writer.

role in the religious life of the community. It is said that certain Sayyeds and visionaries possess esoteric knowledge that may not be communicated to outsiders. Still, community discourse on religious topics suggests that knowledge of the various *dowres* and of the identity of the incarnations of the Seven Beings during each of these are part of the core of religious knowledge, as are several great Yārsān myths.

This knowledge is transmitted and used in a number of ways: it is taught informally by parents to children; it forms part of priestly learning, which is transmitted within the "lineage" to which a priest belongs (usually from father to son); the knowledge is constantly alluded to in *nazms* and *kalāms*, which are often quoted in religious discussions, suggesting these difficult and allusive texts have been memorized and pondered, at least by an intellectual elite. Like the Yezidi sacred texts, the *kalāms* can only be understood through the oral transmission of the myths and religious narratives they allude to.

It is interesting to note that, unlike the Yezidi tradition, where sacred poems are mainly used as liturgical texts, this is not the case with the Yārsān *kalāms*. Also, unlike the Yezidis (Kreyenbroek 1995:132-33), the Yārsān have no distinct social group whose task it is to memorize the sacred texts. That means that a sizable and complex body of texts have been preserved by a poor and partly illiterate community, not because the texts are needed for ritual purposes but for other reasons that were evidently considered to be of key importance. Memorizing these texts is generally regarded as the province of Sayyeds, though not all Sayyeds have an interest in the *kalāms*, and non-Sayyeds may also study these texts if they choose. The contents of the texts are discussed at religious gatherings. Sayyedeh Behnaz Hosseini states: "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" (2017:29). Sayyed Fereidoun Hosseini, describing the three days of fasting (Marnow) followed by the Feast of Khāwankār, says:

> 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 . . . .
>
> It was the custom in Gahwāre [a Yārsān village], 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 yogurt and rice. They mix this, cook it, pray over it, and offer it to the *Morids* ("followers") who come as guests. Everyone must bring his *niyāz* ("offering"). . . . The Sayyed gives him [the visitor] *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 11:00 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 *kalām*s with *tanbur* and all that, they [the Sayyeds] also offer explanations of the *kalāms*. They recite the *kalām*s—the Perdiwari *kalāms* and those of Nowruz—and explain them. They explain each one to the young ones, and then they explain the religious customs of the Yārsān. On those three nights,

> fortunately, people learn a great deal about the melodies[11] and about the texts. In this way, religious knowledge is transmitted orally.

Thus, while most Yārsān are familiar with the outlines of their great myths and of religious history because they heard these narratives in various forms, religious "experts" appear to function as channels through which the deeper religious knowledge that is contained in the *kalāms* is made accessible to the community at large.

Scripturalization

There is a widespread belief that the Yārsān have always had a sacred book but that it was lost from sight for a long time. This putative book was sometimes referred to as *Saranjām* ("Conclusion"). In the recent past, in the Guran area at least, it was possible to order a handwritten copy of a certain sacred text (rather than the entire collection) from members of a single family that was allowed to write such texts down (see below). Since this was expensive, relatively few such manuscripts existed. In any case, these manuscripts, it seems, were primarily regarded as venerable objects rather than as sources of information. The fact that such a tradition existed suggests that this was an old and established practice, but otherwise we do not know much about the written transmission of these texts. The Introduction to the *Daftar-e Diwān-e Gewre-ye Perdiwari* (see below) suggests that, for a long time, written copies of sacred texts were absent or very scarce. It is probably true to say, therefore, that for several centuries the community relied mainly on oral transmission.

Over the past thirty years, however, collections of sacred texts have been published either privately, intended for the sole use of the community, or by "mainstream" publishers, which gave access to the texts to a wider public including researchers.

An account of Yārsān 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* (Anonymous 2008:1):

> From the appearance of Soltān [Sahāk] till the end of the period of Bābā Yādegār, perhaps, as is laid down in this *Daftar*, the Ahl-e Ḥaqq had the *Daftar-e Ḥaqiqat* ("the manuscript of Truth") 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 Ḥaqq* [God] arranged for there to be the means and purveyors of teaching, and those who picked the grapes of Truth were successful in their endeavors, 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 . . . .

[11] I.e., presumably about the melody with which *nazms* are to be recited.

Sayyed Fereidoun Hosseini said:

> Since the Revolution things have become much better, there are lots of texts available now. Before the Revolution, there were no printed 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 specialized 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 one or two *darwish* ("pious men") 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, [when] my father wanted to have a copy of the *Ketāb-e Perdiwari* ("Book of Perdiwari Texts"), 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 limited. As it was very expensive and people were illiterate anyway, this [copying 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, since the Revolution, there are all these Xerox machines and things, so it is easier to make copies.

As was said earlier, a series of collections of *kalāms* has been published in the past decades. These are now widely available to Yārsān and non-Yārsān alike. It could be that, at some time in the future, the cumulative effect of these publications will be that a canon of key Yārsān texts will emerge, whilst no such well defined collection of sacred texts existed previously.

The first of the publications in question was Safizādeh 1996, which comprises a collection of texts here called *Kalām-e Khazāne* or *Saranjām*. The author (Safizādeh 1996:20) mentions the existence of several other texts not included in his work. That publication was followed by that of Hosseyni (2003), which claims to include the entire Perdiwari tradition: "The true *kalāms* of the Ahl-e Haqq, i.e. the *Diwān-e Gewre* (the Great Collection), the only written *Diwān* belonging to the period of Soltān Sahāk . . ." (Hosseyni 2003:3). Tāheri's (2007) *Saranjām* is the result of a long and painstaking comparison between different manuscripts; it comprises a greater number of texts than Hosseyni's work. The *Daftar-e Diwān-e Gewre-ye Perdiwari* (Anonymous 2008) and other collections of *kalām*s were produced locally and were evidently intended for a more restricted, Yārsān readership. Among traditional Yārsān Sayyeds, the latter work has a greater prestige than the others. These collections, although based upon roughly the same corpus of older manuscripts, constitute independent efforts to publish the sacred texts of the Yārsān in a structured manner. There are significant differences in the sequence of the texts, and some variations as to which texts are included. Nevertheless, the commonalities exceed the differences. Thus, a body of texts is now emerging upon whose authenticity most Yārsān seem to be agreed.

Outlook

The increased use of writing is inevitably leading to a transformation of the religious

textual tradition of the Yārsān to some extent. In essence, this is a process of "reification"—the change of status from an intangible text existing in the memory (or "heart") of some authoritative figures that can be only listened to uncritically (as neither time to deliberate while listening nor objects of comparison are available), to that of a tangible object that can be scrutinized at leisure and compared with other, similar texts. The differences between an oral tradition (where texts in a sense exist side by side, and the existence of variant forms is either ignored or taken for granted) and a book (which forces the author(s) to determine the proper sequence and the best, or "true" form of the texts), implies that those who will carry the tradition forward will require skills that traditional priests did not need to have, ideally including a theoretical understanding of the way oral traditions function. So far, however, the various publications of sacred texts that have appeared do not seem to have given rise to much debate, or indeed great interest in the community. Whilst among the Yezidis the newly written sacred texts are studied intensively by an intellectual elite, so as to reach a deeper and more objective understanding of their religion, at the time of writing the Yārsān do not appear to feel the need for such activities. Those who have the texts by heart and can quote from them in religious discussions do not need written versions, while the scrutiny of the *kalāms* as a basis for a new study of the religion is hampered by a range of factors. Besides a reluctance to discuss religious questions in public—often based on realistic fears as well as tradition—and the scarcity of suitable forums for religious debates,[12] another contributory factor may be the lack of central authority: individual communities tend to have their own formal or informal leaders, and there appears to be little or no interaction between these.

Another factor that may eventually inform the reception of the *kalāms*, at least in Iran, is the virtual loss of spoken forms of Gurani and the decline of the active command of the literary form of that language. Instead of texts that are recited at least in part because of the messages they contain, in the future *kalāms* may come to be perceived as texts that are recited for the inherent power of their mysterious, divinely inspired words.

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[12] A few websites exist (such as http://www.yaresan.com/ and http://www.yarsan.blogfa.com/), but these apparently aim to inform the reader on the Yārsān tradition rather than engaging in debates as to its teachings.

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Religious Musical Knowledge and Modes of Transmission among the Kurdish Ahl-e Haqq of Gurān[1]

Partow Hooshmandrad

Introduction

The great astronomer and social commentator Adam Frank says: "We are fundamentally storytellers . . . . Every society . . . has had a system of myths, a constellation of stories that provide a basic sense of meaning and context" (2018:8). So what is this constellation of stories for the Ahl-e Haqq (AH) people? How are these stories told, transmitted, embodied, and kept alive? What is the meaning and value of this perpetual transmission?

The Kurdish AH (also referred to as Yārsān/Yāresān)[2] have been a minority group for centuries. A collective biography and social memory that includes an intertwined compendium of

[1] I wish to express my gratitude to my family and loved ones for their continuous support and kindness; PD Dr. Khanna Omarkhali for her utter generosity and for creating the opportunity for this collective work; ā Sayyed Nasr al-Dīn Ḥaydarī (the esteemed *Pir* of the Gurān region) and the respected *kalām-khwāns*, *daftar-khwāns*, and *tanbūr* makers of Gurān; Sayyed Abbās Dāmanafshān for his valuable advice and unending support; Sayyed Vahid Dāmanafshān for always providing perceptive and beneficial feedback; Dr. Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval, President of California State University Fresno, for his unrelenting support, my mentor Professor Bonnie C. Wade, and my teacher forever Professor Benjamin Brinner; all my teachers who taught me generously about the AH tradition and Kurdish culture and language; Shayee Khanaka for her unending generosity and support; my faithful friends; the Alfred Hertz Traveling fellowship of UC Berkeley, the National Geographic Conservation Trust Fund, and the Kurdish National Congress; and Professor of Astronomy Wil van Breugel for reading the manuscript in detail and for his invaluable comments. Diacritical marks have only been used to indicate the pronunciation of a long "a" as in "ā" in this manuscript. Diacritics that have been used for words or names in other sources are kept in their original form, as in "Deschênes."

[2] "The AH, literally 'the People of the Truth,' or *Yārsān/Yāresān/Yārestān*, with plausible translations as 'the friends of Sultān,' 'the [divine] friend Sultān,' or 'the [divine] nation/territory of *Yāri* (comradeship, friendship, or service),' is a distinct faith with a rich cultural heritage and formalized practices with the belief that God or the idea of the divine, following the initial state of perfect nothingness or oneness, and after the eruption of the pre-existent 'pearl,' manifests itself in a cyclic manner through a sevenfold cluster referred to as the *Haftan* or *Haft-tan* (the Seven) . . . . The eventual objective in the AH religion is the instatement of divine righteousness, which is attained through the many hardships and trials that the various entities in each cycle have to go through . . . . A variety of original and borrowed phenomena, entities, ideas, and terminology are employed to exclusively express and represent their worldview . . . . In the sacred texts, which is an important source for the study of the AH religion, the original and borrowed ideas are presented through astronomical bodies; real and mythological human characters and animals; human body parts; characters in Iranian mythology and history; local agricultural tools, games, food items, locations, and housing types; musical instruments, musical practices, sounds, and dance; numbers and the letters of the alphabet; colors; flowers, trees, and fruits; fragrances, herbs, and spices; elements from various religious practices, and others. Borrowed ideas from other sources are sometimes altered to one degree or another

beliefs, principles, and practices has been critical to their social, psychological, and physical survival and welfare as a community. Practices among the AH of Gurān are meant to celebrate, retell, study, educate, rehearse, perform, entertain—albeit with reverence—preserve, and sustain religious knowledge.[3] The social memory and practices hold the community together in that members may declare the status of belonging to the community through a finite, comprehensible, and therefore inclusive and meaningful experience of their space of living, everyday social life, historical time, and the future. They make life meaningful for the AH and help the community survive the social pressures they have historically experienced. The individuals seem to share a primary common purpose, and that is to live a life of good deeds, so that they may be salvaged by the *Haftan* (the seven-fold cluster that represents the idea of the divine for the AH), and in particular by Dāwud (one of the *Haftan*).

Because the idea of the sacred is knitted into everyday life for the AH (see Hooshmandrad 2014), it is difficult to separate what might be considered religious knowledge and practices from the whole of AH life. Therefore I define religious knowledge for the AH as any idea, narrative, history, practice, canon of texts or musical repertoires, or stylized action, whether in daily activities and relationships or in sacred ritual settings, that may be transmitted orally or embodied.

Music plays an important role in transmitting and conserving religious knowledge and identity, and sustaining a way of life for the AH people of the Gurān region. Religious musical knowledge embraces the music, the texts, the rituals, the daily life of the AH, and grand ideas about the AH religion, identity, and community. The musical practice is in essence an embodiment of the whole narrative of who the AH people are. Through musical performance and the act of transmission the AH cultural space is kept alive.

In this article, aspects and modes of "orally embodied" transmission of religious musical and music-related knowledge in the Gurān tradition will be examined. I shall ask the following questions. What is being transmitted? How is religious musical knowledge transmitted, embodied, and sustained? Who/what are the repositories? What aids in the transmission of the musical repertoire? How might we comment on the relationship between music and text in its broadest sense in the AH tradition? What are the sanctioned variations and alterations in traditional transmission? Which changes and new modes of sustaining practices can we find? How are traditional teaching methods applied in new settings? Who is an expert now? What are the new forms of preservation? How are the teaching of *tanbur* (the sole musical instrument in the AH religious tradition) in formal music institutions and the staging of formal concerts affecting the practice? What is the impact of social media and contacts with the outside world? Finally, embodiment of grand ideas such as experiencing love and respect for the religion and AH's existence and prosperity through the transmission of practices will be cited.

By "religious/sacred music" in this article, I refer to a musical practice that is believed to

(losing their original function and meaning) in order to help best express AH's teachings. The objective in these cases is to express their belief system in multiple ways through the use of those concepts and entities" (Hooshmandrad 2014:48-49).

[3] For a list of interlinked tangible and intangible elements, expressions, and experiences that define the AH community and mark the connection of daily life and the sacred, see Hooshmandrad 2014:57-58. For a discussion of how a *liminal* state is maintained through representations of the ideas of preservation and authenticity, see 59-62.

have been revealed by "divine" entities. This is in contrast to the perceived status of sacred music in Western music history, which is generally defined as a type of music made for and performed in the church. Aside from the goals of understanding, cherishing, and preserving the cultural heritage of a group of human beings, this paper may contribute to the knowledge of the subject in comparative religious studies. My work is based on nineteen years of field research with the AH of the Gurān region.

"[O]rality is often considered a means of accessing collective memory or innate human truth. Whether orality manifests itself through an epic, a folktale, a lyric, a lament, a dirge, or a charm, the medium is innately connected with cultural knowledge" (MacNeil 2007:3). The concept of orality as used in this article comprises the people, the items, and the methods involved in the transmission process. The goal of transmission is to express and sustain the distinctiveness of the community and the experience of a "sense of place." In the Kurdish of the Gurān region, the phrase *sina wa sina* (lit. "chest to chest") is used for the oral transmission of knowledge. Even though the Kurdish word *sina* literally means chest, the word may also refer to the heart (as in "the core and soul of a person") as well as memory and mind. The phrase *sina wa sina* in my opinion describes the transmission method of the AH more accurately than the word "oral" unless we provide a fuller definition of "oral" based on AH practices. Here we may define "orality" as a concept comprising modes of transmission that lie far beyond merely spoken and sounded utterance. I define the term "oral" as including communication through the spoken word and other sounded utterances, as well as through the performance and learning of the body in the broadest sense of the phrase; as including individuals, community, objects, and social memory; as the result of the integration of the aural and the textual; and, finally, as including involvement in a multisensory, (older or more advanced) technologically-oriented cyber-world (MacNeil 2007:2).

Fig. 1. Ostād Tāher Yārwaysi, one of the most well known and highly respected *kalām-khwāns* and *daftar-khwāns* of the Gurān region (photo by Partow Hooshmandrad).

Traditional Aspects and Modes of Transmission of Musical Practice

"The . . . social body is the starting point of any musical activity" (Deschênes and Eguchi 2018:63). As a shared means of connection and communication, collective religious socio-musical knowledge in the AH tradition is a complex, multidimensional web of items, a collage of musical and extra-musical elements, ideas, and practices that are orally embodied. It is knowledge that the body learns, assimilates, and personalizes, and then performs without thinking (70).

There are different roles and levels of expertise for the embodiment and transmission of musical knowledge in the AH community, but all are somehow involved in this embodiment and transmission process. Communal adoration for the music is accessible to all through being surrounded by the representations of practices. On a micro level that is organically connected with the macro, the musical repertoire is represented by units called *nazm*. The *nazms* of the AH are structured musical entities that encapsulate ideas about the vocal and instrumental melodies, prescriptions for fitting the texts into the vocal renditions, rhythms, and clapping patterns, the abstract and concrete narratives associated with each *nazm*, the probable order of performance, the types of music that are performed in different contexts, settings, seating arrangements, etiquette for performance, and rules of interaction, the sanctity of the *tanbur*, religious beliefs, rituals, and devotional goals of music-making.

What is Being Transmitted?

In nineteen years of working with the Gurān AH community, I have gone through the process of "cultural proficiency" so as to be able to interact, understand, and appreciate life among the AH as intuitively as possible. This was made possible because of the generosity and support of the AH community. I rely on this acquired understanding of AH life to list the following as important segments of collective socio-cultural-musical knowledge that is perpetually transmitted, in and through musical practice, on different levels.[4] Transmission and embodiment occur in a fluid manner. Not all aspects are perfectly or wholly embodied by everyone at all times. The order in the following passage is not necessarily hierarchical in nature. It is meant to provide a non-linear cluster and collection of important items:

> — Believing in and respecting the worldview of the AH religion. The AH history. The difference between the Gurān region's practices and others. AH's relationship with the outside world. What to love and feel ecstatic for. Reverence towards the *Pir* (Elder of the community).
> — Music as expression of religious belief. The connection of musical performance and *jam* (the ritual of blessing of food). The importance of learning, knowing, and participating in the musical

[4] For a detailed discussion of various aspects of the AH musical practice, see Hooshmandrad 2019:15-19. For a discussion of the motivations for transmission and preservation efforts, see Hooshmandrad 2014.

practice directly or indirectly in order to feel a sense of solidarity with the *kalām-khwāns*[5] (experts in singing the *nazms* with the sacred poems of the AH) and/or the community. Knowing the *nazms* of the repertoire. Knowing the titles of *nazms* (even forgotten *nazms*).

— Learning the *daftars* (books of the AH sacred poems) by heart and understanding the meaning of the *daftars*. Knowing the spiritual power and meaning of the *daftars* and the *nazms*. Primary categorization of the *nazms* into group *haqiqi* (true/sacred) *nazms*, solo *haqiqi nazms*, and solo *majlesi/majāzi/bāstāni* (chamber/not "true," not sacred/ancient) *nazms*. The idea of relative tuning on the *tanbur* ("movable *do*" in Western music terminology).

— Knowing the two main tunings on the *tanbur* (top single string tuned a fourth below the first double strings, referred to as the "seven" tuning because it corresponds to the seventh fret on the neck; or a fifth below the first double strings, referred to as the "five" tuning because it corresponds to the fifth fret on the neck). The sanctity and symbolic presence of the *tanbur* as the manifestation of one of the *Haftan.* How and when to kiss/greet the *tanbur* and the meaning of this gesture. Where to put the *tanbur* in places of residence. Washing hands before playing the *tanbur*. Giving the *tanbur* to a person of high spiritual status first and then to one who is the most expert *tanbur* player in a gathering. The style of holding the *tanbur*.

— Knowing the instrumental renditions. Knowing the vocal renditions (with consideration of the ways the verses of the *daftar* and syllables of the text fit into the melody of the vocal rendition). Knowing the correct melodic phrasing. Knowing the difference between solo and group sections/cycles of the group *nazms*. Knowing the permanent texts attached to the group *nazms*.

— Awareness that the instrumental rendition is meaningless without performance or imagining/remembering the vocal. Knowing the way these vocal and instrumental renditions are tied together, and how the performance and transmission of one trigger the recollection of the other. Playing the *tanbur* with appropriate volume during singing (or not playing at all during singing, while extending the right hand to signify that the texts should only be sung).

— Knowing the general rhythmic structure. Knowing the clapping (*chap*) patterns for pertinent *nazms*. Knowing that the succession of *nazms* in performance is rhythmic—from slower to faster *nazms*—not modal, even though *kalām-khwāns* are aware of modal connections (for example "Shāh Khwashini" and one of the "Hay Giyān" *nazms* are based on the same pitch selection, and this is often expressed in casual conversations). Knowing the sanctioned variations. Not improvising. Knowing the meanings and narratives connected with each *nazm*, contextualizing the *nazm* historically or cosmologically.

— Awareness of local proverbs teaching about *tanbur* performance culture. Systems of checks and balances (and evaluation of who is "better" or truer to the communally embodied/perceived/imagined original).

— Knowledge about tying knots of frets and changing strings of the *tanbur*. Knowledge of *tanbur* construction (among *tanbur* makers and musicians). Forms of interaction and stylized actions. Knowledge of the etiquette and seating arrangements for *kalām* sessions,[6] walking processions,

[5] Literally "singers of *kalām*." A *kalām* session refers to a session that includes the chanting of selections from the sacred portion of the musical repertoire with the AH sacred poems (*daftar*). *Kalām* may also refer to the body of the sacred poems of the AH.

[6] A session of group chanting where participants are seated in one or two circles.

formal social observances such as mourning ceremonies, and casual gatherings. Knowing the difference between a *kalām-khwān* (leader of the *kalām* session) and *kalām-wa-sinay* ("receivers of the *kalām*"). Knowledge about the correct way to be a lead *kalām-khwān* and how to be part of the group singers as *kalām-wa-sinayl*.

— Importance of the moral character of a *tanbur* player and *kalām-khwān*. Knowing the life stories of *tanbur* players and *kalām-khwāns* (as a way of keeping these stories alive). The option of several people singing together as *kalām* leaders (consulting among themselves about the lines of poetry and the succession of *nazms* as they perform).

— The difference between a *kalām* session without and with a *niyāz jam* ritual (which would require the use of head cover and belt as symbols of humility, spiritual maturity, and readiness to be of service; and singing the texts connected with *niyāz*).

— The structure of walking processions in comparison to seated *kalām* sessions (seating arrangements in one or two circles in comparison to prescribed patterns of movement in walking processions).

— Awareness of the option of several people taking turns in singing the solo *nazms* in casual settings (each following their chosen verse). Knowledge of available written and audiovisually recorded information (more recent).

Fig. 2. Kākā-Berār Ostād's *tanbur* class in the early 2000s after a *niyāz jam* session. He is one of the most well known and highly respected *tanbur* teachers, *kalām-khwāns*, and *daftar-khwāns* of the region (photo by Partow Hooshmandrad).

How Is Religious Musical Knowledge Transmitted, Embodied, and Sustained? Who/What Are the Repositories?

Without a doubt there is an intention and a serious determination for transmitting and preserving socio-musical knowledge in the AH community. Traditional methods and processes are very much alive. In previous writings on the AH, I have demonstrated that the ideas of preservation and debates about authenticity lead to decisions about what should be transmitted (Hooshmandrad 2014:61). Here I shall further discuss *how* religious musical knowledge is transmitted, embodied, and sustained.

As noted previously, I use the term "embodied orality" following Deschênes and Eguchi's (2018) designation to refer to the complex web of tangible or intangible items, processes, experiences, and ideas that help transmit religious musical knowledge in the AH community. This is beyond mimetic transmission of isolated elements. I use "embodied orality" because knowledge among the AH is transmitted in more ways than just verbalization and abstraction of knowledge. As Staal appositely states in his discussion of the Vedas, "the meaning of the mantra is not the meaning of those words," and "[r]itual is a physical activity of the body but not only of the mouth and ears" (2008:193).

The tangible and figurative venues for transmission and the sustaining of musical knowledge exist within a range of entities, concepts, and scenarios. These include the following:

> — Expert *kalām-khwāns* and *tanbur* players. Members of the community as participants with varied levels of knowledge and proficiency.
> — Social and physical spaces where learning occur through osmosis by being surrounded with aspects of the music in daily life. Seated *kalām* sessions. Walking processions. Lifecycle performances such as mourning ceremonies. Casual performances.
> — *Tanbur* classes led by experts (ranging from formal to more causal). Focused or casual conversations about the practices.
> — Written instructions and analyses in prose or verse form. Written narratives based on oral discussions. Audio and video recordings of interviews with experts, and conventional as well as pedagogical performances. Lists and categories of *nazms* based on oral knowledge. Stories and conversations about *kalām-khwāns* and comparisons.
> — Historical and present spaces where the competency of various experts is assessed.

Of course, musical and textual experts and keepers of the tradition (*kalām-khwāns* and *daftar-khwāns*) are the most important repositories of socio-musical knowledge. One receives the designation *kalām-khwān* or *daftar-khwān* only if she/he knows most or all of the *nazms* and many verses of the sacred poems by heart. Additionally, learning and embodiment on an expert level is achieved when one is not only subliminally aware of all the melodic, rhythmic, textual, and contextual aspects of the presentation, but when one performs "spontaneously even under stressful situations" (Deschênes and Eguchi 2018:68). These experts must also have high moral characters since their presence has tremendous power over the cultural education of community. With a well defined past and a cautious stance towards changes in the future, musical and textual experts continue to exchange ideas and refine their knowledge while they train their children and

keep the tradition alive. These children internalize and make the transmitted knowledge their own through "osmosis" and active participation in ritual and casual musical assemblies. Their progress is constantly assessed before they receive the status of an expert as an adult. *Kalām-khwāns* and *daftar-khwāns* also transmit musical knowledge to other members of the community indirectly through their performances or directly through individual and group instruction.

For several decades, recordings have been used as a tool for transmission. These attempts began with cassette-tape recordings of a number *kalām-khwāns* and *tanbur* players, including Sayyed Wali Hosseini, Khālu/Lālu Badr (Bayar) Khān Zardayi, Kāki Allāh-Morād Hamidiniyā, Kāki Wali Mirzāyi, Darwish Ali Gawra Jubi (Juyi), Sayyed Khayāl and Sayyed Nāsser Yādegāri, Darwish Ali-Mir and Darwish Jahāngir Darwishi, Mirzā Said-Ali Kafāshiyan, and many others. Most noteworthy of these recordings in terms of preservation efforts are those of Sayyed Wali Hosseini, which were intentionally created for teaching and transmission purposes. Other recordings were made to preserve the heritage of performance practice. The recordings mentioned were not produced methodically and were partially based on what the *kalām-khwāns* remembered at the time. They were also mostly recorded when these *kalām-khwāns* were older. This might have influenced melodic and textual memory and technique. Nevertheless, we are fortunate to have these archival cassette recordings, because they allow us to compare the playing and singing styles of different *kalām-khwāns* in terms of quality, presence, length of performance for each *nazm*, use of particular verses for different *nazms*, and explanations and narratives attached to the *nazms*. Some of these recordings were made at the request of ā Sayyed Nasr al-Din Haydari, the current *Pir* of the Gurān region, and some were done by *tanbur* enthusiasts of the region who are now respected *kalām-khwāns* themselves (such as Kākā-Berār Ostād, one of the greatest current bearers of the AH musical repertoire).

Another example of recordings and written resources rooted in the oral tradition is the author's recording and musical transcription of the repertoire of the *nazms* in the early 2000s (Hooshmandrad 2004). These transcriptions, created in part for preservation and transmission purposes, were recently utilized in the production of a video album of the entire *nazm* repertoire (Ostād and Hooshmandrad 2019). During the production process (2016-18), my teacher Kākā-Berār Ostād and I were able to have fruitful discussions about minute variations in the performance of some of the *nazms* in comparison to earlier recordings from 2000. One such discussion was about a certain *nazm* which was performed with a different rhythmic structure in 2016 and in 2000. We arrived at this conclusion after we examined the earlier recordings and transcriptions. This led to a review of our earlier recordings and transcriptions, recordings of old masters, and consultations with living masters of the region for confirmation and a faithful transmission of the *nazm*.

Transmission is not always directly and readily apparent. In fact, in the AH community transmission usually occurs in an encapsulated form. The encapsulated transmissions and experiences include elements that are meaningful in a multidimensional collective. For example, the mere intention to stage a *kalām* session, or the mere presence of items such as the *tanbur*, directly or indirectly evoke and induce a chain of thoughts, memories, histories, emotions, beliefs, agreements, and "truths," which define the experience of a *kalām* session with the eventual performance goal of purification and the hope for manifestation of Soltān (the absolute idea of the divine in AH religion).

Fig. 3. Ostād Tāher Yārwaysi (right) and Sayyed Abbās Dāmanafshān (left), two of the most well known and highly respected *kalām-khwāns* and *daftar-khwāns* of the region (photo by Partow Hooshmandrad).

Fig. 4. A *niyāz jam* performed by Sayyed Abbās Dāmanafshān (left) and Sayyed Iraj Eftekhāri (right) (photo by Partow Hooshmandrad).

Factors in the Transmission of Musical Repertoire

Several factors play a role in the transmission of musical repertoire. First, an absolute love and affection for the AH religion, and the musical repertoire and the *tanbur* as sacred entities, is evident in everyday interactions. This is reinforced by ample presence of verses and ideas about the sanctity and importance of sound and music for the AH religion in the *daftars*. It is true that only a limited number of individuals were/are experts, that it is not a religious obligation for everyone to be an expert, and that the musical practice is comprehended and appreciated on various levels. Nevertheless, everyone is expected to participate in valuing the music and the texts, for example through having *tanburs* and *daftars* as religious icons in their homes, and through listening to the music and the recitation of the texts. Second, the use of sacred texts in the vocal rendition of the *nazms* adds to the veneration of the musical practice and therefore safeguarding it. Third, it is a finite repertoire with well defined and recognized variations. The utter joy and surprise expressed in a *kalām* session observed by the author in 2001, when a single new pitch was used in the singing of the group *nazm* "Sultān-e Dina," is an indication that spontaneous changes are clearly noticed, although they are very rare. Fourth, the structure and nature of the AH music, for example, the existence of solo and group cycles in the group *nazms*, necessitates the coming together of community members, which sustains transmission. The effect of technology on the transmission process will be discussed later in this contribution.

Text and Music

Even though the majority of the texts used by the AH have been written down, hand-copied, and printed, they have been orally narrated and transmitted. They are mostly in a unique form of Hawrāmi Kurdish with some exceptions that are in Persian, Sorāni Kurdish, and Turkish. The texts that are used in the performance of the *nazms* and the direct or indirect transmission of information on the *nazms* include the following categories (Hooshmandrad 2014:53):

> — Books of the sacred poems of Gurān normally having a combination of twenty-syllable and fifteen-syllable lines for the verses, with several exceptions that have sixteen-syllable lines—as in the case of *Daftar-e Il Baygi Jāf*—and varied syllabic structures as in the case of *Daftar-e Perdiwari* (all of which are believed to be of divine origin).
> — Permanent texts of group *nazms* with a variety of syllabic structures used in a similar manner as a refrain (believed to be of divine origin):
>
> — Selected collections of verses of the *daftars* by *kalām-khwāns*;
> — Non-sacred Kurdish poems in Hawrāmi that may be used in the vocal rendition of non-sacred solo *nazms*;
> — Fixed syllables, words, and phrases used in between segments of the vocal rendition of solo *nazms*;
> — Spoken prayers/invocations used in the rituals;
> — Non-sacred instructive texts in prose or verse form.

— Audio recordings of instructive discussions with regional experts (these may be regarded as a sort of "oral" commentary, to illuminate the meaning of various aspects of the AH religion).

— Oral narratives connected with the *nazms* (these may also be regarded as a sort of "oral" text).

Even though performances of the *nazms* occur on the two levels of instrumental and vocal, they are like the warp and woof of fabric and inseparable. One is either accompanied by the other or at least signals the other rendition. Does the instrumental dominate or the vocal? There is "a balance between the two modes allowing for moments of each. . . ." (Marcus and Reynolds 1994-95:5), since the texts used in singing, the melodies of the vocal and instrumental renditions in the *haqiqi nazms*, and the *tanbur* are all sacred and equally revered.

Vocal renditions of the *nazms* are not only transmitted in terms of their melody, but also in terms of how the text is matched with the melody. The endorsed versions of the vocal rendition of the *nazms* have fixed or semi-fixed text-melody charting that indicates what syllable is to be sung with what pitch and for how many counts. This is especially true of the group *nazms*. In this way, the use of text in the vocal rendition of a *nazm* helps with remembering and transmitting the melody. My view is that the somewhat elastic but at the same time clearly prescribed text-melody relationship in the Gurān repertoire acts as a type of rhythmic "notation," in that the design and matching of the syllables of text to the pitches of the melody will help the performer recall the rhythmic organization of musical phrases. In turn, musical performance is a venue for transmitting and memorizing the texts through the prescribed use of the texts in the vocal rendition of the *nazms*. Also, the mere singing of the sacred poems in the vocal rendition of the *nazms* helps with the transmission and preservation of the *daftars* and thus the teachings and stories of the AH religion. This is not surprising, as other studies have also found that "music plays an important role in oral transmission of poetry" (Deschênes and Eguchi 2018:58). The preservation of the texts through music has an added devotional benefit. The sacred poems are written in a highly coded manner and are very difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, the mere uttering of the poems is thought to bring blessings to the individual or the group involved, much like the chanting[7] of the Indian Vedas where the Vedic Sanskrit texts might not be immediately comprehensible to all but the mere chanting of them is thought to bring blessings to performers.

Transmission of musical knowledge and the texts are related in a number of other ways also. The *daftars* provide and transmit much musical information. There are many examples in the *daftars* pointing to the importance of sound and music and teachings about the sanctity of the *tanbur* and the musical practice. There are references to the sound of the *tanbur* being connected with one of the manifestations of Sultān (Anonymous n.d.:31) and direct depictions of a *kalām* session in the "divine realm" (Sorāni n.d.:28-29).

Selected collections of texts for musical performance are another example of connections between the text and the transmission of musical knowledge. One such example is the unpublished collection of selected verses from a number of *daftars* by Kāki Aziz Panāhi, which is based on decades of *kalām* sessions and used regularly by the *kalām-khwāns* of Gahwārah and beyond.

[7] "Chant" in this article generically stands for the singing of devotional texts.

Variations and Alterations in Traditional Transmission

In his contemplation on the idea of community, Burt Feintuch reminds us that "integrity of social relations does not rule out difference" (2001:51). Traditional methods and processes of transmission occur in an assortment of modes and may only be discussed within a spectrum of many possibilities. Such is the case with the AH's transmission of musical knowledge. It is important to note that traditional methods of transmission are not rigid and allow for flexibility within the boundaries designated through consensus. Melodic and rhythmic variations and some level of elasticity in the vocal and instrumental renditions of the *nazms* are important components of the traditional performance practice. At the same time, there are limits to the extent of variation out of fear of losing the essence of the *nazms.* No improvisation is allowed. Groups of *kalām-khwāns* come to agreement about fixity and elasticity in the performance of *nazms*. This knowledge is orally transmitted. Exceptions to the limits are tolerated in some cases. One such tolerated deviation is the case of Latif Manhuyi, who sometimes combines the Gurān *nazms* with other Kurdish musics and Persian *dastgāh* music, at times even changing the scalar structure of *nazms* (as in Manhuyi's performance of the *nazm* "Tana-Miri" in archival recordings). His mixing of the traditional repertoire and surrounding musical practices and experimentation with improvisation is generally overlooked, perhaps because the community enjoys his musical presence, and all know that this is an exception to the rules. He is not believed to have malicious intentions in his approach. At the end, however, only the *Pirs* are allowed to make a substantial change within traditional practices that would be recognized by the community. Two such cases include the addition of the *nazms* "Sar-Tarz" and "Duwāla" composed consecutively by ā Sayyed Berāka Haydari and ā Sayyed Rostam Haydari, two of the most revered *Pirs* of the Gurān region.

As mentioned above, melodic and rhythmic variations and some level of elasticity in the vocal and instrumental renditions of the *nazms* are important components of performance practice. Intended or unintended variations may be observed within an assortment of pretexts and a complex spectrum. These factors and elements include variability in narration of the repertoire by different experts/teachers and lineages (and even the same teacher in different time periods); proficiency of the bearers and their level of expertise; recordings of various *kalām-khwāns* with different performance styles; the order of performance of the *nazms*; habitually more frequent performance of some *nazms* than others; causing some *nazms* to be forgotten; elasticity and variations in melody and rhythm; choice of verses for singing; acceptance of minute melodic and rhythmic variety as long as the text is sung correctly; ornamentation in vocal and instrumental renditions, whether or not there is a vocal *wach* (*wach* literally means "child" and refers to the secondary part in the melody of a *nazm*; this is different from the concept of *gusheh* in Iranian *dastgāh* music) for a *nazm* (such as the case of Sayyed Nāsser Yādegāri, who would sing a *wach* for the solo *nazm* "Gharibi"); talent to repeat and remember detailed performances as heard before; memory erosion; the existence of an assortment of dialects in the Gurān, Qalkhāni, and Sanjābi regions, leading to different pronunciations of the texts; pupil population; and transmission spaces including ritual, pedagogical, social, and casual performances.

A comparison between the author's field recordings of the *nazms* performed by Kākā-Berār Ostād in the year 2000 and the 2019 production of a formal album for public distribution titled *Nazms of Gurān: A Pedagogical Presentation* (Ostād and Hooshmandrad 2019, mentioned

previously in this paper), demonstrates slight patterns of change in the transmission of the *nazms*. For example, several *nazms* have been removed and several others added to Ostād's repertoire in the 2019 album. The added *nazms* included "Yār Dāwud Haqq, Version 2," "Chelāna Mastan," and "Khwājā-y Gholāmān Giyān." The removed *nazms* included "Yārān Wa Bāten" and "Sāqi Nāma." Moreover, some of the *nazms* that were performed slightly differently in the 2019 video recording included minute changes in text-melody relationship, for example in the group *nazm* "Hu Hu Yār, Version 2." According to Ostād, he had made these revisions after a thorough review of the recordings of past masters of the region and consultation with the elders of the community in order to preserve the most consistently documented oral and recorded form of the *nazms* (for comparative purposes, see Hooshmandrad 2004 and 2019).

Another way to think about variety in AH music is that there are two main approaches towards the repertoire of *nazms* when considering traditional transmission modes: one for teaching purposes and possibly for scholarly analysis, and the other informed by performance practice in ritual and casual settings, where teaching is not a direct concern. In teaching, each *kalām-khwān* has their own "correct" variant of listing and clustering of the *nazms*, even though the three categories (1) group *haqiqi nazms*, (2) solo *haqiqi nazms*, and (3) solo *majlesi/majāzi/bāstāni nazms*, are consistent among all *kalām-khwāns*. For example, in the *Nazms of Gurān: A Pedagogical Presentation* video album, the listing of group *nazms* is based on Kākā-Berār Ostād's pedagogical method, which focuses partially on the progression of *nazms* from the "easiest" to the more "difficult" *nazms*, on the basis of years of training a large number of *tanbur* players. Other *kalām-khwāns*, such as Ostād Tāher Yārwaysi or Sayyed Taymour Mehrābi, cluster the *nazms* slightly differently in teaching. To point to a variant listing of the *nazms*, the author has grouped and classified the *nazms* considering a variety of factors including textual and musical analysis, as well as performance practice (Hooshmandrad 2004). Teaching settings in newly developed music academies, and how these new venues have caused transformations in the listing of *nazms*, will be discussed in the section titled "Changes and Sustaining Practices" later in this article. (It is important to note though that the boundaries between "traditional" and "changed" methods and newly arrived and invented points in the process of transformation are not always clear.) In contrast, the succession of *nazms* in actual performance is relatively fixed among most *kalām-khwāns* with some possible variations. Certain patterns for grouping the *nazms* have been consistently transmitted to the present.

As mentioned previously, different *kalām-khwāns* have created different sequences in the listing of the *nazms*. They also sometimes disagree on the most correct version of a *nazm*. However, there is constant discussion about whose version is the most "correct/authentic" one, and revisiting old recordings and manuscripts and adjusting to new findings is absolutely part of the "traditional transmission" process. This is part of a serious system of checks and balances to transmit the material as carefully as possible. The famous grading sessions organized and led by ā Sayyed Shams al-Din Haydari (one of the previous *Pirs* of the Gurān region), where he would test and evaluate the knowledge of the *kalām-khwāns* and *tanbur* players on the musical repertoire, are a good example of these checks and balances (see Hooshmandrad 2014:60). On the other extreme of these endorsed limits and constraints there is the general idea that as long as the texts of the *daftar* are uttered correctly, the *nazm* is correct. However, more than anything these types of statements signify the importance and weight of the *daftars*, whilst at the same

time they are meant to include everyone in devotional practices. In fact, the author's observation in the last nineteen years has been that the melodies are astonishingly kept intact and performances are extremely consistent.

Finally, in the performance of the *nazms* with regular rhythm (regular units or repeated cycles of beats), it does not always matter if the exact regular units of beats are performed equally every time, although they are perceived as such in the minds of *kalām-khwāns*. All that needs to happen in performance is that the performers should revert to the regular cycles of beats by adjusting the claps.

Changes and Sustaining Practices

New methods and modes in the transmission of musical knowledge are undeniably evident in a close examination and observation of the last two decades of the AH communities. However, the "traditional" transmission processes discussed above are also very much alive or at least deeply woven into new methods. These parallel activities and transmission methods have helped keep the traditional performance practice alive. Changes in the way the tradition is handed down do not always lead to changes in the performance practice. They are seen as new tools to sustain traditional performances. Thus, while changes in venues and modes of transmission may be observed, they seem to be deeply attached to and ingrained in the old practices. If I may, the old practices and methods of transmission may be imagined as a sea with ever-existing ships on it, and the new methods and practices are only newly added boats floating on the same sea.

That said, traditional teaching in new settings, the movement and migration of AH individuals to different parts of the country, teaching *tanbur* music in formal music academies, performance of *tanbur* at national and international concerts and festivals, and the use of social media have led to some changes. On one hand, these changes have certainly created new opportunities for experiencing *tanbur* music by a larger population of enthusiasts. The consequence of this popular spread however (usually sprouting from positive intentions) has been at times an uneven transmission, newly generated compositions and techniques, and a not always effective blending with other music cultures, admittedly mostly due to a sincere and healthy desire for collaborative endeavors, social interaction, and social recognition through staged concerts.

Traditional Teaching Methods in New Settings

The more people have moved away from the region for social and economic opportunities and chosen homes in new places, where they no longer live in the fixed space of a village or town within the Gurān, Qalkhāni, and Sanjābi districts, the more the tradition of learning by naturally being exposed to the musical practice is gone. Therefore, new formal classes have developed, which are led by a number of *kalām-khwāns* and their traditionally trained children in- and outside of the region, with the intention of safeguarding musical

knowledge. Interestingly, some individuals in the new generation of teachers from *kalām-khwān* families also pursue a formal education in music (one such case is Rezā Gholāmi). By contrast, traditional *kalām-khwāns* and teachers were (and some still are) attached to traditional ways of life such as farming and herding or crafts, with some owning small businesses and some involved in the education sector.

In these newly formed classes AH and sometimes non-AH *tanbur* enthusiasts participate. The focus on vocal and instrumental renditions of the *nazms* stays intact. The teaching of AH sacred poems also remains extremely important, although some teachers might not see fit to share the sacred poems with non-initiates. The only differences between traditional and new contexts are that the geographical setting might be outside the region, new methods of transmission, such as audio and video recordings, have been added to the teaching process, and most classes do not create an opportunity for combining the performance of music with the *jam*, the ritual of blessing the food, which is at the core of AH religious practices.

While all efforts are made by these respected *kalām-khwāns* to transmit the tradition as they have received it (even though some level of variation in the performance of the *nazms* has existed even in conventional contexts), the nature of these newly formed classes that are geographically removed from the traditional space of transmission has led to some changes. In these formal classes prescriptive standards have been created for groups of students for the sake of consistency and group rehearsals. Additionally, the choice of *daftars* for singing is more limited in comparison to the past due to the presence of mixed groups of students. Finally, the idea of methodical practice is rather new and in fact a positive result of these new classes.

In order to avoid the loss of subtle variations that are part of the traditional mode of performance of the repertoire, in his *tanbur* classes, Kākā-Berār Ostād has expertly and perceptively created two versions for each *nazm* that he designates as the "basic" and the "advanced" levels. Ostād's advanced rendition includes the sanctioned variations and much more ornamentation.

Traditional ways of transmission still persist on the group and individual level in the region. Sayyed Abbās Dāmanafshān and his family are an excellent example of sustaining the practices in the traditional manner and location. He has maintained a custom of gathering his grandchildren to practice the solo *nazms* and the refrains of the group *nazms*, and the clapping patterns for clapped *nazms*. Sayyed Abbās's eldest son is also a great *tanbur* player and *kālām-khwān*, who knows many verses of the *daftar* with the traditional interpretations and always looks for new ways to keep the tradition alive through teaching and performing.

Fig. 5. Kākā-Berār Ostād's classes outside of the region in recent years (photo courtesy of Kākā-Berār Ostād).

Who is an Expert Now?

In the past *kalām-khwāns* would have been (and still are in traditional settings) the most valued and recognized bearers of the tradition. They would have gone through years of assessment by older experts and the elders of the community, and they knew many verses of the *daftar* by heart. The famous sessions of ā Sayyed Shams al-Din Haydari where all *kalām-khwāns* would gather to be tested on their knowledge of the musical repertoire have already been mentioned. Nowadays, even though experts in traditional settings still strive for the old standards and discuss the qualifications of various musicians, the old system of checks and balances is being transformed.

Although women have always been deeply involved in all devotional practices and in the transmission of religious knowledge, in the past only a few of them were methodically trained in reciting the *daftars* or the *nazms* and considered "experts." These women from past generations, who were mostly considered experts in the *daftars*, included Sayyed Homā Haydari, Minā Khānom, Sayyed Nosrat Dāneshwar, and others. Currently, compared to previous generations, there is a very large number of women who seriously study the *daftars* and the *nazms*. Pegāh Salimi is one example, who is the shining star in the new generation of female *tanbur* players.

New Preservation Efforts

The variety of new AH efforts for preservation are connected with and imbedded in

conservation modes of the past. They "[recapture] a past most of the participants know only through stories" (Feintuch 2001:154) and attempt to reimagine and construct the idea of the AH community by whatever accessible means possible.

Some archival recordings of the past closely correspond to the performance practice of the *nazms* where multiple cycles of a *nazm* are performed with the use of at least one, and sometimes several verses of the *daftar*. Such is the case in the performance of the *nazm* "Sar-Tarz" by Sayyed Farhād Yādegāri. However, in most archival recordings of the *nazms* of Gurān, the *kalām-khwān* has performed the *nazms* in a shorter manner than usual so as to transmit the essence of many *nazms* in the brief time available for a recording session on cassette tapes. Even though this compressed mode of transmission has certainly influenced teaching methods where teachers offer shorter performances of the *nazms* as models, it has nonetheless helped with ideas about playing and singing styles, phrasing, rhythm, use of text, narratives attached to *nazms*, and most importantly, with the way each *kalām-khwān* has abstracted the idea of a *nazm* in his mind. I argue that there is a similarity between these short recordings and serious attempts at notating the *nazms* (based on orally transmitted information). It is true that transcription and use of notation by nature freeze a conceptual understanding of a *nazm* and narrow the range of possible variations, thus altering the experience of the oral tradition. However, if the goal of transcription is clear as to its use for reference purposes, then it may be considered a new but useful tool for those who no longer have the privilege of growing up in the AH community. This is especially true if the skeletal notation is accompanied by oral demonstrations of a live teacher.[8]

Currently, formally published audio and video recordings and informal filming of performances on phones have become commonplace for AH music enthusiasts. The previously mentioned 2019 video album *Nazms of Gurān: A Pedagogical Presentation* is an example of these new endeavors. The authors spent months deliberating about the order of *nazms*, selection of verses, the number of times each instrumental and vocal cycle should be performed for a pedagogical presentation, how to compensate for the fact that these performances are not presented in a "real" performance space and group singers are not present to "receive" the *kalām* for group *nazms*, and many other particulars, before deciding on a unified and structured performance that might be useful for the AH community and other enthusiasts alike. Kākā-Berār Ostād also reviewed practically all archival recordings and consulted older experts and elders of the community due to a sense of responsibility for performing and preserving the most "authentic" version of the repertoire.

A surge of publications on AH music culture is also emerging in the form of articles, books, websites attempting to upload all available material from the past and present, and various channels of social media such as Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. All these new "transmission" modes are rooted in orally transmitted and embodied knowledge.

Teaching of *Tanbur* in Formal Music Institutions and Staged Concerts

Another interesting change is the teaching of *tanbur* in music schools and institutions

[8] Please see the author's transcription of the *nazm* repertoire in Hooshmandrad 2004.

where other types of music, such as the Iranian *dastgāh*, are taught. Here we have among the young generation of *tanbur* players (and teachers) individuals who are part of the AH community, but who might not be living in the traditional geographical spaces where they would be regularly exposed to the performance of rituals. They also might not be active participants in AH *kalām* sessions. These individuals identify as musicians and performers while taking pride in their AH identity and heritage. As a result of their work at these institutions they are not only exposed to musical genres such as Iranian *dastgāh* music, but they also welcome dialogue and collaborative efforts with non-AH *tanbur* musicians. Another change that must be noted as a result of this new transcultural space of transmission is that the focus on instrumental music is increasingly favored in comparison to the practice of combining vocal and instrumental renditions. The emphasis on instrumental music at these formal institutions also means the study of AH sacred texts is not included, or only partially included, in the training, unless the teacher is keen to inform and train her/his students on these texts. A notable and positive change that has resulted from formal classes at music academies is that there are a number of female *tanbur* players who act as teachers, whereas in traditional settings the active presence of female teachers would not often have been seen (even though women have always been serious and essential participants in the transmission of musical knowledge in the Gurān region). Finally, in traditional settings normally no exchange of money would take place for teaching. In contrast, the nature of these new formal classes at music academies necessitates regular tuition fees.[9]

A desire for variety, detachment from the purely devotional nature of the AH music, exposure to and interaction with other music cultures at these music academies, more emphasis on instrumental music, and new spaces of performance such as concerts and festivals, have caused additional changes for some. For example, in comparison to traditional principles, improvisation and compositions are becoming more customary among new *tanbur* performers, who are mostly learning a variable version of the repertoire with a focus on the instrumental, and detached from the vocal rendition of the *nazms*, texts, and ritual/religious associations. Therefore the finite and fixed nature of the AH repertoire in terms of strict limitations on variation of the melodies and rhythms of the *nazms* is changing for these populations. Some *nazms* have even been reconstructed by some in the new generation of *tanbur* players to appeal to a larger audience. Moreover, other instruments besides the *tanbur* have been added in ensemble performances that mix AH music with other musics. These manifestations are more evident in public performances and commercial recordings. Finally, concerts and festivals have created a new standard for "preparing" for performances, whereas in ritual settings, performances occur spontaneously, without prior practice and many times for purely ritual purposes.

Social Media and Contact with the Outside World

The popularity of multiple platforms of social media as well as contacts and collaborations with the outside world have created new opportunities for learning and the exchange of ideas. These platforms are utilized for the preservation and transmission of

[9] For reflections on *tanbur* construction and economical considerations see Hooshmandrad 2015a.

traditional musical knowledge. Nowadays the younger generation of *tanbur* players are using social media to discuss, share, and critique different performances and performance styles, as they examine extra-musical aspects such as history of the AH, rituals, and meaning behind the *nazms*. At the same time, without the boundaries and defined expectations of traditional transmission spaces, these platforms have also created prospects for interactions and collaborative efforts with the non-AH community.

The Future and Concluding Remarks

"Traditional" processes and methods of transmission are very much alive among the AH of Gurān, even though they might take new forms of expression. These conventional processes continue to safeguard and sustain the culture and therefore the community. Nevertheless, new modes of transmission including the use of tools such as social media, the focus on the instrumental rendition of the *nazms* in music academies, staged concerts, and collaboration with musicians from other music cultures in Iran, are definitely causing transformations, and in some cases a only partial transmission of the material and the AH ethos. The new transmission methods, material, and aspirations may be compared to a collage or a quilt that is made with "thousands" of pieces of fabric, taking ideas from the patterns of the original interwoven entities, and creating and adding new ones. At the end however, these "quilts," even as transformed variations, continue to be transmitted in the forms and representations that are reminiscent of the past, though not quite the same. Yet, these variant quilts or collages are not here for decoration; they are very beautiful, colorful, endeared, and living entities that continue to represent the AH identity and community and sustain it as it moves forward and bears new fruit. Whatever the changes in the AH's process of transmitting knowledge, the communal embodiment of lofty ideas, such as having love and respect for the religion and the very existence of the AH, remains a constant. Attempts to save the AH musical culture in its original form—from preserving the *nazms* to the idea of the *tanbur* as a sacred instrument—or partial, mixed, and changed portrayals, "embodies the virtues" (Feintuch 2001:151) of the AH community. It is important to note that the AH community is very much alive, with strong roots to help it survive for centuries. Therefore, even changes are continuously and deeply tested and assessed and still rooted in "old ways" of being. Regardless of the real or imagined time period and place of living, a metaphorical home is readily brought to existence through performing and transmitting the music. Performance and transmission of musical knowledge is a "performance of the belief" (Hooshmandrad 2004), and thus it transmits and sustains the religion. As mentioned previously, communal embodiment of lofty ideas such as experiencing love and respect for the AH religion and the community's existence and prosperity, are also transmitted through the practices. Self-inquiry and contemplation of the past, present, and future as well as interaction with the outside world regenerate, sustain, and transform practices and the community all at once.

Finally, I wish to affirm that my main goal in writing or speaking about the AH is to share what I have learned about my fellow global citizens, and that my focus is first and foremost on the wellbeing of these communities. In fact, writing this article itself is an act of conservation

and transmission, helping to sustain and empower the AH community through valuing and presenting the process. One may think of it as applied ethnomusicology, or simply acting as a human being connected with others. I hope to do more in the future as I learn from the younger generation of the AH community.

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"Let Me Tell You How it All Began"— A Creation Story Told by Nesimi Kılagöz from Dersim[1]

Erdal Gezik

The circumstances when we met were far from ideal. It was in 2009, in a suburban Istanbul hospital while I was leaning against the wall, that I became aware of his presence on the other side of the corridor. For a while we stared at one another, and then he patted the chair next to him. Without hesitation I accepted his invitation. Under the curious looks of the people around us, we started a cautious conversation. I asked him about the man-headed cane he was holding in his hand. He wanted to know where I was from. I told him. With a pleasant look, he said: "So, it is the homeland that brought us together."

For years I have been interested in the Alevi creation myth. Due to the absence of any written material or relevant research, I began to record scattered bits and pieces still recalled by elderly people. It was especially the very popular introductory part that led me to ask questions. God is said to create angels and later to want to test them on their awareness of His existence. Thus Gabriel, who is to become God's favorite angel, is asked: "Who am I?" Gabriel, not knowing that there is any other being, is unable to answer the question and is punished for this by Him. In order to find the answer, he must fly away in the endless universe. The questioning and punishment are repeated three times, and only the last time, when Gabriel is almost exhausted, he hears a voice whispering to him how to answer: "You are superior, I am subordinate." Precisely this happy ending did not fit with the overall image of a God that I had learned from Alevi narratives; a God who is not directly involved in the events and definitely does not punish. On the other hand, why was Gabriel, the first angel to be named, characterized by such a shortcoming? This and other questions kept my belief alive that the story we knew might have some missing pieces.

The physical appearance of the man on the other side of the corridor left me with no doubt that he was from Dersim (Tunceli). A white-bearded, elderly face of a type that one could encounter in each village of the region until recently. Indeed, Nesimi Kılagöz was from Dersim or, to be exact, from the village of Loto, which belongs to Mazgirt, a southeastern district of the province. After his wife passed away a few years ago, he was no longer able to live by himself in his village during the harsh winters. Therefore he had moved to Istanbul, where most of his family members and other villagers from Loto had migrated since the eighties of the last century.

[1] I am grateful to Prof. Philip Kreyenbroek for the editing support he has given to me.

Although he was surrounded by many coreligionists in this city, there really was no one who was interested in his stories, which he called "our true history." The few people of his generation with whom he had shared these stories had passed away in the eighties. For the educated, younger members of the family the grandfather's memories had little appeal, as they were more engaged with political activities and discussions. Also in the many Alevi foundations and "religious houses" in Istanbul, which Kılagöz did visit from time to time, he could not find anyone who was interested. The activists of the so-called "Alevi awakening" in Turkey, a new urban phenomenon since the eighties, were more focused on written and legitimate historiography than his stories, which for most of them were of no more than superficial interest.

That attitude was partly determined by the overall effect of the modernization the community has been subjected to for the last decades (Shankland 2003:133-85); another reason for their lack of interest was the official Turkish historiography about the Alevis, which was deeply influenced by nationalist ideas. According to this narrative, the Alevis were descendants of Central Asian Turcoman tribes that migrated to Asia Minor during the second half of the Middle Ages. These tribes were accompanied by religious leaders who represented a sort of folk Islam or belonged to popular mystical orders that were active in the late Middle Ages. (At that stage, a Sunni-Shi'a division did not exist. Shi'ite tendencies would become dominant only after 1450 CE, through Safavid propaganda.)

Clearly such a view of history would make it preferable to ignore someone like Kılagöz who, from an ethnic perspective, did not fit into the categories postulated there, and whose religious worldview was difficult to classify as either Sunni, Shi'ite, or Sufi.

Dervish Gewr (Dewrêş Gewr)

Nesimi Kılagöz belongs to one of the *Sayyid* (that is, hereditary religious leader) families of the Kurdish Alevi community. The Dewêş Gewran family, as they are known, are called after their ancestor, Dewrêş Gewr, who, according to the oral tradition of the family, belonged to the circle of two other famous Sayyids (Baba Mansûr and Kureş) of his time. The name Gewr, which means "grey" in Kurdish, is a reference to a miraculous deed of his. To prove his saintliness, he was thrown into a burning stove by the order of Seljuq Sultan Allā'uddin Kayqubād (d. 1237). Later on, when the stove was opened, first a white bird flew away and then they saw Dervish Gewr coming out unharmed and totally covered with ashes.

Within the religious organization of the tribes and Sayyids, the Dewrêş Gewr family represents the hereditary position of *rayber/rêber* or *delîl* ("guide"), a rank below *pîr* ("master") and *pîrê pîran* or *murshid* ("grandmaster"). Although Kılagöz himself did not actually perform the religious tasks incumbent on a *rayber*, he had always been attracted to religious matters since his youth. As a young man he regularly accompanied the well known Sayyid Veyis of Baba Mansur on the yearly visits he made to his *talibs* ("disciples, followers") and in the secret meetings he had with other Sayyids. In these meetings Kılagöz witnessed lively discussions on religious matters, and he listened with great interest. A second source of his knowledge, mentioned by him explicitly, was his brother Xerîb. Blind from birth, in winter Xerîb used to travel from village to village in Dersim, and on returning he would share all the stories he

collected with Nesimi. Apart from Kurmanji, Xerîb also spoke Kirmanjki (Zazaki), and that made it possible for him to communicate with everyone in Dersim. The language of the main part of the Dervish Gewran, including Nesimi Kılagöz, is Kurmanji. However, there are also small Zazaki-speaking branches of the lineage.

When Xerîb passed away in 1987, Nesimi Kılagöz knew that he was left with the stories they had shared so enthusiastically. Since then, he frequently asked people around him to write these down so that they would not be forgotten, but he soon noticed the general lack of interest in such an undertaking. In his view, therefore, the eventual fulfillment of his wish was due to a miraculous act of “Dewrêş Baba,” the name he had given to his staff. During our second meeting, I asked him why he didn’t interrogate me about my past and family, like all the elderly people in this region did when they talked with a stranger. He told me about a dream he had before our encounter in the hospital. In his dream someone had wrapped up his notebooks and books in a white cloth and handed them over to him. The next morning, Nesimi Kılagöz told his children that someone would come soon and fulfill his wish. Therefore, from his point of view, our meeting in that hospital in Istanbul was not an accident. However, the fact that the place was a hospital, rather than a remote village, did actually say, at least for me, more about the general state of the community itself than about Nesimi Kılagöz.

Gabriel and Melekî Tawûs (“The Peacock Angel”), Who Is Who?

Despite his advanced age and the physical restrictions of someone over ninety years, Kılagöz had an admirable memory and a dedication to share his knowledge. During the many meetings I had with him later, our conversations took four to five hours each time. It was clear that he had waited for a long time to tell his stories. During my first visit, when I asked him a general question on religion, he said: “Let me tell you how it all began, then. There you will find all your answers.”

Kılagöz subdivides “our true history” into three categories: the stories in the first category were those that could be shared with everyone. For the second, I had to “have the sword Zulfiqar in my hands” before publishing it, because of the risk that these polemical stories could anger others and lead to conflicts.[2] The last category was only for those who were able to “keep the secret.” Accordingly, I will here only deal with the first category, which will be divided into four chapters. The first focuses on the story of angel Gabriel and Melekî Tawûs (“the Peacock Angel”) and narrates how this evolved into the creation of the first man, Adam. The second chapter consists of a narrative about Adam and Eve, their expulsion from heaven, the birth of Naci (also associated with the figure Seth), and the arrival of the female angel Naciye. It is believed that the Alevis belong to the progeny of Naci (“the saved one”) and Naciye, a group that is also designated as “the seventy-third faction.” The third chapter includes a list of the prophets,

[2] Zulfiqar is the name of the sword of Imam Ali, the cousin of Prophet Mohammed, to whom the Alevis trace back their name and their creed. According to the Alevis, this sword is also equivalent to justice.

which interestingly differs from the names given in the *Buyruks* (Ayyıldız 2002:222-33).[3] The last chapter contains a collection of allegorical comments on the creation, the core elements of the Alevi religion, and additional, short stories.

One of the threads of this cosmogony includes the importance of the number two, or, as Kılagöz designates it, "looking for one's second-self." In his view the number two is the basic feature of their creed. All beings in the universe come into existence only when they meet their second self. God exists, but the knowledge of His existence is only realized by introducing angel Gabriel. When, later on, Gabriel's act unwillingly opens the door to the error of Melekî Tawûs, he cannot see himself anymore as the proper second and punishes himself by leaving the celestial world to look for his second inside the universe. Melekî Tawûs, on the other hand, is expelled by water after polluting the celestial realm and begins his own journey to look for his second. After long travels, Gabriel sees in the depth of the sea a shining vault, and within it he meets Muhammed and Ali. As an answer to Gabriel's search, they decided together to create the first man, called *Shah* ("King"), who became the brother of Gabriel.

The expression "looking for one's second self" is used in references to the celestial world; in worldly matters, Kılagöz prefers to use *brayê axiretî* or *musahib* ("brother of the hereafter") as a term for it. The concept of the "brotherhood of the hereafter" is one of the main pillars of the religion and social life. The brotherhood is a bond between two non-related and unmarried young men for the rest of their lives. It is consecrated by the *pîr* and demands absolute solidarity between the two men and later between their families. The keeping of the commitments of this brotherhood is seen as the main proof of how far the "brothers" have committed themselves to the conditions of the religion. Therefore, it is believed that they also play the role of witness at the judgment of the soul in the hereafter. A prayer for the brotherhood ritual, recited by Kılagöz in Kurmanji, shows its dimension:

> Wan navên Xadêyî Xadeyê xwelîyê Xwelîyê avê. Avê jî genimê
> Genimê cane. Can jî dayê, Bav e, lawik e, gizîk e. Him zaye, him mirine.
> Him meyman, him minç. Him can, him ceset. Him li vê dinê, him li wî dine.
> Him cennet, him cehenem. Herkes ber xwe bi xwe tev hev ra dî.
>
> These are the names of God. God of the earth. Earth of the water. Water is [i.e., produces] wheat.
> The wheat of life. And life [belongs to] the mother. The Father, son, and daughter. Both of birth and death.
> Both guest and enemies. Both living and dead. Both in this world and in the other world.
> Both heaven and hell. Each saw only the one belonging to him.

[3] For the Alevis, *Buyruk* is one of the few books which contain and represent their doctrines. The earliest copies of *Buyruks* were in the possession of Alevis from the middle of the sixteenth century. The books are the result of attempts to connect the Anatolian Alevis to the Safavids. The content has a significantly Shi'i and Sufi character. The central role is reserved, respectively, for Muhammed, Alī, the Imāms, and Shāhs, as the grand masters of the religion. Although the Safavids adopted Twelver Shi'ism after establishing their state in Iran, they continued to propagate Kizilbashism in Anatolia by means of *Buyruks*.

The importance of the number two also has another important outcome: Nesimi Kılagöz rejects the holy Trinity (Allah, Muhammed, Ali), which is accepted by many as a fundamental tradition of the Alevis and Bektashis (Birge 1937:132-34). He claims there is a holy Quaternity: God, Gabriel, Muhammed, and Ali. This was the way of thinking that he was taught by his religious masters in Dersim.

The creation story told by Kılagöz contains many interesting features, both as a narrative and in its details. It is beyond the scope of this article, however, to offer a detailed analysis of all these aspects (on some of which see Gezik 2016). Therefore, I will only discuss three important aspects of Kılagöz's creation story. The first is that this narration should be set against the background of the cosmogonies (and beliefs) of other Alevi communities in Anatolia. At least since the sixteenth century, there have been written sources describing the Shi'ite and *Ghulāt* ("exaggerators; those who exaggerate the status of Ali") tendencies in the Alevi and Bektashi worldviews (cf. Yıldırım 2018:189-93). The creation story published here clearly differs from those of other communities; particularly important is Chapter I, where Gabriel and Melekî Tawûs play a prominent role.[4]

Secondly, this cosmogony should also be compared to the Yezidi and Ahl-e Ḥaqq traditions (Asatrian and Arakelova 2003; van Bruinessen 2014). Here it is relevant to offer a brief discussion of the position of Melekî Tawûs in these traditions. This angel is especially known for its prominent role in the Yezidi religion (Kreyenbroek 1995:245-48). However, in the story of Nesimi Kılagöz, we find a very different account of Melekî Tawûs, which has not been recorded till now. As the head of 366 angels, he holds a remarkable position that he will lose, not because of refusing to prostrate before Adam as some Muslims believe, but because of polluting the celestial realm. Because of this, it is the water that will punish him and not God. The fact that the Peacock Angel is led to commit an error by an act of the Angel Gabriel brings us to the third point.

Who is Gabriel? Why is he the angel who is associated with the first doubt, and not Melekî Tawûs? It should be added that in the Dersim tradition, Gabriel is more than the revealer of His word or a mediator between the Almighty and His servants. He is seen as the representative of the *aqil* ("intellect"). He is the patron angel of the *raybers*. He is the "brother of the hereafter" of Adam (and thus of mankind), and of the four basic elements, he represents the earth. Nevertheless, these attributes do not prevent him from doubting, not the existence of God, but rather the perfection (!) of a building that was ordered by God. Kılagöz designates Gabriel's attitude as *guman*, a term that interestingly has a double meaning in Kurdish: both "doubt" and "belief." This complexity brings us, on the one hand, to the cosmogonies of Late Antiquity, and, in connection with these, to the discussions of philosophers and sects in the Middle East after the eighth century CE, especially those of the Isma'ilis (Halm 1978). On the other hand, it is also strongly reminiscent of ancient western Iranian traditions, notably Zurvanism (on Zurvan's doubt see Zaehner 1972:54-79).

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[4] The cosmogony of other Alevi groups in Turkey is mainly based on two narratives. In the first one, God initially manifested Himself in the light of Mohammed-Ali. The rest was created from these two lights. Because of this view, most Alevis designate the two as Mohammed-Ali, as one entity, and not as Mohammed and Ali. In the second narrative Ali is represented as the direct manifestation of God. In the story of Kılagöz, on the other hand, their manifestation comes after Gabriel and Melekî Tawus.

Kılagöz's cosmogony begins in the celestial realm and turns into a mundane event when Gabriel's wing catches fire after being blown on by God. The wing turned to ash, and this was thrown into the water. The water dried up and became earth. According to Kılagöz, the first piece of earth that appeared, and where Gabriel came down, was the village of Loto, where Kılagöz was born. In remembrance of this, the family is given the name of Gewr and the position of *rayber*, a responsibility that they have taken over from Gabriel. Now, the story may be seen as completed.

The translation of the knowledge that Kılagöz has entrusted to me has involved more than looking for the right word. In one of our meetings he said: "There are two kinds of writing: the one is invisible and is written with white letters, and the other with black. We have had our education in the invisible alphabet, but nowadays nobody can read this. Therefore, someone has to write [our knowledge] in black." Here, with his permission, I have made a careful attempt to pass on his knowledge in "black letters," and for the first time in its entirety in English.

Definitely, the recording of Kılagöz's narratives demonstrates the contribution oral history can have to the study of the religions in the Middle East, and underlines the need for more field research so that other missing parts of this and other stories might be discovered.

Chapter I

When the earth was water and the sky was smoke,
God said: "I exist."
When existence came into being, Gabriel—peace be upon him—greeted.
To him God said: "If I tell you about a building, would you be able to construct it?"
Gabriel: "O God, you give me a task, how could I not do it (?)"
God: "Construct a building in such a way that it does not contain the tiniest deficiency.
When you have completed it, hand over the key to me."

Gabriel came, and he called Michael, he called Israfil, he called Azrael,
and said: "I will give you a task. Carry it out, and then hand it over to me,
but you shall make no deficiency in it."

They said, "Yes, yes," and accepted the task.
They constructed a beautiful building.
They brought the key to Gabriel who could not find any deficiency.
They made a very perfect building.
Suddenly, he thought to himself and started to doubt:
"What if this building turns out to have a flaw when I show it to God."
Then he said: "On condition that three of you will be present, prepare a feast for this building. Call all the 366 angels wherever they are, let them enjoy the feast. It is allowed to eat and drink, but there is one condition: No one shall move and all have to look at that building."

When Gabriel ordered this, the order was carried out.
None spoke a word for twenty-four hours, all stayed where they were.
Only the head of the angels, Melekî Tawûs stood up.
Gabriel asked: “What is it?”
Melekî Tawûs: “My ablution is nullified.”[5]
Gabriel: “What to do now?”
Melekî Tawûs: “I will perform my ablution.”
Then Gabriel acting as if he would not know the consequences of his act, said: “Go!”

Melekî Tawûs came out among the angels and went to the fountain.
There was a watering can near the fountain.
When he took the can in his hands, the can began to speak: “What are you doing?”
Melekî Tawûs said: “My ablution is broken.”
The can: “So what?”
Melekî Tawûs: “I’ll perform ablution.”
The can said: “Perform it then.”
He grabbed the can and headed towards the water.
When he poured the water, the water began to speak, and they talked about the same matter. He did what he did a few steps away from the fountain.
When he put the can back, the water asked the can: “What did he do?”
The can said: “He only cleaned his body.”

The Water asked Melekî Tawûs: “Why did you do it?”
Melekî Tawûs: “What good is the inside to me?”

The Water replied: “Ah, the soul that does not know! So, he [Gabriel] also acted as one who did not know how to act, and gave a feast. What is ablution, what is prayer? How good for you if one day you would be able to answer this. Don’t you know that the beginning and the end were earth and water? How can one perform one’s ablution with water and earth? Tell me!
Wherever you go, make sure that your inner being is fulfilled. Save yourself, do not lie. Look for the answer as to who your God is. Ablution, prayer, belief, and devotion to God are one and the same. Thank God. Work with your second self if you can; if you cannot, there is no relief for your pain. There are seven hells (*tamu*) and eight heavens (*uçma*). The truth about you will be revealed there. Find your answer and tell it to me. If you do not, the door of the seven hells is open. Leave now, I do not want to see you anymore. Leave and look for your community, where will you find it?”

[5] The allegorical story told here is related to the question as to whether it is sufficient to take part in rituals after cleansing oneself externally only. The Alevis are of the opinion that “inner” (esoteric, *batini*) confession, that is, a clean heart, should be taken as the essence of the religion. According to the story, Melekî Tawûs was the first one who went against this and believed that by using water he could clean himself.

While Melekî Tawûs was leaving,
Gabriel realized his fault.
Given the condition of bringing the key to God,
He set out to look for his second self.
He wandered for many thousands of years.
He did not see any corpse, he did not see any life.
Finally he reached the water,
He found a shining vault.
As he approached the vault, he heard a voice: "Who are you? Who am I?"
Gabriel: "You are you, I am I."
Gabriel was ordered to fly.
He flew for another hundred years.
When Gabriel returned to the vault, he was asked the same question. He gave the same answer. He flew again and this was repeated three times.
The fourth time, Gabriel heard the voice in the vault, now from the sky.
The voice said: "When asked, say: You are superior (*haluk*), I am subordinate (*maluk*), you are Sultan, I am your subject."
Thus spoke Gabriel.
The ones who were in the vault saw each other. Same body, same life (*can*).
Those who were in the vault have the same body and two heads.
One of them is Mohammed, the other is Ali.
The one who leads Gabriel is Mohammed, and his master is Ali.
Three bodies of universe saw each other and said:
"If we are wayfarers on this path,
Let us be brothers, because the path is greater than us."
Mohammed became a brother to Ali.
Gabriel was left alone.
And to him the King (*Shah*) was given as brother.

This is the King:
Earth, water, sky, smoke.
May water draw away and become earth.
May smoke be drawn away and become frost.
When the smoke was drawn away, moon and sun saw each other.
So they joined the brotherhood.
A living body is needed for Gabriel as a brother.

What shall we do?
Let's make one body from our bodies; Father Adam, the purest one of God, was made from our body? Do you ask how?
This is how. His holiness Ali gave a command:
"O messenger of God, may you blow on the wing of Gabriel who travels like a pigeon. It will catch fire and become dust.

Throw the dust into the water, the water will dry and become earth.
Then you shall call Michael for salutation,
Then you shall call Israfil for salutation,
Then you shall call Azrael for salutation.
On the condition that the four angels, with Gabriel as the first, witness,
Let us make the body of Adam, he shall look like us.”

All that should be done has been done.
Gabriel went to take a piece of earth. The earth wept, the earth would not give (from itself).
Then Michael went so that he would take earth. The earth wept, the earth did not give.
Then Israfil went and the earth wept again and did not give from itself.
Then Azrael went, and the earth wept again. He said:
“O earth, do not cry anymore, we are working on something:
What we take will return to you at the end.”
Then he took and brought a piece of earth.
He brought the fire and the wind, and mixed them to form mud.
The mud remained mud for thirty-nine days.
Corpse, shape, and body were formed in forty days; the same body.
They hold it up, yet it became mud again.
They left it behind.

They went to Mohammed and told him:
“We made the same body, we held it up, it became mud again.”
This is what Gabriel told Mohammed.
Mohammed went to Ali.
Ali said: “O Messenger of God, it is happening. It does not hold together because there is nothing of our blood in it.”
Gabriel took Mohammed and Ali’s blood together with his own blood, and gave it to the body. The body became alive, they held it up. Gabriel saluted him.
Father Adam saluted Gabriel back: “Peace be upon you, o Head of the Light, noble Shah.”

Then they became loving friends.
Gabriel and Adam joined the brotherhood.
It was at that time that they told each other about the Path that we take till today.

This is how it happened:
Gabriel became brother to Adam,
Mohammed to Ali,
Sky and earth became brothers,
So did sun and moon,
Day and night,

And cloud and thunder.
These are from the sky.
They exist on earth, too:
On earth, there are Mohammed, Ali, Gabriel, and Adam.
In the sky, there are Sun, Moon, Day, and Night.
Cloud and thunder became the weapons of the sun and moon.
The weapon on earth is Zulfiqar, and its owner is Ali.
These inventions were fulfilled.

This is how the four gates were created.
The world is created with four corners:
East, west, north, south;
Sky above, earth below.
God is the first gate,
Gabriel is the second gate.
Mohammed is the third gate
And Ali became the fourth gate.

What a happiness it would be
If these four gates were to meet, knowing the twelve pillars on the path of "body and soul."

When the sky and earth were created,
Day and night were formed
And the decision of twelve months was taken,
By that decision,
Father Adam came, and by the knowledge that two is the origin,
Admitting that God exists, Gabriel came.
He told Father Adam:
"I am asking you now, beloved Father Adam:
What is on your head?
What is on your eyebrow?
What is in your eye?
What is in your ear?
What is in your nose?
What is in your mouth?
What is in your chest?
What is ahead of you?
What is behind you?
What is on your right?
What is on your left?"

Father Adam said:
“There is the Crown on the Head,
The heavenly pen (*Levh-i Kalem*)[6] on the eyebrow,
The Light of generosity (*Nur-i Mürüvvet*) in the eye,
Goodness and justice (*Shepper u Shupper*) in the ear,
Pureness (*Musk-i Evren*) in the nose,
Religion in the mouth,
Belief in the chest,
Gabriel ahead of me,
Israfil behind me,
Michael on my right,
Azrael on my left, and
There is God the beloved, who loves all of them.”

Chapter II

After that, to create the bond of husband and wife,
The woman was made from the left rib of Father Adam.
They left them untouched for a while.
Then Gabriel asked Father Adam: “Who is it standing facing you?”
Adam said: “It is a woman.”
“What is her name?”
Adam said that her name is Eve.
“Why Eve?”
Adam replied: “Because no one saw her when she was created.”
“Why?”
Adam said: “Because she is my wife.”

So Adam and Eve went on living on earth.

One day Father Adam said to the earth:
“Earth, earth, you are the earth, you know all the creations, (but) only one percent knows you; what will you do about the ninety-nine percent?”
Earth was silent, then Adam asked again:
“Earth, earth, were you there in the Beginning, or was it me?”
Then the earth began talking. As if it didn’t know the (answer to the) first question, and not wanting to hurt him, it said: “Now I will ask you: O Adam, Mother, Father, when you were born from me, were you man or woman? Do answer me.”
Hence Father Adam knew:
You are I, I am You;

[6] *Levh-i Kalem* is the name of the tablet on which God has written the destiny of humans.

You are water, I am earth;
You are religion, I belief,
You are the Father, I the Mother;
Our [mutual] devotion is complete.
Then Adam said: "O God, Gabriel, Mohammed, Ya Ali."
After saying that, Gabriel took Father Adam and Mother Eve to heaven.

He showed them heaven.
Whatever exists in the world of today, existed in heaven.
He gave it to Father Adam so that he would wander and live free.
Only when it comes to wheat,
He told him that it was forbidden.
What was the reason?
If they eat it, they would die.
Father Adam never ate it.
He stayed in heaven with Eve for 800 years,
They lived without becoming man and woman.
The wheat was not eaten.
During these 800 years, Father Adam said only once:
"Eve, does anyone live in this heaven except you and me?"

When he uttered these words,
Gabriel heard them, and went to God:
"Beloved God, Father Adam spoke these words."
And (the Presence of) God replied:
"Go and see Father Adam, raise him from the lower level of heaven to the upper level. There, open the door to space. Let Adam enter. He will see whatever or whoever will be there."

Gabriel brought Adam to the upper level of heaven and opened the door.
When the door was opened, Father Adam saw.
Gabriel said: "Enter Adam."
Father Adam replied: "My beloved brother Gabriel, my feet do not move.
Who is this person standing there?"
Then Gabriel spoke:
"She is Fatima Zahra,
Mohammed Mustafa's daughter,
The wife of Ali Murtaza,
The mother of Hasan and Husayn."

Father Adam saw her.
There were signs on Fatima's head.
There was a crown on her head. He asked about that crown.

What is it?
Gabriel: “It is her father, it is Mohammed Mustafa.”
There was a belt on her waist, what is it?
Gabriel: “It is Ali. It is her husband. Of her earrings one is Hasan, the other is Husayn, Shepper and Shupper.”
And her shoe?
Gabriel: “These are the ‘spiritual seekers’ (*talip*) who love her.”

Father Adam saw and accepted them.
When he had seen it, Gabriel brought Father Adam back to the lower level.
When this happened, Melekî Tawûs saw them.
He turned into a peacock, and from the form of a bird he entered the skin of a serpent.
As a snake, he slipped through the keyhole of heaven and got inside.
After having been inside, he turned back into a peacock.
He looked for Eve and found her.
He wandered around with her. While he chatted with her, brought her near the wheat,
Melekî Tawûs asked: “What is this?”
Eve: “It is a food, but forbidden to us.”
Melekî Tawûs: “Now you are telling me that God brought you to heaven because God loves you. What exists on earth and in the hereafter is all here. Life and death are both here. And this is forbidden to you? What kind of love is that? How does God love you?”
When he finished, Eve asked him again: “What is this?”
Melekî Tawûs: “Whatever this is, eat it and you will see.”
Eve, without even looking, ate it.
Her clothes slipped off.
As she stood naked, she saw her place of shame.
When she saw this,
She wanted to go right, (but) had forgotten the word “right.”
She went left, (but) had forgotten the word “left.”
She went back, (but) had forgotten the word “back.”
She went forward, (but) had forgotten the word “forward.”

Melekî Tawûs turned into a serpent, slipped through the keyhole and went away.

Father Adam came. Eve was totally different.
Adam asked: “What is it, Eve?”
Eve: “Adam, do not even ask about it. I ate this grain. This is why.”
Adam: “This grain was forbidden to us, tell me the truth.”
Eve: “I am telling the truth. If you do not believe me, eat it yourself.”
Adam ate and he became like Eve.
He could go neither left nor right, neither back nor forward.
There was no place for him in heaven.

Gabriel became aware of it, and, instead of God, he went to tell Mohammed-Ali
And Mohammed-Ali ordered Adam and Eve to be banished from heaven.
Adam (found himself) on the top of Mount Judi (Cûdî), and Eve near the Indian Sea,
They wept for 200 years, and did nothing but weep.
During these 200 years, Father Adam woke up once.
When he woke up, he said:
"In the name of God the all-compassionate, the most merciful, praise be to the Lord of the Universe, to the Messenger of God."
Gabriel heard and went to Mohammed-Ali.
He said: "O Messenger of God, have compassion for Adam."
Ali replied: "Adam is banished, (I have) no compassion for him."
Gabriel said: "He pronounced your name."
Then Ali and Mohammed, from the same mouth in heaven, told Gabriel:
"Go as fast as you can, reach them and do what you have to do!"

Gabriel came and awakened Father Adam.
How did he wake up?
"In the name of God the all-compassionate, the most merciful, the messenger of God, Ali is the Friend of God, and the Friend of God is Ali."
Gabriel asked: "Father Adam, where did you see them, how do you know about them?"
Father Adam: "My brother, when you brought me to the upper floor of heaven,
when you showed me Fatima, I saw what is written on the crown of Fatima.
I read it there, saw it there."
Gabriel said: "Then wake up."
Adam woke up and his first question was, where Eve was.
Gabriel: "She is weeping near the Indian sea, she is weeping and calling your name."
Then he brought Adam to Eve.

The vast world is empty: Adam, Eve, and Gabriel.
There is no one else.
They asked each other what to do, what not to do.
Gabriel said to Father Adam: "From now on you are husband and wife.
You will have children, all of them twins: One girl, one boy.
You will marry the younger girl off to the older boy, the older girl to the younger boy.
Feasting and wealth will result in this world."

To this command, Father Adam gave his acceptance, and children were born.
When they reached the age of marriage,
he told them: "I will give you in marriage."
The children said: "Father, how can we be married? We are sisters and brothers."
"Yes," said Adam, "but this is God's command. This should be done because there is no one else. Younger sister to older brother. Older sister to younger brother."
When he said these things, the older brother did not accept it.

“I want my own twin,” he said.
But Father Adam did not accept.

Father Adam issued a decree, and by that criterion he would make a decision.
He wanted a piece of produce from everyone, according to their profession.
He told them that whoever would arrive first, would have the older daughter.
The older son was a farmer, the younger was a shepherd.
The field of the older son was far from home.
The younger son grabbed a ram from among the animals, and came to his father.
When the older son came, he realized that his younger brother has arrived before. Father Adam said: “God’s Command shall not be broken. The older daughter belongs to the younger son, and the younger daughter to the older son.”
The older brother Cain (Kabil) did not accept it.

Once a year Father Adam used to visit a holy place to worship, and stayed there for eight days. Cain waited for this moment, and when his father left, he took the younger brother to the forest. He killed him right there. He took the body with him, because he did not know how to hide it. In the sky he watched a crow killing another one. Then he saw how the crow dug a grave and buried the other.
So he repeated this: he dug a grave and buried his brother.
When he returned home her mother asked him: “Where is Abel (Abil)?”
Cain: “Am I Abel’s keeper? He may have gone with my father.”

When the eight days had passed, Father Adam came home.
He saw everyone except Abel, and asked for him.
They said: “We thought he was with you, he has not been here since you went away.”
Then Father Adam immediately left to look for Abel.
He could not find him.

He was about to give up when he lay down near a rock and fell asleep.
Gabriel came while he was sleeping and woke him up.
He asked: “Why this sadness, my brother?”
Father Adam: “O brother, my son is lost.”
Gabriel: “Your son is not lost. Cain killed him, his grave is right there.”
Adam stood up and went towards the grave. He took Abel and brought him with him.
The ritual duties for the dead were performed for Abel.
This ritual began with him.

Once the rituals had been performed, he said:
“My God, I am a body and soul who believed (in you) and prayed to you. I accepted your command. But my son accepted neither your command nor mine. I repudiate him as my son. You, too, ban him from your dwelling. I will do whatever you order.”
Then Gabriel came as the messenger of God.

He told him: “Your prayer was accepted by God. Take him away and leave him on a mountain that is so remote that you will not see him and he will not see you.”
Then Father Adam took him away, to leave him behind on a mountain.

Before this, Melekî Tawûs was banned from the celestial realm.
When Father Adam had been created from earth, all angels, fairies, and giants were ordered to prostrate themselves before Adam.
Melekî Tawûs was called (again), to give him a second chance.
All prostrated except Melekî Tawûs.
Not aware of the light in Adam, he said:
“I am an angel made from fire, whilst he is a body made from earth. I will not prostrate myself (before him).”
He wanted to hit Adam, but he could not.
He wanted to spit on him but his own saliva became a ring and stuck on him.
So then he prayed—he realized his fault and said:
“O God, I did wrong.”
God replied: “You did wrong to yourself, now go and save yourself.”
And He banned him.
Since then, Melekî Tawûs, as one who does not know himself, is called Satan.

Melekî Tawûs heard about Cain, and found him on the mountain.
To see whether he was conscious, he asked him a question:
“How did your father perform the ritual for your brother?”
Cain answered that he did it with fire.
When he got the answer to his question, he understood that Adam had a religion.
Then he told Cain: “My origin is fire and wind. If I want I burn the world, you will be burned with it. If you listen to my word, I won’t burn the world. The world has four corners. You shall take three of them, and the remaining one will be your father’s. But I have some advice for you.”
Cain said: “What advice would you give me?”
He said: “I will make five idols for you. Their names are: Yakut, Yatuk, Yasuk, Nasuk, Nasır. Do not leave those five idols, and three-fourths of the world will be yours. And your father will always have to live with less.”

A long time afterward, Mother Eve bore seventy-two children in all.
After a while, Father Adam and Eve did not get along well.
Adam became miserable and prayed to God: “What was my fault?
You created me, and I live in this coldness.”
And God knew it.
God called Gabriel.
“Go,” said God, “there is a girl named Naciye among the houris in heaven. Take and bring her, give her to Father Adam. From now on, Naciye shall serve Father Adam.”
Gabriel carried out God’s command, betrothed Naciye to Father Adam and came back.

He said to God, “I have done it and carried out your command.”

Father Adam had not seen Naciye, because he was not at home yet.
Eve was the first to see her before Father Adam did.
Eve approached her and asked: “Who are you?”
Naciye: “I have been sent by God from Heaven as an angel.”
“Oh!,” said Eve.
She left her work and went directly to Father Adam.
“Father Adam! I have committed a lot of mistakes against you. Forgive my mistakes. From now on, whatever your wish is, I shall do it.”
Father Adam: “If you really mean it, I will forgive you.”
“Only on one condition,” Eve said then. “You will not marry anyone after me.”
Father Adam: “I will not marry if you keep your word.”

Then Father Adam came home; saw that a girl was sitting on his bed.
“Who are you?” he asked her.
“I am Naciye, one of the houris. You had prayed to God in your grief, and God sent me to you as your wife so that I can serve you from now on.”
Then Father Adam thought:
“An oath is a serious matter.”
He did not approach Naciye, and this became known to God.
God sent again Gabriel: “Go to ask Adam what is going on.”
Gabriel came and asked.
Father Adam told about the promise he had given to Eve.

After Gabriel’s warning, Father Adam wanted to carry out God’s command,
but at the same time he did not want to breach his promise to Eve, because keeping one’s promise is an obligation.
Father Adam thought again.
To solve the problem,
He read all the history books,
written before and after him.
He could not find an answer.
The oath is (a) solemn (thing); he did not want to breach it.
Then he asked Eve: “I am (created) from *nur* (“light”). And you?”
Eve said: “I am from *nur* too.”
Thereupon they said: “Both of us will breathe into a jar, and see what will happen.”
And they did so. Adam breathed into his jar, Eve into hers.[7]
Eve, curious to know the outcome, went and opened the jar on the thirty-ninth day.
In her jar, she saw all the creatures on earth that walk on their bellies.

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[7] To have a clean heart, one has to master one’s *nefs*/*nafs* (“lower ego”). This is translated by Alevis as one should not lie, should not steal, and should not commit adultery. *Nefes* (“breath”) here symbolizes the *nefs*.

In Adam's jar she saw a child of light.
Out of anger she shook the jar for a bit and went away.
On the fortieth day they came together. In Adam's jar the child was still alive, but he was lame.
This time Eve admitted (she was in the wrong) and agreed with the rightness of Adam's decision.
The child was called Naci ("the saved one"), and when he grew up, they gave Naciye to him in marriage.
The Forty[8] came from them.
From Adam's breath and the angel Naciye.
And they called them the "Group of Naci" (*Güruhu Naci*).[9]

Chapter III

This is what happened:
Father Adam is the father of the Forties,
All Prophets, Imams, and all of us,
All seekers of this Path,
All of us are from this lineage:

Bismi Şah Allah Allah	In the name of King God
Ya Adam Ata Ya Safi Allah	O Father Adam, the innocent one of God
Şit aleyh selam Güruhi Naci	Seth—peace be upon him—the descendant of Naci
Enus aley selam	Enoch, peace be upon him
Yardi aley selam	Yardi, peace be upon him
Kenan aley selam	Canan, peace be upon him
Heno aley selam	Heno, peace be upon him
Ramak aley selam	Ramak, peace be upon him
Nuh naci Allah	Noah, the saved one of God
Sam aley selam	Sam, peace be upon him
Yunus aley selam	Jonah, peace be upon him
Yahya aley selam	John, peace be upon him

[8] This is a reference to the forty celestial beings. It is believed that they were the first ones who held a *jam* (*cem*) ceremony in the esoteric world. *Cem* is the main ritual meeting of the Alevis.

[9] Kılagöz also added a second version of this story, called the story of *Güruhu Naciye*: When Adam told Gabriel about the promise he made to Eve, Gabriel said: "What is the promise you gave to Eve compared to God's command?" Thus, Adam and Naciye became husband and wife. Naciye got pregnant just once by Father Adam. But she gave birth to forty children at one birth. She left thirty-nine of them in the cave *Xar*. She brought one home, they called him Seth. She fed him with breast milk, and until she brought him home he had no speech. When he began to talk, they gave him water, but he did not drink water. They gave him bread, but he did not eat bread. His parents asked: "Why don't you eat, son?" Then he said: "My thirty-nine siblings are in the cave *Xar*, how could I eat?" Then Adam asked Naciye: "What does this mean?" "The child's word is true," said Naciye. "I gave birth to 40 children in one birth." Then Father Adam said, "Go and bring them quickly." Naciye left and brought the children, who were fed better than this child. Then these children became *Güruhu Naciye* ("The Group of Naciye").

Zekeriya aley selam	Zechariah, peace be upon him
Yakup aley selam	Jacob, peace be upon him
Ya İbrahim Halil Allah	O Abraham, Friend of God
İsmail aley selam	Ishmael, peace be upon him
İshak aley selam	Isaac, peace be upon him
Eyüp aley selam	Job, peace be upon him
Harun aley selam	Aaron, peace be upon him
Lüt aley selam	Lot, peace be upon him
Zubeyir aley selam	Zubeyr, peace be upon him
Cergivis aley selam	Cergivis, peace be upon him
Ya Davud Nur Allah	O David, the light of God
Musayi Kerim Allah	Moses, the generous one of God
İsayi Ruh Allah	Jesus, the spirit of God
Muhammed Resul Allah	Mohammed, the messenger of God
Dapir Xece	Grandmother Khadija
Dê Fadima	Mother Fatima
Imam Ali Al Murteza	Imam Ali, the chosen one
İmam Hasan, Halki Rıza	Imam Hasan, the contented one of the community
İmam Husayn, Şahı Kerbela	Imam Hussayn, the King of Karbala
İmam Ali Zayn Al-Abidin	Imam Ali Zayn al-Ābidīn
İmam Muhammad Al-Baqir Dünya	Imam Muhammad al Baqir, the World
İmam Ja’far Al-Sadiq, Nuri Nur Allah	Imam Ja‘far al-Sādiq, his light is the light of God
İmam Musa Al-Kadhim Rayber	Imam Musa al Kādhim, the Guide
İmam Ali Al-Ridha, Piri Horasan	Imam Ali al-Ridā, the Pir of Khorasan
İmam Muhammad Al-Taqi	Imam Muhammad al-Taqi
İmam Ali Al-Naqi	Imam Ali al-Naqi
İmam Hasan Al-Askeri	Imam Hasan al-Askeri
İmam Muhammad Al-Mahdi.	Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi.

And the prophet Khizr, always being there for us.

Chapter IV

Gabriel is beloved by God,
Ali is beloved by Mohammed;
Michael, Israfil, and Azrael are witnesses.
God, Gabriel, Mohammed, Ya Ali. All of them are apparent in this world.
All together is *Haq* (“Truth”) for us.
The only witnesses to them are the angels.
And Father Adam is the head of the *Sayyid* lineage.

When you will reach the gate of Heaven, all these (questions) will be asked forever.
Just as these were asked of Gabriel.
"Who are you?"
At this time, you will need to know who you really are.
You shall answer,
Whoever you are, when called upon;
If allowed, go on; if not, turn back.
(Then) Hell's gate will be opened for you.

Always be ready for these questions:
"Who are you, whose child are you?"
"The body and soul are one, they function as two.
One is the mother, one is the father."
They said about this:
"God exists, God in two:
One is Gabriel, one is Himself,
One is sky, one is earth.
One is east, one is west,
One is sun, one is moon,
One is morning, one is night.
One is water, one is soil,
One is sky, one is earth,
The corpse came alive,
Body and soul became Father Adam.
From Father Adam, mother and father,
God's secret, God's light.
As the inner secret in the endless sea,
When the Imam is known,
That gate shall be opened."

No one sees Gabriel, Mohammed, and Ali;
Murshid, *pir*, and *rayber* exist in their place.
When they are not known they retreat too.
When one retreats, (then) his place is known.
It is called Seven *Tamu* ("hells").

It is asked, as it was asked in heaven:
"Who is the one who will intercede for you?
With 124 thousand names, four gates, twelve pillars;
With 366 ropes, 1,001 names, 80,000 words,
With 90,000 forms of wisdom, 6,666 words of advice,
And as four elements, and six creations, (answer) by saying:
"O God, we possess body and soul."

By saying: “In the name of God, in the name of Shah.”
Swearing by God, at the gate of heaven;
“What is crude, what is refined?
Who is the friend, who is the foe?”
All (this) shall be asked.
Answers to all questions have been given in white letters, but not in black letters.

When the creation of Adam happened,
God called him first a prophet.
While he was a prophet, who were his believers?
What was the blessing of the first prophet Father Adam?
There was no body and no soul.
If there was, it was not a human being.
But if there was, it existed under different names:
Days, devils, angels, *houris*, and all living beings.
No one knows what it was.
Adam went to Heaven to see his believers.

That building in heaven is the body of all that has been created,
It was Father Adam himself.
Gabriel said to Father Adam:
“If you know yourself, you are holier than God;
if you do not know yourself you are lower than God.”
And Father Adam commanded this to be his miraculous creation.
His miraculous creations are the daughter and son, as he called them mother and father.

You shall not forget: our secret, hidden in Dervish Earth,[10]
Comes from the earth, and returns to the earth.
This path was given to us in this form,
On condition that we shall be held responsible for it.
To remember the path, to remember Him.
Therefore we pray facing the sun every morning:

Ya Xadê	O God
Cemalê Elî Mıhemmed	The Face of Ali Mohammed
Tu heye	You exist
Me ra dest bide	Help us
Me ra ji cemalê xwe mahrum meke	Do not deprive us of your face
Em kulê te ne	We are your servants
Ji te zêtir em kesî nas nakin	We do not know, no other than you

[10] Hardo Dewrêş (“Dervish Earth”) is a popular expression used in Dersim with a double meaning. First, it is a reference to the earth as the home of wandering dervishes in search of the Truth. Secondly, the expression is also used as a synonym for Dersim, a region known for its many holy places and wandering dervishes and sayyids.

Tu him zayê me ye	You are both our birth
Him mirinê me ye	And our death
Navê te yî Xadê ye	Your name is God
Xadê yê mezin e.	God the great.

God is one, but He creates through His second-in command.
While Gabriel was living with the soul of God,
He conveyed all sciences to those who existed.
Gabriel conveyed this knowledge to Father Adam.
Father Adam became Mother and Father.
Man and woman came from Mother and Father.
The *Levh-i Kalem* came from that, and son and daughter came from that.
And birth and death came from that.

God exists in all words, in all creations
But if body and soul did not exist,
no creation could see and know any other creation.
God exists, yes, God exists as the owner of the world,
But God exists when the questions "what is God, how is God?" are asked.
It is necessary to get the answer.
If there is no answer, there is no learning and no knowledge.
That is because there is a statement for that.
Haq ("Truth") is mother and father.
There is no *halāl* and *harām* in God's name,
All that God does is *halāl*, *halāl* is from God.
God will not punish anyone,
Everyone will be punished for their own actions.
Everyone will see what is caused by their own deeds,
So nothing of this affects God,
His name will not be connected to evil.

Satan is the devil, being mutated from an angel,
Made from an element that does not offer a remedy for his suffering.
He is neither woman nor man.
And *harām* exists in everyone who is like Satan,
In all who repeat that first fault.
Heaven and hell exist in everyone.
That is because the faithful one becomes unfaithful.
Cain (descended) from Father Adam, Ham from Prophet Noah.
Therefore 124,000 floods occurred in the world.
Why?
Because the bodies of Satan and Cain are in the world.
That is why, first and above all, God created heaven and hell,

He saw these things coming.

God, Gabriel, life, the body, water and earth are one.
Earth is our body.
And our soul and our life are both God and Gabriel.
All of them are water, earth, and blood.
When it completed (its development) in the endless sea,
The External World becomes a rose and a rose garden.
We live as if we have seen God.
It seems that God is here.
His name has become the Endless Sea.
If we do not know, the First Man inside us will be disappeared.

If the External World exists,
that is in order (for us) to know the secret of the universe.
Zulfiqar is in the hands of the one who knows the Internal World.
Then he will read that great book, the four (holy) books are contained in it.
Let us find that book.
Let us find that master, learn the lesson.
There will be absolutely nothing immature in it.

The world was once water.
The Master of the World (speaking) as water said:
“This world was once thus:
It was neither sea nor water.
It was both sea and water.
I wonder what this world was and what it is?”
It is necessary to have the answer to this too.

When this world had been created, it was restless in the universe,
A yellow cow existed.
They brought this yellow cow.
There was a distance of five centuries [of traveling] between the horns of this yellow cow. They put the world between the horns.
The world remained restless in that position too.
Then, when a great mountain appeared, there was no life, so how could anyone see it?
The breadth of the mountain also measured the distance of five-centuries’ (travel).
They put the world on it, and still the world remained restless.
No remedy could be found yet.
There was a fish in the water.
The Master of the World held the head of the fish;
He took the fish from the water and traveled the distance of five centuries’ (travel) while dragging it after him.

But the fish could not yet come out of the water.
And they put the world on it, but still the world remained restless.
And when the first human was created,
The knowledge of the world was put in the brains of this body and soul,
So it could find its place and find its peace.
And it found (peace), but now the human became restless.

I wonder who was this first body and soul?
Only the owner knows it.
However, God exists as the secret of all wisdom.
And it is in the body and soul (i.e., the human existence).
We should look for Him, in order to know Him.

We know God through water, through earth, through the body, and through the soul.
God, Gabriel, Mohammed, Ali are one in the secret of the universe.
When coming into the external universe,
They are Father Adam.
God means faith and devotion.
Mohammed is the Teacher (*murshid*).
And Ali is the Master (*pir*).
His origin, his essence, and his outer form are the Prophet Khizr.
And Gabriel is the Guide.
The Twelve Imams are hidden in it (i.e., in the External Existence).
Anyone else is a seeker.
They are the children of Father Adam.
Whoever exists in time, he or she is a child.

Whoever likes this Path,
When knowledge and devotion are present,
With mother and father,
With water and soil
Let him come to our court.

His origin, his essence comes from water and earth,
Our secret comes from water and earth.

Come my child, come my child,
Come my child, come my child.

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Dancing the Text: Embodying the Sacred Orature in the Alevi *Semah* (Turkey)

Françoise Arnaud-Demir

In rural Turkey,[1] as in many places around the world, dance in its most basic and daily expression is performed to the songs sung by the dancers themselves. People will gather after field or housework, grab each other's hand to form a circle, facing and looking at each other, and start dancing to a call-and-response song in binary rhythm based on a rotating leadership—when the first song ends, another singer may take the lead with a new song, as the singers-dancers tap into the local repertoire of dance texts. Verses are simple and may be partly improvised according to the situation and the extent of the humor the singers want to put into them, or the hints they want to drop. Because of this specific relationship to the sung texts, dance in this context can be characterized as a play—as its Turkish name, *oyun*, shows.

Some aspects of this situation can be found in the *semah*, the Alevi ritual dance, but certainly not all of it—there must be something inherent to the rituality of the context. We listen to songs, whose text may also largely determine what is at stake in the dance act. We also see a circle of dancers, but they don't sing, they don't hold hands, they don't look at each other. None of them leads, and what they perform is not meant for amusement. Yet, albeit in a distinct way, the dance is linked to a text, and the vernacular name of the dance suggests, by its very etymology—*semah* derives from the Arabic *samāᶜ* which means "audition"—the existence of an intrinsic relation between what is said and sung and the dance.

Dance as an Expression of Orature

Despite the physical disjunction between the singing voice and the dancing bodies in the latter performance, in both situations the performers find themselves dancing a text. However, in the Alevi ritual context, the different relationship between the sung text and the dancers themselves—vocal and instrumental music being performed by others—and the way the *semah* is performed confer a special meaning and purpose to the whole dance act. As anthropologist

[1] The situation presented here belongs mostly to the pre-electrification era. To put it shortly, microphones, amplification, modern mass media, and urban migration have largely disrupted this relationship to dance. But much remains of it, especially when urbanized rural people go back to their family village for the summer. Hysteresis makes it worth explaining this more or less extinct and/or transformed way of life, that we chose to describe here using the present tense.

Michael Houseman put it, following Gregory Bateson, rituals "enact particular realities" and these "particular realities people enact when they participate in rituals are relationships" (Houseman 2006:2)—indeed, one can "approach ritual actions as the shaping and enactment of a network of relationships, both between participants and with non-human entities (spirits, ancestors, objects, images, words, places, etc.)" (2012:15).[2]

The study of dance as the physical medium for a text to be expressed has been largely neglected. Dance in mainstream research seems seldom envisaged as a global act encompassing verse, song, and collective body movements—a common feature in traditional societies. Indeed, research into the anthropology of dance has been strongly oriented towards the separate study of these traditional components of dance, to finally focus on the physical movements alone (Grau and Wierre-Gore 2005b). Yet others have argued that "[traditional dance] is not 'gestures accompanied by music,' but a 'total act,' at once narration, poem, melody, and song, experienced communally through the tireless repetition . . . of the same step that everyone does at the same time" (Guilcher 1998:52). As such, the performing, as a single act, of singing a text and dancing to it, can be seen as a particular expression of *orature*[3]—the latter being defined as "the heritage being transmitted by word of mouth without using the written word" (Dor 2006)—what is generally, and wrongly, called "oral literature."

Almost all of the Alevis' religious practice is based on orature (or the contiguous realm of literary orature, which embraces "the written extensions of oral works" (Dor 1995:31)). Alevi bards and religious guides, who are sometimes the same person, have memorized hundreds of dedicated words and songs passed down through the generations—the *deyiş*, etymologically "mutually told" poems. They sing them to the lute (called *saz* or *bağlama*),[4] singing and playing being inextricably linked;[5] moreover, the two "voices," that of the singer and that of the lute, are in homophony, the same notes being sung and played by the bard on the chordophone in unison. Though the bardic tradition is common to the whole population, it plays a prominent role in Alevi culture. And the rituals of the Alevis, of which the sacred chants are an intrinsic part, are specific to them, one of their specific aspects being that they include the *semah* dance.

Much has been written since the beginning of Islam on the question of *samâ^c*—the

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[2] Unless otherwise specified, all translations from French and Turkish in this paper are by the present author.

[3] A terminology first put forward by Rémy Dor (1976). His logical argument was as follows: "The term 'oral literature,' commonly used to describe this vast cultural heritage that is transmitted by word of mouth over generations, is not satisfactory. It amalgamates two distinct notions, thus creating confusion: if one sticks to the etymon, *litteratura* refers to writing, which cannot logically be oral" (1982:9). In his definition the term "oral literature" covers "written works designed to be said aloud" (1995:31).

[4] Widely played all over Turkey, the *bağlama* or *saz* is a pear-shaped long-necked lute, generally with six strings in three double courses. *Bağlama* (from the Turkish *bağ*, "link") refers to the fretted neck of the instrument; *saz* is a Persian noun with two meanings, "reed" and "instrument," the latter having evolved in Turkish to cover the folk music lute.

[5] "To say that the Achik [bard] is accompanied on the *saz* is insufficient. . . . It should rather be said that the voice of the instrument and the human voice played in duet" (Gheerbrant 1985, first record).

movements in response to the mystical or "spiritual concert"[6] of the Sufis—and my purpose here is not to exhaustively add my voice to the countless others who have addressed this vast and complex subject. Instead, I will confine myself to one particular area, the Alevi *semah*, even limiting my remarks to an archetypal sample, the "*Semah* of the Cranes" danced in Divriği, in the Sivas province of Turkey, analyzed in its textual, musical, and choreographic elements. Through this archetypal example, my purpose in this paper is to show how "special relationships" inherent to rituality are enacted between the *semah*'s poetic text, the vocal-instrumental music, and the dance movements, so as to physically embody the sacred orature—thus ensuring the success of the *semah*, and consequently, that of the entire ritual.

The *Cem*: Gathering, Listening, Reacting

With historical roots that go back to the thirteenth century and the figure of a saint, Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, the Alevis today, being estimated to number over twelve million,[7] still form an important part of Turkey's population. Before the days of urban migration they were living in most parts of the country, both Turkish- and Kurdish- (Kurmanji and Zaza) speaking (with concentrations in the Dersim-Tunceli, Sivas, Erzincan, Malatya, and Maraş provinces, broadly in the middle of the country); however, Turkish may be seen as their historical and largely dominant ritual language, as is shown by a recent compilation of thousands of their age-old poetic texts.[8] The Alevi way of practicing Islam differs from that of the Sunni rest of the population, combining mystical and Shi'ite elements of faith infused with beliefs linked to their once pastoral way of life. They do not perform most of the usual Islamic duties, such as praying five times a day and going to the mosque on Fridays, fasting on Ramadan, and performing the pilgrimage to Mecca. Instead, Alevi villagers, both men and women, will gather and sit in a circle throughout certain nights at a private house to attend the *cem*,[9] a plenary ritual meant to recollect, commemorate, and reproduce an assembly of saints, under the guidance of a leader, the "ancestor" or *dede*. The *dede* was—and still is—supported in his task by a group of assistants, among whom the bards act as reciters (*zâkir*) on the lute (*saz*).

A well defined series of actions are performed during the *cem*, beginning with the settling down in a circle of all the attendants, "face to face,"[10] and ending with a meal made up of bread, the boiled meat of sacrificed sheep, and fruits or sweets. In between, twelve "services" (*hizmet*)

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[6] "Sūfi tradition of the spiritual concert in a more or less ritualized form . . . . These manifestations are often accompanied by movements, agitation or dance, codified or not, individual or collective" (During 1993:1092).

[7] European Commission 2004 estimate (Massicard 2005:3).

[8] We have an approximate idea of this with Özmen's *Anthology* (Özmen 1995), the only comprehensive anthology of Alevi poetry: going from the thirteenth to the twentieth century, it lists 480 poets and gathers more than 2,500 pages of rhymed text, all of them in Turkish. The main poets, such as Pir Sultan Abdal, are all Turkish-speaking.

[9] The full name of the Alevis' main ritual is "*ay(i)n-i cem*," an expression of Perso-Arabic origin meaning "ceremony of gathering."

[10] In Turkish, *cemal cemale*. *Cemal* (Arabic) expresses the face's beauty.

are performed simultaneously or one after another by twelve persons or groups of persons. These are: announcing the meeting, leading the ritual, keeping the door, controlling the participants, lighting candles, sweeping the floor, spreading a carpet, washing hands, playing-singing, dancing, pouring water, and cooking the sacrificed meat for the concluding meal. Each completed task is punctuated by the *dede*'s blessing of the performers, who are placed in front of him in a definite position: standing tightly side by side, bust bent, one large toe on top of the other.

As soon as the participants approach the meeting place (which used to be a normal house with a large guest room), everything is made special by means of a series of actions. Everyone must show reverence (*niyâz*) to the—thus ritualized—space, people, and objects, by pressing successively the lips and the brow on the doorjamb before entering the place, then the cushion where one is going to sit, the lute one is going to play, the hand of the *dede*, and so forth. Similarly, when the name of a holy person is mentioned in a song or a ritual speech, people will press the forefinger of their right hand on their lips, then press the palm of the same hand on their chest.

In a culture where orature was the predominant medium, men and women would sit down together and listen to different memorized texts marking the different steps of the *cem*, some of them uttered without music by the *dede*, but most sung and played by the *zâkirs*. During the six or more hours the ritual is performed, the attention and participation of the faithful is ensured by a variety of means. One is the use, on the part of the main officiants, of various types of speech —direct communication, benedictions, sacred songs with different functions. While they listen to this variety of speech, people sit or stand without much moving, controlled by the *gözcü* ("watcher"), a man waiting in the middle of the crowd and holding a thin stick, which he uses to call back to order anyone whose attention is waning, or to quell any chatter. At times, the faithful react to the texts with exclamations ("Allah Allah!") or even with tears, thus formally expressing and showing that they are moved by what they hear. At times they also sing choruses. And they collectively mimic certain episodes of the ritual.

Coupled to the variety of speech during the *cem* is the alternated use of various musical rhythms, both used to keep the attention of the participants and to bring them gradually to a certain state of mind. These rhythms can be binary (a regular one-two rhythm), or of the so called *aksak* ("limping") type, meaning a combination of "long" and "short" beats, conventionally[11] written 3 and 2 respectively, such as 7/8 (2 + 2 + 3 or 3 + 2 + 2)—a rhythm largely present in Turkish bard music in general—or 9/8 (mainly 2 + 2 + 2 + 3 or 3 + 2 + 2 + 2)—which is generally associated with dance music in many areas of Turkey.

Preparing for the Dance—*Mise en abyme* and Mimicking

The Alevis perform the *cem* to recall and reproduce an assembly of Forty Saints (*Kırklar*) that took place outside time and space, in the "invisible world" (*gaib*). The identity of these Forty

[11] Here I used the conventional notation of musical rhythms, without entering into the debate on the *aksak* rhythm (for any details, see, among others, Cler 1994).

Saints is left partly undisclosed, but among them are said to stand the most sacred Five (*Pençe-i Âl-i Abâ*) of Shi'a Islam, Muhammed, Ali, Fatma, Hüseyin, Hasan, as well as their faithful follower Selman. They are physically represented by the sheepskins on which the *dede* and his officiants sit, and the *hizmets* performed are also linked to them. But they are mostly made present by verbal means. Most of the words being spoken during the *cem*, be it in the form of songs (*nefes*) with specific functions—*tevhid*, *duaz-ı imam*, *mersiye*—or in the form of benedictions (*gülbenk*) pronounced by the *dede* at the close of each service, are invocations, and convocations of holy persons, starting with the supreme divinity, most frequently called *Hak* (The True One) or *Şah* (King), continuing with the Twelve Imams, the founding saint Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, down to the sacred poets themselves, whose name as *mahlas*, or "signature device" (Koerbin 2011:209), is always mentioned in the last stanza of the poems sung.

The danced part of the *cem*, the *semah*, can be seen as the climax of the ritual, as it is performed towards its conclusion, after the singing of the *miraçlama*—the narration of the Prophet's Ascension into heaven (*mirac*) according to the Alevi tradition. This account, which is also partly acted out by the participants, involves a *mise en abyme* of the ritual itself. A brief summary has to be given here. Summoned by the angel Gabriel, Muhammed ascends into the heavens to visit God, then takes the road back, and sees an intriguing dome in the distance. It is that of a convent (*dergâh*). He knocks on the door. After a brief trial, he is invited to enter and sit among Forty Saints. But the Forty, as they tell him, are One. One of them comes back from begging, returning with a grape, which a hand from the invisible appears to press. To share this grape among all, it is enough for one of them to consume it. Muhammed having drunk the pressed grape juice, all those present are intoxicated. They stand up, shouting "Allah Allah," and together with Muhammed they form the round of the *semah*.

At this point in the narration, the music changes and accelerates and some of the faithful get up quickly and mimic the dance to an accelerated rhythm. Other episodes of the sung narration were mimed before; they deal with the movements of the Prophet on his way (standing up, sitting down) and with his devotions (kissing one's hand and laying it on one's chest, bowing down) during his Ascension—these are symbolically acted simultaneously by the whole audience, including the musicians. All these mimed actions anticipate the physical experience of the *semah*, which will be shared by all the participants, both as performers and spectators.

It is the leader, the *dede*, who designates, one after the other, those who are called upon to "turn"[12] barefoot in the center of the room, where a carpet has been unrolled for this purpose until everybody has performed the *semah*. Each woman chooses a male partner, and both start by showing each other respective reverence (*niyâz*).[13] Then all the dancers stand in a circle without touching, one behind the other with their bodies facing to the right, waiting for the music and singing to begin to dance, the musicians and *dede* being seated outside the circle and facing the dancers.

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[12] To distinguish the sacred *semah* from the secular *oyun* (see the introduction), the derived verb "*oynamak*" is generally not used to describe the act of dancing in the *cem*; the dancers are said to turn, "*dönmek*."

[13] Depending on the local rules, the woman may kneel down in front of the man and kiss his hand or foot, the latter carrying the forefinger of his right hand to his lips in return; or each partner may kiss the other's shoulder.

"*Turnalar semahı*," an Emblematic *Semah* of the Sivas Province

To the ethnochoreologist, the Alevi *semah* appears morphologically different from the *samâ'* or *semâ* of the Mevlevi Order—the so called "whirling dervishes"—which presents itself as a continuous rotation of the body around the right foot, albeit to music. The Alevi *semah* has more of the characteristics of a "dance" as commonly defined—"a series of rhythmic and patterned bodily movements usually performed to music" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Indeed, in some areas, its form is identical to that of the local secular dance; in other areas, it may also be danced out of context at family gatherings. Moreover, it displays different morphologies across regions.[14] But all these local forms have common characteristics: voice and *saz* accompaniment; general anti-solar round movement; isolated bodies; and symmetrical and upward arm movements.

Because of the abundance of forms and regions and microregions, and the size of the population under consideration, I chose to start focusing on a single *semah*, following the example of the French ethnomusicologist Monique Brandily, who dedicated an eighty-page study to a five-minute Tibesti saddle song (1976). One *semah* in particular—*Turnalar Semahı*, the "*Semah* of the Cranes"—was considered as emblematic by the Turkish folklorist Nida Tüfekçi when he collected it among the Alevis of Sivas at the end of the 1960s. Sivas, in north-central Anatolia, is one of the provinces with the highest population of Alevis (Massicard 2005:7), both Turkish and Kurdish speakers, and it has also been hailed for centuries as "the bards' homeland." Time had passed since, but I decided to re-collect it myself in the same village[15] in a ritual context to give a fresh look at what was happening there.

In this geographical area—belonging to the largest and most densely populated among the various typological Alevi *semah* areas—the *semah* movements look rather simple. The dance figures vary according to the three melodic lines of the music, but can be described as three variants of the same movement. It roughly consists in taking three steps, starting with the right foot and ending on the same foot (on a quick-quick-slow rhythm), then the same steps symmetrically starting with the left foot and ending on it; hands are alternately raised in conjunction with the feet (right hand raised as the right foot starts the step, left hand raised as the left foot starts the step) and lowered in a round outward movement on the last of each three-step sequence.

The dance starts with the music, and the figure is first slowly outlined by the dancers on the spot, as if they were finding their feet—by shifting their body weight laterally from one foot to the other and raising their arms, with their tight fingertips quickly stretched out to underscore

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[14] A typology can be drawn up with roughly three main areas according to the relationship between men and women: dancing always alike in a round (Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Anatolia), dancing partly alike in a round (north-central Anatolia), round square dance in mirror (European Turkey, West and Southwest Anatolia) (cf. Arnaud-Demir 2002:46-48).

[15] The analyzed *semah* was recorded and filmed while the locals danced under the supervision of *dede* Hüseyin Gazi Metin (1939-) from Şahin village (the place where it was originally collected), who organized it in the nearby village of Başören (Divriği, Sivas province) and who also played and sang, in October 2011. The video and sound recordings were the basis for a thorough analysis based on written description and music and text notation (Arnaud-Demir 2012).

the last strong beat of each melodic phrase with a flick in the air. The second variant is similar to what was described above as the general form, but instead of going forward, the step is performed on the spot, laterally: the right foot to the right, the left foot to the left, the only difference being that the dancer is not moving forward. The third variant is the one described above, namely a forward progression of all dancers.

One more rule is that, as the circle progresses from right to left in an anti-solar movement during the third variant, the dancers must not turn their back on the *dede* when passing him. To do this, they make a turn to the right when they come near him, while continuing to move in the circle.

Though it looks rather simple from a choreographic point of view, mastering these three variants, added to the need to rotate at a precise point in the circle, all this without colliding with each other and without getting off on the wrong foot, represents a significant difficulty, something like a trial. It is a ritual context, everyone is watching, the dancers are not here to have fun. That is why, before the dance, the musician-*dede* strictly warned the dancers: "If you see that you can't adjust your steps to the music, go back to your seats!"

In warning the performers, the *dede* alluded to the complexity of the music that he was going to sing and play on the *saz*. Three parameters are to be considered here: 1. rhythm; 2. tempo; 3. melody—the specificity of this *semah* music being *a continuous variation* of these three parameters during the recorded performance. Nothing of the kind can be seen in leisure dances, which are based on a single rhythmic cycle and keep a more or less stable speed—here the play of variations is permanent, between the different rhythmic patterns, the different tempi (slow or fast) and the different melodies, as shown on the following synoptic table, which has been drawn from the careful analysis of the sheet notation.

Section	1	2		3		4	5
Subsection		2a	2b	3a	3b		
Rhythmic cycle	9/8 2232	9/8 2322		2/4		9/8 2322	2/4
Tempo	slow	quick	quicker	slow	slightly accelerating	quick	interruption
Melodic outline	7 notes up and down	3 notes downward	3 notes upward	3 notes downward	3 notes upward	3 notes upward	3 notes downward
Steps variant	1	2	3	2	3	3	2
Movement	on the spot	on the spot	forward	on the spot	forward	forward	on the spot
Duration	1'16"	0'43"	0'30"	0'45"	0'19"	0'37"	0'05"

Table 1. Synoptic view of the Sivas *Semah of the Cranes*' music (vocal and instrumental emission as one) and dance movements.

What is astonishing here is the number and the speed of the transitions that the listeners-dancers have to negotiate in a very short period of time. In no time at all, here they are, depending on the music, forced, one after the other, to initiate a movement, to somewhat change their steps on the spot, to start moving forward, and then suddenly to slow down in order to

perform the steps again on the spot, once more to advance, suddenly to accelerate the movement, and then to interrupt their dance abruptly because the music stops. The changes appear in every music parameter.[16]

Most notably, the changes in rhythm alternate between *aksak* and binary rhythms, two times during the short four-minute piece, and at the beginning, two types of *aksak* 9/8 rhythms are played consecutively. The tempi also are always different, alternating between slow courses, accelerations, and sudden decelerations. As is shown in the video recording, the sudden decelerations pose the greatest problems for the dancers, suddenly breaking their momentum between sections 2 and 3, as well as between sections 4 and 5 at the end of the *semah*.

What has to be stressed here is the musician's control over the unfolding of the musical element and thus of the danced course. As will be shown later, the dance performance—the success of the designated dancers in performing the *semah*—is entirely dependent on the way he plays—the length of each section, liveliness of the transitions, vocal highlighting of key moments. His expertise and prerogatives allow him not only to master the text and the music, but to underline or repeat verses, add or subtract stanzas, and shorten or lengthen the instrumental parts inserted between each of them. Nevertheless, the music structure he applies is consistent. If the changes are introduced frankly and at a brisk pace, they are also coupled with clear instructions: the dancing on the spot always corresponds to the descending melody, the steps forward to the rising one. Still, changes are introduced all the time. This forces the dancers to pay extreme attention to the music. And this links them intimately to what is being said, to the text of the *semah*.

Applying the Bards' Orature to Dancing

As noted before, the words that are uttered as part of the *semah* belong to the bards' orature, the *deyiş*; they clearly pertain to the *koşma* poetic genre—verses of eleven syllables, quatrains with rhymes of the abab, ccb, ddb, etc., type, *mahlas* signature in the last quatrain. This genre is widely used in Anatolian Turkish orature to express love (including the love for God), homesickness, blame, heroism, or mourning. The pieces are performed during formal or informal social meetings—the bards (*aşık*) used to travel through the country, being invited to houses to play. But, perhaps with a few minor exceptions (generally in Alevi context), no signed bard's poem is used for a dance in Turkey, except *semah*. This is due to the ritual character of the *semah*, and to the fact that only the words of renowned Alevi poets will be pronounced during the *cem*.[17]

Two institutions have played a considerable role in shaping this expression of traditional orature, that of the bard (*aşık*) and that of the religious leader (*dede*). And while bards specialize in the role of the reciter (*zâkir*) in the *cem*, it is common for the *dedes* to be bards as well—that

[16] These changes were emphatically pointed out in 1970 by the collector, Nida Tüfekçi (Erdal 1998:136), and more recently as a general feature of the *semah* by Markoff (1993:103).

[17] And, in Koerbin's view, the *cem* is in turn "the foundational and referential context of the performance" of the *deyiş* of prominent Alevi bards (2011:206).

is, they have memorized the orature poetry interpreted on the *saz* and compose verses themselves. This is the case of Hüseyin Gazi Metin, heir to a long poetic tradition in his village, area, and province, from whom the version of *Semah of the Cranes* that is studied here was collected.

I listed above three types of poems that are sung during the *cem*: the *tevhit* (glorification of Ali, with the uniqueness of God proclaimed in the chorus), the *duaz-ı imam* (invocation of the Twelve Imams), and the *mersiye* (lamenting the tragic death of Imam Hüseyin[18]). The *semah* songs can form a fourth category, with three specific features: 1. two or more poems are sung continuously; 2. extra text is included in the form of extra verses, repetitions, and calls; 3. a dialogue with crane birds appears as an insistent theme. Let us now look at the content of the text of the *Semah of the Cranes* as it was sung during my visit to Sivas.[19]

A1	*Yine dertli dertli iniliyorsun*	Once again, dolefully, you moan
	Sarı turnam sinen yaralandı mı	My yellow crane, is your breast bruised?
	Hemen el değmeden siniliyorsun	Suddenly, without being touched, you whine
	Telli turnam sinen yaralandı mı	My aigrette-headed crane, is your breast bruised?
D1	*Has gülüm gülüm, dost gülüm gülüm*	Elected one, o dear, my dear, friend, o dear, my dear
	Has nenni nenni, dost nenni nenni	Elected one, bye, bye, friend, bye, bye
D2	*Sarı turnam, allı turnam, sinen yaralandı mı*	My yellow crane, my red-headed crane, is your breast bruised?
A2	*Baş perdeden çalınıyor bağlama*	The *bağlama* is played on the main fret
	Dertli ötüp şu sinemi dağlama	Don't sear my heart with your sad cry
	Yine bulam üstadını ağlama	I'll find your master, please stop crying
	Allı turnam telli turnam sinen yaralandı mı	My red-headed crane, my aigrette-headed crane, is your breast bruised?
D3	*Hay hay, hay hay!*	*Hay hay, hay hay!*
A3	*Yas mı tuttun giyinmişsin karalar*	Are you in mourning, because you wear black?
	Senin derdin şu sinemi yaralar	Your pain is hurting my heart
	ESİRİ der nedir derde çareler	ESIRI says: what remedies are there for the pain?
	Allı turnam telli turnam sinen yaralandı mı	My red-headed crane, my aigrette-headed crane, is your breast bruised?

[18] Son of Ali (cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet), grandson of Muhammed. Fighting to regain his place as Caliph, Hüseyin died a martyr's death at Kerbela (Iraq) in 680, as well as all those who accompanied and supported him, like Hür b. Yezid.

[19] Two more versions have already been published, the first collected text, according to its source, having been partly modified because it didn't look politically correct at the time of the collection (see Koerbin 2011:206).

D4	*Allı turnam, telli turnam, sinen yaralandı mı*	My red-headed crane, my aigrette-headed crane, is your breast bruised?
D5	*Allı turnam, telli turnam, sinen yaralandı mı*	My red-headed crane, my aigrette-headed crane, is your breast bruised?
B1	*Devredip gezersin dar-ı fenâyı*	You roam around this ephemeral world
	Bağdat diyarına vardın mı turnam	Have you been to the land of Baghdad, my crane?
	Medine şehrinde Fatma anayı	In the city of Medina, mother Fatima[20]
	Makamı ordadır gördün mü turnam	Has her place there, have you seen it, my crane?
D6	*Ay hay, ay hay!*	*Ay hay, ay hay!*
B2	*Biz de « beli » dedik nice uluya*	We, too, have said "yes" to so many high beings
	İkrar aldık iman verdik Veli'ye	We swore an oath and put our faith in the Veli[21]
	Necef deryasında pirim Ali'ye	In the ocean of Nejef,[22] to my guide Ali
	O deryaya yüzler sürdün mü turnam	Have you bowed down before that ocean,[23] my crane?
B3	*Hür Şehit de Kerbelâ'da çürümez*	Hür the Martyr[24] cannot putrefy in Kerbelâ[25]
	Halktan emir vardır kalkıp yürümez	It's the people's decision, he can't be resurrected
	İmam Hüseyin'in kanı kurumaz	Imam Hüseyin's blood cannot dry up
	Şehitler serdarın gördün mü turnam	This leader of martyrs, have you seen him, my crane?
B4	*GENÇ ABDAL'IM der ki Şah'a varalım*	GENÇ ABDAL declares: Let us go to the King
	Varıp Şah'ın divanına duralım	Let us go and stand humble before the King
	Can baş feda edip Şah'ı görelim	Let us offer our lives, and see the King
	Sen de o Şah'ımı gördün mü turnam	And you, my crane, have you seen him, this King?

Before addressing the semantic content of this text, let us look at it from a morphological point of view. First, the two poets' signature—their pseudonyms—written here in capital letters (Esiri and Genç Abdal, two locally important historical bards) shows that we have two different poems here, of three and four stanzas respectively (noted A and B), with quatrains made of

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[20] Prophet Muhammed's daughter and the Imam Ali's wife.

[21] *Veli*, the "Friend," meaning here the Imam Ali.

[22] City of Iraq where Ali's tomb is located.

[23] The image of the ocean is widely used in Sufism to convey the concept of infiniteness.

[24] Supporter of Hüseyin who died in Kerbelâ (see note 18). Legend has it that when his grave was opened in the sixteenth century, the blood dripping from his wounds had not yet dried.

[25] See note 18.

eleven-syllable verses of the *koşma* type of rhyme. What is special here is that they are sung consecutively. In all circumstances, including the *cem* ritual, poems are usually sung separately, with the *mahlas* always indicating the end of a text, dutifully closing it just as the abab rhyme structure indicates its start. Thus, linking two poems as one looks unusual.

Musically speaking, also, they are not sung as they would be in a non-*semah* context, following a regular pattern consisting of singing each verse in a single breath and separating the stanzas by instrumental phrases. Here the singer generally breaks the verses in two. But this caesura is not of the same length everywhere, and there is a point where it is not made (see Table 2). The way the poems are sung is specific to the dance context, and to what the *dede* wants the dancers to experience on this particular occasion.

A second unusual text feature concerns the verse reiterations, although this is not uncommon in the normal, non-*cem* performance—it may happen that the bard repeats the last verse of a stanza twice, and he then will do it regularly at the end of each stanza. Here, however, the repetitions of the last verse of some stanzas (poem A) are irregular. As shown by the musical analysis, they act as directions (noted D) to the dancers: D2 marks the start of dance variant 2 and links the first stanza to the second; D4 is a true reiteration of A3's last verse, with the same melody, whereas D5 shows the way back to dance variant 2 again, with a slowing down from variant 3. As for the extra text added, this is of two types. The first "direction" given (D1) is a small hypocoristic and soothing text, added to the bards' poem by the musician; it closes the first section of the *semah*. The second text added is a series of cheers or cries, *hay hay!* or *ay hay!*, that give rise to the accelerated dance variant 3—the two points where the dancers move on in the circle.

By its morphology, because of this unexpected threading of the seven quatrains of two linked poems, intertwined with versified or non-versified dance directions, the *semah* song can thus be seen as guiding the dancers through a textual story that they are made to perform. Indeed, when analyzed in relation to its sung structure, this text takes on an unexpected meaning that sheds light on the function of the *semah* within the Alevi ritual, on the relationship it establishes between the text and the faithful dancers, as well as what they are supposed to experience and realize while performing the dance.

Questioning the Flying Cranes

When starting to analyze the content of the poetic text, one's attention is immediately attracted by the fact that it addresses a bird, precisely two species of cranes. The call to cranes is a common feature of numerous Alevi *semah* songs, which has been my research focus for many years (Arnaud-Demir 2002, 2012, and 2014). Cranes are large migratory birds which, on their way between Northern Europe and the Arabian Peninsula or Africa, cross Turkey's skies and stop over in this country two times a year, more conspicuously in autumn (from north to south), when the birds migrate with their newly born chicks. As they pass, they trumpet strong and distinctive "kru kru" calls that can be heard for miles, and form spectacular V-shapes that can comprise hundreds of individuals—these migrations have been observed in Anatolia for centuries, as evidenced by ancient bas-reliefs. Cranes are revered all over the world by people for whom they

are a precious indication of the change of season—of the dreaded arrival of winter and the expected return of spring.[26] And they are also chosen as the messengers for all those who are separated, whether from the beloved or from the homeland.

In the Sivas *semah* song, consistent with the history of crane migration in Turkey, two species are invoked: the "red-headed"[27] or Common Crane (*Grus Grus*) and the "aigrette-headed"[28] or Demoiselle Crane (*Grus Virgo*).[29] The whole text is based on the questioning of the cranes, but this questioning focuses on a totally different matter in each of the two poems. The first poem is a reaction to the call of the passing cranes, a call that is perceived as a cry of deep and unbearable pain, provoking the compassion and empathy of the speaker expressing himself in first person:

> Suddenly, without being touched, you whine
> My aigrette-headed crane, is your breast bruised? . . .
> Don't sear my heart with your sad cry . . . .
> Are you in mourning because you wear black?
> Your pain is hurting my heart
> Esiri says: what remedies are there for the pain?

In this first part, there is no mention of religious concerns; the *semah* simply begins with this plaint and the painful questioning it raises.

In the second poem, on the other hand, the crane makes no sound—the text is no longer about pain. The focus is no longer on hearing, but on sight, with a similar interest in and emphasis on what has been happening in this regard. The questions continue without answer, and this time the crane is questioned about devotions that have to be made at holy places:

> Have you been to the land of Baghdad, my crane?
> In the city of Medina, mother Fatima
> Has her place there, have you seen it, my crane? . . .
> In the ocean of Nejef, to my guide Ali
> Have you bowed down before that ocean, my crane? . . .
> This leader of martyrs, have you seen him, my crane? . . .
>
> Let us offer our lives, and see the King
> And you, my crane, have you seen him, this King?

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[26] General examples are given in Treuenfels 2007.

[27] "Red crane" is the popular term in Turkey, because of the bare red crown on its head.

[28] "Aigrette-headed" is a popular term in Turkey because of the white aigrettes springing out behind the eyes on the crane's black head.

[29] The "yellow crane" in the first stanza refers, inter alia, to the color of the *bağlama*'s body.

This semantic opposition between the two poems, coupled with the information afforded by rhythm, tempo, and melody, gives the key to the performance, as shown by the comparison of textual and musical elements.

General theme Audition: questions about a painful cry Vision: questions about a devotional journey							
Text elements	A1-D1	D2-A2	D3-A3-D4	D5-B1	D5-B2 (except last verse)	B2 (last verse)-B3-B4	Last verse of B4
Caesura in stanza verses	6 + 5	4 + 7	4 + 7	No caesura	4 + 7	4 + 7	4 + 7
Notable music features: Instrumental prelude and instrumental phrases inserted in verses			Instrumental interlude before second poem				
Rhythmic cycle	9/8 2232	9/8 2322		2/4		9/8 2322	2/4
Tempo	slow	quicker and accelerating		slow		quick and accelerated	interruption
Melodic outline	up and down	downward	upward	downward	upward	upward	downward
Movement	on the spot	on the spot	forward	on the spot	forward	forward	on the spot

Table 2. Synoptic comparison of the text, music, and dance elements in the Sivas *Semah of the Cranes.*

To make sense of this *semah* event, a subtle element needs to be underscored in the middle of the table above: the performing of a lengthy instrumental interlude—almost as long as the time needed for uttering a whole stanza—located at the junction between the two poems (which look in fact separated as they traditionally should be). In other words, at the point where one moves on from hearing about an unexplained pain to inquiring about the accomplishment of a pilgrimage to Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, and where the sense of sight is highlighted as the conclusive element and the purpose of the journey—see God, see the King. This long interlude without text (and emphasis on text) starts the dancers on a binary rhythm—the rhythm of walking—while they perform the basic step *on the spot*, like a mimic. This stationary walk recalls for us the actions mimed before and during the *miraçlama*. It is an indication that, at this point of the *semah*, the dancers represent a story of displacement. Symbolically, they enact the

"pilgrimage" of the cranes, under the guidance of the *dede* who never stops watching the dancers as he plays and sings to the crying and flying birds. Consequently, the changes of rhythm, the generally abrupt (but at the same time announced) transitions between movements on the spot and forward movements, take on their full meaning: they recall and enact the stages of a devotional journey.

The interlude also bridges the gap between the first and the second poem. Traditionally, people pay a visit to the tombs of saints when they are in trouble—they seek a remedy for disease or infertility. Here, the cranes are represented as performing the devotional journey because they are in pain, although the mystery of its cause remains.

Embodying a Pilgrimage, Realized or Unrealized

Through the interplay of changes in rhythm, tempo, and melody, the musician-singer-*dede* sends and guides the dancers on an itinerary strewn with pitfalls. By complicating their progression, he forces them to listen carefully, thus putting them in direct contact with the text, which tells them about what they are performing. Though they are not the singers of their dance, in this way they embody the sacred orature as they dance it. Through the revered figure of a migrating bird, a familiar guest at the tombs of the saints, they accomplish a virtual pilgrimage. Moreover, they symbolically realize the goal of every mystic, which is to offer his life to be able to contemplate God: "Let us go and stand humble before the King / Let us offer our lives, and see the King."

But there is more, because this is a ritual of the Alevis, who share with the Shi'ites the mourning of Imam Hüseyin, and the feeling of an injustice, of a drama whose wound has never closed. They themselves have suffered pogroms and repression since the sixteenth century—and they suffered it again in their flesh on July 2, 1993, when an attack on an Alevi festival in Sivas by a mob of fundamentalists resulted in the death of thirty-three Alevis, including prominent personalities. The saints who are mentioned here, in unanswered questions, are Ali, considered the true heir of the Prophet, and his wife Fatima, Hüseyin's mother. The wound remains open, the dead body fails to putrefy, and the blood of the Imam continues to flow (second poem, third stanza). Yet, like the others, "we said 'yes'" (second poem, second stanza). This "yes" (*beli*) is the answer that as yet uncreated human beings gave when Allah asked them: "Am I not your Lord?" (*Alastu bi-Rabbikum*, Qur'an, 7.172), thus accepting to bear the burden of existence and to submit to the will of God.

Dancing the *Semah of the Cranes* in the Divriği area of Sivas is therefore a strange experience, which enacts the "special relationships" specific to ritual contexts between many elements: the singer and his instrument, the traditional orature of the bards and the dance song, the religious leader and the performers of the dance (and those who sit watching them, and whose turn to dance will come), between the faithful and the saints and divinity they have come to visit, and between the invoked cranes and the convoked dancers—both men and women, as a true representation of society. Through the *semah*, the *cem* is supposed to help achieve a goal—the theophany or the apparition of the divinity—by giving the dancers the means to dance the evocation of this theophany. But at the same time this goal remains unrealized, for the questions

remain unanswered, and the arduous itinerary can go on forever at the will of the guide: that is the inherent condition of rituality. Although the *semah* is familiar to the dancers who are not performing it for the first time, its regular reiteration in the living culture of the Alevi *cem* ritual gives it a new dimension and a new meaning each time. The transmission of the ritual orature does indeed take place in this ever renewed reiteration among the musicians and religious leaders who are its bearers, appealing to and nourishing their memory, but it also occurs among the faithful through the dance, in their astonishing embodiment of the text.

The thorough exploration and analysis of the intertwining of the various textual, musical, and choreographic elements of the Alevi *semah* through an archetypal sample, which I have presented here only in broad outline, thus offers new perspectives for the analysis of dance as a branch of orature when coupled with song. And conversely, analyzing the dancing of a text also opens new avenues of research on the traditions of oral-poetic expression.

Independent researcher

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Men of Speech: The ʿAjam Dervishes and Their Role in the Transmission of Popular Persian Narratives

Shahrokh Raei

A group of dervishes known as ʿAjam belonged originally to the dervishes without an order (*bi-selsele*). They are closely related to the Khāksāriyya and are considered as one lineage of this order today.

The Khāksār order, as one of the three Shiʿi dervish orders of today's Iran, used to have three main lineages, which were: Nurāʾi, Maʿṣum ʿAlishāhi, and Gholām ʿAlishāhi (Raei 2014:237-38). Concerning the Nurāʾi lineage, written sources, as well as Khāksār dervishes themselves, provide no further information except the name. The lineage of Maʿṣum ʿAlishāhi has also gradually declined, and most of its survivors have joined the lineage of Gholām ʿAlishāhi (Raei 2017:267). However, there are still remains of Maʿṣum ʿAlishāhi in some cities of Iran. Today, the Khāksār dervishes belong mainly to the Gholām-ʿAlishāhi lineage. The ʿAjam dervishes were later considered as the fourth lineage of the Khāksār order. It is not clear when this group of dervishes became known as part of the Khāksār.

It seems that some Khāksārs viewed the position of ʿAjam dervishes as lower than themselves and declared the ʿAjam dervishes as "footmen of poverty" (*farrāsh-e faqr*) and their own order as "king of poverty" (*solṭān-e faqr*) (Chahārdehi 1990:23; Zariri 1990:375).

On the other hand, many ʿAjam dervishes were not happy to be subordinate to the Khāksārs and acknowledged their independence from them. For example, the author of *Wasīlat al-najāt*—the most important known treatise of the ʿAjam—who is himself an ʿAjam dervish, objects to the tradition of Khāksār and introduces it as a false mystical path (Afshari 2003:282).

The ʿAjam dervishes, like the other lineages of Khāksāriyya, had most probably a historical connection with the Ḥaydaris of the Safavid era (Raei 2020:44; Maʿṣumʿalishāh 1959:68-69). Ḥaydariyya refers to two particular groups of members of the Qalandariyya, the followers of Qoṭb al-Din Ḥaydar-e Zāweʾi (d. 618/1221), as well as the followers of Mir Qoṭb al-Din Ḥaydar-e Tuni (d. 830/1426-27) (Raei 2020:43).

This Mir Qoṭb al-Din Ḥaydar-e Tuni was born in Bāku of Shervān and was a wanderer and traveler who built lodges (*tekye*) in some of the towns that he visited (Ibn Karbalāʾi 1965:467).

The followers of this Mir Qoṭb al-Din Ḥaydar, with whom the ʿAjam dervishes have a historical connection, included twelver Shiʿa (Shushtari 1972:82) and his sheikhs, like the sheikhs of ʿAjam, who were called *bābā*. Qoṭb al-Din Ḥaydar himself was known as Bābā

Ḥaydar (Ibn Karbalāʾi 1965:467; Mahdawi 2007:30). The Ḥaydaris played an essential social role during the Savafavid era; during this period, the Shāh himself appointed *bābās* of the Ḥaydari lodges (Naṣrābādi 1938:284; Mahdawi 2007:34).

It is possible that the ʿAjam dervishes also had correlations with the Noqṭawiyya. Their name is linked perhaps to the Noqṭawis, surnamed ʿAjam (Papas 2020:299). There are reports which suggest that after the suppression and fall of the Noqṭawis, those that remained dressed as ʿAjam and Khāksār dervishes and lived among them (Ẕakāwati 2014:44, 77).[1] It is also reported that there were Khāksār and ʿAjam Dervishes who interpreted the mystical books according to Noqṭawi thoughts and beliefs and introduced many mystics and poets as Noqṭawi (47).[2] In addition, in some Noqṭawi texts, a few special terms were used, which belong to the main concepts of the Khāksār tradition (115, 239).[3]

Our primary knowledge of the ʿAjam dervishes is mainly due to an important treatise called *Wasīlat al-najāt* (*Tool of Salvation*), written in 1266/1887-8 during the reign of Nāṣer al-Din Shāh (r. 1264-1341/1848-96). This treatise deals in detail with the customs, rituals and beliefs of the ʿAjam.[4] There is also the manuscript MS 4362 of the Central Library of the University of Tehran, which is a rich collection of Persian poetry copied in 1336/1918. These simple but elegant verses were recited during public declamation (*sokhanwari*) by ʿAjam dervishes (Papas 2020:293).

The ʿAjam dervishes, like other branches of Khāksāriyya and also like the *fotuwat* tradition, connect their mystical-spiritual lineage to ʿAlī b. Abī Tālib through Salmān-e Fārsi (Afshari 2008:112). Moreover, in their oral tradition, in poems and narrations, they mention two brothers named Jalil and Khalil, who must have developed the ʿAjam and the public declamation (*sokhanwari*) in today's form (Maḥjub 1958a:535; Hāshemi 2020:15).[5]

Regarding the ʿAjam dervishes, it should also be mentioned that they were mainly craftsmen and had a strong connection with the trade and professional guilds (*aṣnāf*). They introduced themselves as "seventeen orders" (*heḥdah selsele*) or, in other words, seventeen guilds or trades. The members of these seventeen particular trades received their spiritual training only from ʿAjam dervishes and were all obedient (*motiʿ*) to the order (Ridgeon 2010:152, 164). It seems that the linkage between the ʿAjam dervishes and these trades was so essential that an

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[1] Including a report in *Mirʾāt al-Ḥaq*, which implies that Majẕub ʿAlishāh (1173-1239) met some of them (Ẕakāwati 2014:78). Zayn al-ʿAbidin Shirwāni has also reported on this (Ẕakāwati 2014:44, 46).

[2] This report is related to the meeting of Nur al-din Modarresi Chahārdehi with a dervish in Behbahan in the southwest of Iran (Ẕakāwati 2014:47).

[3] Some scholars have even assumed that "Maḥmud ʿAjam," the leader of the ʿAjam dervishes, is the same as Maḥmud Pasikhāni, the founder of Noqṭawiyyah (Ẕakāwati 2014:240).

[4] This treatise was written by a dervish named Mashhadi Moḥammad Mehdi Tabrizi, and one of his devotees named ʿAli Moḥammad Kaffāsh Hamedāni helped him to edit some poems. It has been registered with the number 9200 at the Parliament Library in Tehran and has been edited and published by Mehran Afshari (Afshari 2003:231-94). Lloyd Ridgeon recently analyzed this treatise and translated parts of it into English (2020:311-20).

[5] Among others in the long poem entitled *ṣobut-e sardam*. An example of these poems is given by Morshed Qāsem Hāshemi (2020:15).

ʿAjam dervish had to be a member of one. If he was not, it was not permissible for him to enter the order (Ridgeon 2010:152).

In the treatise *Wasīlat al-najāt*, the seventeen guilds associated with the ʿAjam dervishes were mentioned as follows: 1. dervish (*darwish*), 2. Koran reciter (*qāri-ye Qurʾān*), 3. lamentation narrator (*rowżekhān*), 4. caller for prayer (*moʾaẕen*), 5. pilgrim caravan leader (*chāwush*), 6. master of the bath (*ḥammāmi*), 7. barber (*salmāni*), 8. cobbler (*kafshduz*), 9. saddler (*sarrāj*), 10. leader of traditional exercises (*kohnesawār*), 11. wrestler (*pahlawān*), 12. chef (*ṭabbākh*), 13. baker (*nānvā*), 14. grocer (*baqqāl*), 15. blacksmith (*naʿlband*), 16. water-bearer (*saqqā*), and 17. butcher (*qaṣṣāb*) (Afshari 2003:231).

In all sources, the number seventeen has been given for the guilds associated with ʿAjam. However, there are sometimes differences in the type of a small number of guilds, for example, one guild is replaced by another, or there are occasionally slight differences in the order of the guilds (Afshari 2008:112-13). Of course, these differences are trivial. For instance, guilds for the hookah-seller (*qalyān forush*), washer of corpses (*ghassāl*), winnower (*bowjār*), or coffee-house keeper (*qahwechi*) have been mentioned instead of other guilds in some sources. In the classification of different guilds, those mentioned above are mainly considered as a group that have lower status than the official guilds of the bazaar.

These professional groups also had to pay taxes, but they had no guild leader (*zaʿim* or *bāshi*) to collect their taxes to make payments to the government. Each of these guilds paid the usual tax to its deputy (*naqib*), who was historically considered to be the representative and liaison of the government (Keywāni 2013:63-64). The deputy of ʿAjam dervishes, who often lived in Mashhad, collected taxes from the seventeen trades (Chahārdehi 1990:26).[6]

The Mystical Hierarchy of ʿAjam

The Khāksār have a seven-level hierarchy in their initiatory mystical path. These seven levels, or stages (*haft marḥale*, *haft maqām*), show the spiritual level a dervish has reached. Here it is a question of attaining a certain level of spiritual accomplishment. The promotion from one stage to the next can only be realized with the consent of the sheikh, and through holding a specific ritual (Raei 2014:238-41; Gramlich 1981:80-82).

The ʿAjam also have their own seven-stage mystical hierarchy, but these stages are fundamentally different from those of the other lineages of Khāksāriyya in terms of their names and customs. The names of these seven stages are recorded in scattered sources and with slight differences in the order and sometimes even in name. In some poems and narrations of ʿAjam, these stages are stated as follows: 1. *abdāl* ("righteous person"), 2. *mofred* ("independent dervish"), 3. *qażżāb* or *ghazzāw* ("judge" or "warrior"), 4. *darwish ekhtiyār* ("authorized

[6] There are reports that Mirzā Gholām Ḥossein, the main deputy (*naqib al-mamālek*) and favorite narrator of Nāṣer al-Din Shāh, appointed a representative in each state and received taxes from these seventeen trades (Chahārdehi 1990:26, Chahārdehi n.d.:51).

dervish"), 5. *naqib* ("deputy"), 6. *ʿalamdār* ("banner holder"), and 7. *chehel gisu* ("having forty ringlets") (Maḥjub 1958c:780).[7]

The initiation ritual of the ʿAjam dervishes, like other lineages of Khāksār, is called *lesān* ("tongue") or *lesān dādan* ("giving word").[8] However, the first stage of the mystical path, which among the other lineages of Khāksār is also called *lesān*, after the initiation ritual, is called *abdāl* among the ʿAjam dervishes, using a term of the tradition of Qalandariyya. A notable point, which again shows the relationship between ʿAjam dervishes and the guilds, is the presence of representatives of specific guilds in the initiation ritual, those who would sit in the ritual place in a special order. (Afshari 2003:258-59; Ridgeon 2010:152). Initiation to the ʿAjam, like initiation to the Khāksāriyya, had certain preconditions. For example, it has been reported that the novice had to provide services to the master for one thousand and one days, which was divided into twenty-five forty-day periods (*chelle*) (Chahārdehi n.d.:51). The promotion of a dervish from lower to higher stages also had its own conditions and was done through a ritual (Maḥjub 1958c:780). When the ʿAjam dervishes reached any level of poverty (*faqr*), they received from their master a permission (*parwāne*) or license (*ejāzat-nāme*), which was called *mojallā*.[9] They had to carry their licenses with them at all times. Furthermore, they received up to twelve special items and special garb from their elders, some of which they carried with them, indicating their status.[10]

In some cases, the deputy (*naqib*) would demand the itinerant dervishes provide their licenses to make sure they were bona fide dervishes. If one of these individuals did not have the license and could not answer the deputy's secret questions correctly, the deputy would dispossess him of the position of a dervish and confiscate his dervish garb (*keswat*) (Afshari 2003:256; Modarresi 1965:59).

A dervish who rose to the rank of an authorized dervish (*darvish ekhtiyār*) attained the position of a spiritual guide (*ershād*) (Maḥjub 1958c:780). The highest stage which could be reached through promotion on the mystical path was the stage of the banner holder (*ʿalamdār*). The position of deputy (*naqib*) was to be taken from the *fotuwat* tradition (Keywāni 2013:77), and it was an official bearing that was sometimes inherited. The deputy's assistant (*dast-naqib*) operated as the executive to the deputy and carried out his orders (Maḥjub 1958c:781). Of course, the position of deputy's assistant does not, however, belong to the seven stages of the mystical hierarchy of ʿAjam. In the treatise *Wasīlat al-najāt*, the rituals related to the promotion from each stage to another, as well as the paraphernalia which a dervish receives at each stage, are described in detail (Afshari 2003:258-78).

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[7] In some sources the order of these stages is recorded differently (See Maḥjub 1958c:780; Afshari and Mirʿābedini 1995:317). The author of *Wasīlat al-najāt* only mentions four of these stages (see Afshari 2003:232).

[8] The initiation ritual is explained in the treatise *Wasīlat al-najāt* in detail (see Afshari 2003:256-58).

[9] The fourth part of *Wasīlat al-najāt* deals with different types of these permissions and licenses in detail (see Afshari 2003:262-76).

[10] For more details on these items see Afshari 2012:42.

Traditional Street Performance (*Maʿrekegiri*) and Public Declamation (*Sokhanvari*)

The ʿAjam dervishes did traditional performances on the streets and open spaces in the towns and villages. According to the *Wasīlat al-najāt*, a dervish who reached the stage of authorized dervish (*darwish ekhtiyār*) was allowed to do street performances (Afshari 2012:41), which included the public declamation (*sokhanwari*) and the delivery of Shiʿi panegyric speeches (*maddāḥi*).[11]

The oldest known text that provides us information about the people who engaged in some form of public declamation is the book known as *Kitāb al-Naqḍ*, which was written in the twelfth century CE by ʿAbd al-Jalil Qazvini Rāzi (b. late-eleventh century CE) (Calmard 1993:132; Afshari 2012:34). This book tells of two religious groups who performed on streets, as well as in bazaars and open spaces, before and during the twelfth century. A group that was Shiʿi and recited poems about the heroism, valor, and virtues of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib to the public was called *manāqebkhān* (panegyrist), and the second group, who did the same act but were Sunni, were known as *fażāʾelkhān* (virtue orator) (Calmard 1993:132-33; Afshari 2012:34). According to this Shiʿi author the poems that were recited by the Shiʿi *manāqeb-khāns* were by distinguished poets, while the stories and poems recited by the Sunni *fażāʾel-khāns* were popular poetry of much lower quality (Calmard 1993:132).

The most important source on the street performance and public declamation is *Fotuwat-nāme-ye solṭāni* (*Solṭāni's Chivalry and Guild Treatise*), which was written in the fifteenth century by Ḥoseyn Wāʿeẓ Kāshefi Sabzewāri (839-910/1436-1504). This text deals in detail with different groups of traditional street performers (*maʿrekegir*) and divides them into three main categories: men of speech (*ahl-e sokhan*), men of power (*ahl-e zur*), and men of games (*ahl-e bāzi*) (Kāshefi 1971:279).

This text is mainly in the form of questions and answers and describes each of these groups in detail and, again, divides them into different categories. The men of speech are divided into three main groups: the first group is the panegyrists (or cantors) (*maddāḥān*) and eloquent orators (*gharrākhānān*), the second is the special orators (*khawāṣguyān*), and the third is the storytellers (*qeṣṣekhānān*) and legend tellers (*afsāneguyān*) (Kāshefi 1971:280).[12] In fact, this text considers the first group as superior to the second group, which is superior to the third (297).

Wāʿeẓ Kāshefi himself belonged to the group of panegyrists (*maddāḥān*), and his other work, *Rawḍat al-Shuhadāʾ* (*Martyrs' Garden*), which is more famous than *Fotuwat-nāme*, has caused a significant change in the history of the delivery of panegyric speeches (*maddāḥi*) (Calmard 1993:133; Afshari 2012:39). The Persian term *rowże-khāni*, which means lamentation over the sufferings of the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*), is also derived from the same work of Kāshefi.

In *Fotuwat-nāme-ye solṭāni*, the delivery of panegyric speeches (*maddāhi*) is divided into several categories based on the types and content of recitations. In this work, it is said (Kāshefi 1971:286):

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[11] The word *morshed* (spiritual guide), which is used for a Sufi or dervish with the permission of guidance, has also been used in popular literature for a dervish who does street performance.

[12] Some sources and manuscripts introduce a few of these panegyrists (see Afshari 2012:34-35, 40).

> If they ask how many types of the delivery of panegyric speeches (*maddāḥi*) exist, say three types: first, those who recite only the poems, whether Arabic or Persian, and they are called the simple panegyrists (*maddāḥ-e sādekhān*). Second, those who narrate only prose and tell of miracles and virtues, and they are called the eloquent orators (*gharrākhān*). Third, those who speak in prose and poetry together. They explain the purposed meaning sometimes in prose and recite the poems afterwards and sometimes vice versa. This group is called the stilted orators (*moraṣṣaʿkhān*), and they possess a higher virtue than the other two groups.

In *Fotuwat-nāmeh-ye solṭāni*, the special symbols and tools of the panegyrists are also illustrated as follows: spear (*neyze*), banner (*towq*), girdle of chivalry (*shadd*), tablecloth (*sofre*), lantern (*cherāgh*), and dervish axe (*tabarzin*) (Kāshefi 1971:286). According to this text, the specific banner (*towq*) was a long spear on which the panegyrist tied a piece of felt and installed it into the ground of the performance arena (*meydān-e maʿrekegiri*). The reach of the banner's shadow was recognized as the owner's performance space, and no other performer and panegyrist was allowed to recite or perform in this area (288).

For the classification of men of speech (*ahl-e sokhan*), provided by Kāshefi, the narrators (*naqqāls*) are actually in the third group, among the storytellers (*qeṣṣekhān*). The *naqqāls* are also among the ʿAjam dervishes, and in the early periods they narrated from books like *Romuz-e Ḥamze*, *Ḥoseyn Kord-e Shabestari*, and *Khāwarnāmeh*. These texts mostly included religious content and were specifically about praising and describing the heroism and virtues of ʿAli, the first Imam of Shiʿa (Maḥjub 1958a:531).

In his work (*Fotuwat-nāme*), Kāshefi divides *naqqāli* into two categories, telling anecdotes (*ḥekāyat-guʾi*) and reciting poetry (*naẓm-khāni*), and he mentions the principles and mores of both of these (Kāshefi 1971:304-05). He also describes the chair (*ṣandali*) and the dervish axe (*tabarzin*) as special ritual tools of the *naqqāls*, and associates many rituals and mores especially with the chair of *naqqāl* (see Kāshefi 1971:303).[13]

The Education

There have always been enthusiasts who loved the art of public declamation and accompanied the declaimer as apprentices. These disciples received poems from the declaimer and learned them by heart, and they usually recited or sang them aloud before the start of the performance or whenever the master asked them to (Maḥjub 1958c:779). If an apprentice was successful in attracting the attention of the audience, and was also willing to join the group of declaimers, then after performing the ritual of *lesān* ("tongue") and giving word (*lesān dādan*), he could join the circle of public declaimers (*sokhanwar*) and at the same time the ʿAjam dervishes. From that point, the apprentice would accompany the declaimer as a disciple, following the ranks of promotion of the public declamation and, at the same time, advancing along the mystical path of ʿAjam (Maḥjub 1958c:780).

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[13] Alexandre Papas provides valuable information on the performances and social status of the *maddāh* in Central Asia, especially in Uzbekistan (2010:183-95 and 2019:283-97).

The poems sung by the declaimers are in the same style as the poems of the panegyrists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Afshari 2012:42-43). The panegyrists would sometimes compose these poems themselves, or they used the work of many other poets who are unknown to us today (Maḥjub 1958c:783). In their poems, the panegyrists competed in particular with Ferdowsi, comparing themselves to him and presenting themselves as superior (Afshari 2012:46).

According to *Taḏkirat al-Shuʿarāʾ* written by Dawlatshāh Samarqandi (c. 834-900/1431-1495), the panegyrists were skilled in composing a unique genre of Persian literature called *Welāyat-nāme* (Afshari 2012:44, 64). A known volume of poems entitled *ʿAli-nāme* is written in this genre. This volume, which was composed by a person named Rabiʿ (b. 420/1029) and finished in 482/1089-90, is known as one of the first Twelver Shiʿi literary poems (Afshari 2012:54).

An Example of a Public Declamation (*Sokhanwari*) in Recent Decades

Moḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjub's reports about public declamations (*sokhanwari*) that were held in some coffee houses in Tehran in 1337/1958-59 are among the few accurate reports of this kind (Maḥjub 1958a-c).[14]

According to these reports, initially an ʿAjam dervish whose task it was to organize a public performance in a coffee house brought a number of dervish paraphernalia along with his equipment (*aṣāṣ*), which included animal skins (for instance deer, leopard, and sometimes sheep). The skins were nailed to the wall to prepare the stage. The symbols and coats of arms of seventeen guilds and additional paraphernalia, such as the dervish string girdle (*reshteh*), begging bowl (*kashkul*), horn (*nafir*), dervish axe (*tabarzin*), dervish stick (*meṭrāq*), the "sword" of the swordfish (*arre nahang*), and a "stone of contentment" (*sang-e qanāʿat*), were nailed between the skins (Maḥjub 1958a:531). In fact, each skin belonged to a specific guild, and the symbol of that guild, which consisted of one or two of its tools symbolically made on a smaller scale, was hung or nailed next to the skin (Maḥjub 1958a:535 and 1958b:631).

The coffee houses were busier on the nights of Ramaḍān, and the sessions of public declamation had more visitors during that month. The preparation of the stage and nailing of the skins (*pustkubi*) was usually done on the last night of Shaʿbān, and thus, the coffee house was prepared for the public declamation during Ramaḍān. The skins and symbols of the seventeen guilds were hung in a particular order. The declaimer had to know the specific order of the skins, and whenever someone asked him about it, he had to answer as proof of his competence and ability (Maḥjub 1958b:631).[15]

The Khāksār dervishes have specific pieces of poetry assigned to their paraphernalia, and to some of their rituals, which are called *ṣobut* ("proof"), for example, *ṣobut-e kashkul* ("the proof of the begging bowl"). These poems express the history, reason, and manner of using that

[14] These reports are based on the participation of Maḥjūb in several public declamation sessions accompanied by a declaimer named ʿAmūḥājī (Afshari 2008:124).

[15] For the order of the skins of the seventeen guilds see Maḥjub 1958b:631.

implement or performing that ritual, and explain its mystical importance, and also the spiritual connection of that implement with the elders of the order. ʿAjam dervishes and declaimers also had such poems called *ṣobut-e hefdah selsele* ("proof of the seventeen orders"), which were used to describe the guilds and the order of their symbols and their skins. The declaimer recited them from memory while preparing the stage (Maḥjub 1958b:631). It has been said that the declaimers usually did not do the public declamation—at least ostensibly—as a job or to earn money (Maḥjub 1958a:533).

Today, some high-ranking ʿAjam dervishes still enjoy a special reputation and popularity among Iranians. For example, the poet Shāṭer ʿAbbās Ṣabuḥi (655-715/1257-1315) and the famous wrestler Seyyed Ḥasan Shojāʿat (655-725/1257-1325), known as Ḥasan Razzāz, were ʿAjam dervishes with the rank of *darwish ekhtiyār* (Maḥjub 1958c:780-81).

From the end of the Qajar era onwards, with the modernization of Iranian society, the number and role of ʿAjam dervishes have been significantly reduced. According to Maḥjub, already in 1337/1958-59 only a group of ʿAjam dervishes in the first stage of their mystical path (*abdāl*) and a small number of dervishes in the second stage (*mofred*)[16] were left (1958c:781).

However, there are still remnants of the ʿAjam tradition in present-day Iran, such as a few authentic *naqqāls* who still tell stories in circles and coffee houses. Of the customs and traditions of the ʿAjam dervishes, at least some paraphernalia and clothes, and some aspects of their past traditions and customs survive.

Summary

Ahl-e-sokhan (men of speech) is a general title used in Kāshefi's fifteenth-century treatise which refers to several groups engaged in different forms of public declamation. These groups had a close and strong connection with the tradition of *fotuwat*. Men of speech were, in fact, remnants of the traditions of the Qalandars and itinerant Ḥaydari dervishes of the Safavid era, who until recently gave street performances and public declamation in dervish apparel. The groups of men of speech mostly belonged to the community of ʿAjam dervishes. One of the main occupations and social roles of the ʿAjams was public declamation.

The fusion of *fotuwat* and Sufism, which probably dates back to the thirteenth century CE, can be explicitly seen in the case of the ʿAjam dervishes. The ʿAjam dervishes and other lineages of Khāksāriyya are committed to the principles and traditions of *fotuwat* and observe these as the basis of their doctrinal principles.

The ʿAjam dervishes had an explicit connection with some professional guilds, which dates back to the relationship of both groups with *fotuwat*. The association of these groups is also reflected in their literature and treatises.

The detailed classification of men of speech, as presented in the Kāshefi's treatise, refers to their large number, the nature of their activities, and the importance of their social status at the time. During the Safavid period, the work of various groups of men of speech, including reciters

[16] The word *mofred* has been interpreted as someone who can do his duties alone and no longer has to follow the master's orders (Maḥjub 1958c:780).

of eulogies and panegyrists, flourished. They dressed as dervishes and played a very decisive role in propagating the Shiʿa.

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Mîrza Mihemed / Mirza Pamat: The Tales of the Fabled Hero in Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic Oral Sources[1]

Alexey Lyavdansky

The field studies of Neo-Aramaic dialects that have proliferated recently have yielded many folklore texts. During the author's fieldwork (together with Christina Benyaminova) with one speaker of Neo-Aramaic, the sophisticated plot of a folk story with a hero named Mirza Pamat attracted his attention. A comparison of this story with other Neo-Aramaic field corpora has revealed not only that the plot of this story has clear parallels, but that the hero of the story is popular among several Christian groups of Neo-Aramaic speakers. Further research has shown that Mîrza Mihemed as a folktale hero is not restricted to the oral tradition of Aramaic-speaking Christians. Similar names may be found in Persian, Arabic, and Azerbaijani folk traditions, but the hero with the name Mîrza Mihemed or Mîrza Mehmûd is especially popular in the Kurdish oral tradition of fairytales. This suggests that the corpus of Kurdish tales about Mîrza Mihemed is the possible source of the Neo-Aramaic fairytales with this name of a hero.

This article explores the Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic oral corpora of texts with Mîrza Mihemed as a protagonist. My ultimate aim is to confirm whether the Aramaic and Kurdish Mîrza Mihemed tales belong to the same stock of traditional stories, or whether they are just random combinations of the name Mîrza Mihemed with certain folktale plots. The text of the article is construed as follows: first, the reader is introduced to the general context of Kurdish-Christian cultural interaction in various spheres; next, the Kurdish folktale traditions of Mîrza Mihemed are discussed; the third and the main part of the article deals with several Neo-Aramaic folktales with the same hero and their possible plot parallels within the Kurdish oral tradition.

1. Kurdish-Christian Cultural Interaction

Kurds and Christians lived in Kurdistan alongside each other for centuries. Most of the Western accounts of their interaction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are dominated by the issue of Kurdish atrocities against Christians. In recent decades it became more popular to focus on the sufferings of Kurds themselves from Ottoman or Kemalist rulers. Talking about

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Christian and Kurdish mutual relations, the peaceful aspect of their interaction still remains largely unexplored. Every researcher or traveler familiar with the Near East has many times witnessed communication in everyday life between Arabs and Jews, Assyrians and Kurds, Turks, and Armenians. These observations are not intended to wipe out the memory of many mutual atrocities, but these sorts of peaceful interactions have inevitably left their imprint on the lore and culture of these communities. In the following, I will briefly summarize what is known about the mutual influence of Kurds and Syriac Christians (Assyrians) upon their languages, oral literature, and customs. I will do this with a particular focus on the Kurdish influence on Assyrians, because it corresponds to what will be discussed in the main body of the paper. In many cases where one finds common linguistic, narrative, or other cultural features, it is hard to say who influenced whom. On the other hand, one of the possible options is that both communities were influenced by some third cultural entity, or that the said feature could be a widespread regional or general phenomenon.

The mutual cultural influence between Kurds and Christians living in Kurdistan may well be clear to insiders, representatives of these communities. When it comes to the research literature, here it will suffice to highlight only the most significant issues. As far as social relations are concerned, there were long periods of peaceful coexistence between Kurds and Assyrians in Hakkari (Aboona 2008). The case study of Kurdish-Christian (Syriac) relations in Diyarbakir province shows a high degree of social, economic, and even political integration between these two population groups in the late Ottoman period (Gaunt 2012). The documentation of the earlier periods being scarce, it appears that good relations started to deteriorate significantly before the great crisis that occurred in Hakkari in 1843 (Eber 2008). Historical sources may always be insufficient and their analysis biased by nationalistic and political agendas, but there are undisputed linguistic data, especially in the area of lexical borrowings, which point to a very profound influence of Kurdish language on Neo-Aramaic, whether it be Turoyo or North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (Chyet 1995). The data concerning the Neo-Aramaic influence on Kurdish are less clear and less studied (Chyet 1997).

Talking about influences, one should not overlook the possibility of more complex processes than one-way influence. For example, certain linguistic phenomena may be explained as regional features, common to the main languages of Kurdistan. Discussing the mutual Kurdish-Aramaic influences, Michael Chyet points to several proverbs that are common to Kurds and Syriac Christians (Chyet 1995). In many cases these proverbs, which are not universal, are shared also by Arabs, Persians, and Turks (see also Sabar 1978). As another example, when Western readers first encounter a description of an Assyrian wedding, some customs may seem to them strange and probably unique to Assyrians. When a bride enters the groom's house, he and his fellows stand on the roof of the house; the groom throws an apple at the bride, sometimes aiming at her head (Lalayan 1914:31). Finding the same custom among Kurds (Sweetnam 1994:143), one may conclude that either Kurds influenced Christians, or the other way around. However, the custom is shared by Turks, and similar customs may be found in other places (Üstünova 2011). The types of the folktales and narrative motifs discussed below may not be shared by Kurds and Assyrians (Syriac Christians) alone. In most cases a painstaking investigation on a broad textual basis is needed to prove or disprove the direction of the

influence, but in the case of the stories of Mîrza Mihemed (Mirza Pamat), the very name of the hero may help to define the direction of influence.

2. Mîrza Mihemed in the Kurdish Oral Tradition

Kurdish folklore studies are currently a flourishing discipline. The first transcriptions and translations of Kurdish folktales appeared approximately 150 years ago. They were made by Western linguistic researchers. The modern situation is characterized by the activity of many native Kurdish researchers and amateur folklorists. In sum, it has brought about an immense corpus of published texts. On the other hand, the analytical component of this research is still insufficient. Even the outstanding researchers of Kurdish folklore, such as Heciyê Cindî, Ordîxanê Celîl, and Celîlê Celîl, have been concerned mostly with collecting and publishing the texts, rather than with analysis. One of the main problems for anybody researching Kurdish folklore is the lack of a comprehensive typological index of Kurdish folktales,[2] as has been produced by El-Shamy for Arabic (2004), by Marzolph for Persian (1984), and by Eberhard and Boratav for Turkish folktales (1953, hereafter TTV), to name but a few. Therefore, Kurdish folktales are underrepresented in such general typological works as Uther 2004.[3]

Even a cursory look at the lists of Kurdish folktales in the existing editions shows that one name occurs in the titles more often than others, namely that of the hero Mîrza Mihemed (MM). It has different variants of spelling and pronunciation, but the use of this name suggests that this must be the same hero.[4] Could it be that the many occurrences of this name in folktales merely testify to its popularity as a male name among Kurds? This may be the case, of course, but the roles of the personages with the name MM usually follow the pattern of the typical main

[2] This was already pointed out by Allison (2001:15). The author refers to only two sources, which discuss narrative typology within Kurdish oral tradition (Spies 1972; Marzolph 1984). Additionally, two collections of Kurdish folktales translated into Russian have typological notes for each text (Rudenko 1970; Dzhalilov et al. 1989).

[3] It mentions only 151 Kurdish versions for more than 2,500 tale types. For example, the entry on the famous universal plot ATU 707 "The Three Golden Children" does not refer to any Kurdish version, but at least two Kurdish versions have been published long ago; see Rudenko 1970:147-55, no. 50; Dzhalilov et al. 1989:71-80, no. 4.

[4] The various forms and spellings of this name may be classified into two groups using two different derivatives of the Arabic root *ḥmd—Muḥammad* and *Maḥmūd*. *Muḥammad*: Mîrza Mihemed (Îşler 2014; Öner 2016), Mîrze Mihemed (Demir 2016; Alakom 2002), Mîrza Meheme (Medenî Ferho 1995), Mîrza Miḫammad (MacKenzie 1962); Mîr Mihemed (Demir 2016), Mîr Mihê (Zinar 2003-05). *Maḥmūd*: Мирзə Məh'муд (Cindî 1962), Мирзə Мə'муд (Cindî 1969), Мирза-Мамуд (Druzhinina 1959; Rudenko 1970), Мирза Махмуд (Dzhalil 1989), Mîrze Memud (Alakom 2002), Mîrze Mehmûd (Evdal 2006). It appears that the oral tradition did not pay attention to the etymological difference of two major variants of this name, Mîrza Miheme and Mîrza Mahmud, using both of them for the same hero. See, for example, Kurdish texts with the same plot using both variants in (3.2.1). Note also the variants Mîr Mihemed and Mîr Mihê. The first element, *mîr*, is etymologically derived from Arab. *ʔamīr*, "commander, prince, emir," with basically the same meaning as *mîrza* (*mîrze*) < Pers. *mirzā* ("prince").

male hero of a fairytale, who kills monsters and dragons and finally marries a princess.[5] Very often MM is himself a prince, which finds corroboration in the meaning of his name, because *mîrza* in Kurdish means "prince."[6]

Therefore a number of folktales may constitute a sort of corpus of tales with the same protagonist. The scope of the present paper does not permit a comprehensive account of the corpus of folktales about MM. We may imagine a collection of stories with MM as the main hero as a corpus unified by certain narrative features; however, the tradition is free as regards the use of this or other names in variants of the same plot. Bünyamin Demir (2016) attempted to define the range of narrative motifs that characterize the corpus of MM's tales. The present paper proposes to move in another direction: to demonstrate which plot types constitute the core of the corpus in question. As will be shown below, there are a number of Kurdish texts with MM as a hero which belong to the widely known plot type ATU 301. It is argued that Kurdish texts belonging to the type 301 typically have MM as their main figure. Therefore, it can be shown that this narrative type at least is one of the plots typically ascribed to MM in the Kurdish tradition.

The following summary of what we know about this corpus does not claim to be exhaustive. It merely seeks to show that the stories with this hero are notably popular among Kurdish storytellers. It should be noted that the title of a story does not always include the name of the hero.

As far as could be judged by the sources at the author's disposal, the earliest recordings of such stories were made by the outstanding Kurdish folklorist Heciyê Cindî. His collections of Kurdish folktales appeared in several volumes.[7] He recorded the tales in Armenia. Three significant collections of Kurdish folktales that appeared in Russian translations in the Soviet Union all include MM fairytales.[8] Folktales collected by the writer Emîne Evdal, who lived most of his life in Soviet Armenia, were published posthumously with Russian translations. They include another three MM fairytales.[9] Another group of publications come from what may be

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[5] This role was aptly summarized by Ulrich Marzolph (1984:24): "Die typische Heldenfigur ist der Prinz (*pesar-e pādešāh*), im weiteren Verlauf der Erzählung einfach Jüngling (*ğavān*) genannt, hierbei oft auch der jüngste von drei Söhnen des Königs, wobei den beiden älteren negative Rollen zufallen. Dieser Held vollbringt Abenteuer, besiegt Dämonen und Ungeheuer, bewältigt schwierige Aufgaben und erlangt hierbei oder hierdurch endlich die geliebte Prinzessin."

[6] *Mîrza*, "prince; fils de prince" (Nezan, Bedir Khan, and Bertolino 2017:1038).

[7] "Diranzêrîn" (Cindi 1957); "Чьлкэзи, бьлбьли ь'эзарэ," "Мирзэ Мэ'муд у һэспе ѡи," "Мэймун Ханьм у Мирзэ Мэ'муд" (Cindî 1961); "Шире шер э'йаре шерда," "Голбарин" (Cindî 1962); "Мирзэ Мэ'муд у П'эри ханьм," "Мирзэ Мэ'муд у дeѡ," "Мирзэ Мэ'муд," "Мирзэ Мэ'муд у хушка ѡи" (Cindî 1969); "Мирзэ Мэ'муд у Дургэр ог'ли," 1980, "Мирзэ Мэ'муд у бре ѡи" (Cindî 1988); "Mîrmehmed û beq," "Mîrze Mehmed û Kraszêrîn," "Mîrze Memûd û beran" (Cindî 2005).

[8] "Mîrza-Mamud" (Druzhinina 1959); "Mîrza Mamud and Khezaran Bolbol," "Mîrza-Mamud" (Rudenko 1970); "Mîrza Mahmud and Dunya Guzal," "Mîrza Mahmud and Three Girls," "Hatun Maymun," "Mîrza Mahmud" (Dzhalilov et al. 1989).

[9] "Mîrze Mehmûd," "Dar," "Bozelî," "Gulperî" (Evdal 2006).

called a new generation of Kurdish folklorists from Turkey,[10] including one book published in Germany.[11] A special case is the MA dissertation of B. Demir (2016; Artuklu University, Mardin): the work is based on eight untitled MM fairytales, which are published for the first time in this dissertation. The majority of these texts are in the Kurmanji dialect. These more than 40 texts may serve as proof of the popularity of this personage in Kurdish tradition. An additional indication that MM is not a marginal figure in Kurdish oral tradition is the set expression *çîrokên Mîrza Mihemed*, "the fairy tales of Mîrza Mihemed," which was included in an authoritative Kurdish dictionary (Nezan, Bedir Khan, and Bertolino 2017:1038).

Why did Kurdish tradition choose this name for the main hero of fairytales? One possible explanation may be based on another part of oral tradition, the Kurdish historical songs, which sometimes refer to non-fictional historical events. One of the heroes of these songs in Yezidi oral tradition is Mirza Mohammed (Allison 2001:79), probably identical with Mirza Mamad (Dzhalilov 2003:174-76). There are also reports by western scholars and travelers who visited Kurdistan in the nineteenth century of a certain legendary religious (and adventurous) authority named Mirza Mohammad, who was also known among Yezidi Kurds.[12] Therefore the possible evolution of this figure could be from a historical person, through the role of a hero of historical songs, to that of the hero of fairytales.

Is MM, with whatever variants of this name, only a popular hero of Kurdish fairytales? In fact, there are some indications of the popularity of the names Muḥammad and Maḥmūd in the Arabic oral tradition. Especially popular is Muḥammad the Clever (*muḥammad iš-šāṭir*) in oral texts from Palestine and Egypt (Lebedev 1990:308; Sirhan 2014:53). Among the Arabic folktales collected by Lady E. S. Drower in Iraq, one encounters the protagonists Melek Muhammad and Mahmud (Buckley 2007). A number of Turkish folktales have Mehmet as a hero (TTV). A hero Mamed or Melik Mamed is found in Azerbaijanian folklore (Bagrij and Zejnally 1935), but this name does not appear to be so popular as Muḥammad the Clever in Arab folklore. Persian tradition has a hero named Malik Moḥammad (Osmanov 1987). The only native tradition prone to use this specific combination of the title "prince" (*mîrza*) and the name Muḥammad is the Kurdish oral tradition. The popularity of the derivatives of the names Muḥammad and Maḥmūd in the folktales from the Islamic world in general may have contributed to the specific popularity of the name Mîrza Mihemed (Mîrza Mehmûd) in the Kurdish tradition.

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[10] "Mîrza Mihemed û çavreşa qîza mîre ereban" (Îşler 2014); "Mîrza Mihemed û Çilkezî," "Mîrza Mihemed û Urfût," "Mîrza Mihemed û Nasiro" (Öner 2016); "Mihemedê Nêçîrvan" (Keskin 2019).

[11] "Mirzemhema;" "Mirzemhema und der Vogel Teyre Simir" (Yas 2010).

[12] "After all had retired to rest, the Yezidi Mullah recited, in a low chanting tone, a religious history, or discourse, consisting of the adventures and teachings of a certain Mîrza Mohammed" (Layard 1853:88); "The teachings of a certain Mirza Muhammed are also said to be propounded by the Izedi Sheikhs" (Ainsworth 1861:40).

3. Mîrza Mihemed in the Oral Traditions of Aramaic-Speaking Christians

3.1 Method

In the main body of this work, dealing with the analysis of the plot of selected folktales with MM as the main hero, I will adopt the following procedure. A Neo-Aramaic text is retold according to narrative entities, usually called "motifs" in narratological studies. The next step is the identification of the type of story in question. It is the specific constellation of narrative motifs and their characteristic sequence that needs to be studied in order to define the type to which a given folktale belongs. Then, a Kurdish story with a similar plot is compared with its Aramaic parallel story: all the deviations of its plot from that of the Aramaic story are registered. This analysis aims to determine whether a given Kurdish story belongs to the suggested tale type or not.

For the purposes of this article, only Neo-Aramaic texts are being retold completely. As far as the relevant Kurdish texts are concerned, only their divergences from the storyline of the parallel Aramaic text are discussed. This does not imply that the Kurdish texts are regarded as secondary to their Aramaic plot parallels. On the contrary, it is understood that the Aramaic versions are, most probably, retellings of the Kurdish originals within the tradition of MM folktales.

3.2 The Traditions of Eastern Syriac Christians

By "Eastern Syriac," we mean that branch of the Syriac Christian world which originally belonged to the Assyrian Church of the East, and later split into the traditional church of the same name, and the Catholic, "Chaldean" Church (Murre-van den Berg 2018:771). These communities historically occupied regions in eastern Turkey (Silopi, Hakkari, Van), northern Iraq (Dohuk, Nineveh, Arbil), and North-Western Iran (West Azerbaijan). In all these areas, Syriac Christians lived in close contact with the Kurdish population. In Iranian Azerbaijan, the contact with the Kurdish language was less extensive, because the majority of the local population consisted of Azerbaijani-speaking Turks, at least from the time around the rule of Shah Abbas (1571-1629) until today. It appears that Kurdish was more influential in Urmia in the Middle Ages, but the presence of Kurdish speakers in Iranian Azerbaijan is still considerable.

The texts discussed here represent the three main regions of the Eastern Syriac world: Hakkari in Turkey (3.2.1), the province Duhok in Iraq (3.2.2), and the region of Urmia (3.2.3, and a parallel text in 3.2.1) in Iran. Since most of the Christian population left these regions during the twentieth century, the texts were recorded in the diaspora (Russia, Georgia, and Finland).

As far as the phonetic shape of the hero's name is concerned, there are several variants in Neo-Aramaic sources: Mirza Pamat (3.2.1), Mərza Pămət (3.2.2), Mirza Mamed (3.2.1, 3.2.3). All of them are derived from a Kurdish name of the type Mîrza Mahmûd with the series of vowel shifts û > e > a/ə, and a consonant shift m > p. The shift û > e may be explained by contamination with the name Mihemed; m > p could have been triggered by dissimilation.

3.2.1 “A Tale of the King”

This text was recorded by Christina Benyaminova (Tumasova), in Moscow, from a speaker of the Ṭāl dialect, one of the North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic dialects. The informant, Avdisho Khambeshaya, was born in Georgia and moved to Moscow twenty years ago. The speakers of the Ṭāl dialect, who live in Russia, Georgia, Sweden, Germany, and Australia, all originate from a group of villages located in the province of Hakkari (Turkey). The forefathers of this informant left Turkey in the second decade of the twentieth century and moved to Georgia.

The recording was made in two sessions, because at the first attempt to tell the story the informant was not sure that he would be able to reproduce it as a whole and stopped before completing the story. The first fragment, recorded in November, 2013, was published in a master’s thesis (Tumasova 2015) by Christina Benyaminova (Tumasova). The recording is reproduced in the eCompanion to the present article.

In February, 2014, a continuation of the story was recorded by the same informant. This text, which is much longer, will be published in due course in a collection of texts from a number of speakers of the Ṭāl dialect (subdialect: Badaraye). In the following, a summary of the content of this text is given. It is based on the transcription of the first part by Benyaminova, and on an unpublished transcription of the second part, prepared by Benyaminova, in collaboration with A. Lyavdansky. In the following discussion, this text is referred to with the siglum BL.

1. There was a king who had three sons. The name of the youngest son was Mirza Pamat (MP).
2. The king had a garden with all kinds of fruits. Once he noticed that all the fruits had been stolen.
3. He called up his sons and ordered them to guard the garden the next year when the new fruits were ripe.
4. The two older sons tried to guard the garden one after another, but they failed, having been overcome by sleep. While they slept, an ogre stole all the fruit.
5. Then it was MP’s turn to guard the garden. Feeling that sleep was overcoming him, he went to a Jew and demanded a remedy against sleep from him.
6. The Jew advised him to cut a finger and to pour salt on the wound. This helped MP to stay awake, and he saw the ogre who came to steal the fruit.
7. MP struck the ogre with his sword and wounded him. The ogre fled, and the lad followed him by the trail of his dripping blood until he came to a well where the ogre disappeared.
8. The youth went to his father and asked him to provide warriors to help him with the ogre. His brothers also went with him to the well.
9. They tried to go down the well with a rope. The oldest and the middle brother failed, being scared of the darkness inside the well, but MP managed to reach the bottom of the well.
10. In the well he saw the ogre dying and three girls. The girls told MP to leave the place lest the ogre kill him. But the youth disobeyed the girls and killed the ogre.
11. He sent all three girls up to his brothers. The youngest girl didn’t want to go up before MP, because she believed that the brothers would cheat him and leave him in the well.
12. Forced by MP, she agreed to go up and gave him three keys, with instructions on what to do with them. There were three rooms at the bottom of the well. In the first room he must take the hen

with small golden chickens; in the second room, a magic sword; and in the third room, a wild horse. He must try to use the horse to throw him up to the top of the well; if he failed to stay on the horse, it would throw him down.

13. MP carries out the instructions, but the horse throws him down and he falls into another world, into another city.

14. There he meets an old lady who invites him to live with her as a son.

15. In the meantime, the two brothers and the three girls come to the king; the brothers offer the youngest girl to the king as a bride. They say that MP has fled.

16. The youngest girl agrees to marry the king only if they bring her a hen with seven golden chickens.

17. Meanwhile, MP asks the old lady for water, and she brings him cattle urine, explaining that the supply of water is controlled by a dragon.

18. MP witnesses a young girl being brought, to be eaten by the seven-headed dragon in exchange for water.

19. He talks to the girl and lays his head on her knees to sleep while waiting for the dragon. Her tears wake him up.

20. The hero kills the dragon, cutting off all seven heads. The girl makes a sign on the body of MP, with the blood of the dragon.

21. After killing the dragon and opening the source of the water for the people, MP returns to the old lady and hides.

22. The girl tells the story of her rescue to her father, the king of that country. He orders all the young men of the country to come to him. The princess checks all the youths without success.

23. Someone says to the king that an old lady has a son. His servants bring MP to the king. The girl recognizes him as her rescuer.

24. The king offers MP everything: his daughter, and his kingdom. MP declines everything.

25. MP comes back to the old lady, and she explains to him what to do in order to return to the upper world. He needs to ask the bird Simarkho to take him to his country; but he also needs to ask the king to give meat and wine, for Simarkho, to feed her on the way home.

26. MP comes to the king and asks him to provide meat and wine. The king grants his request.

27. Simarkho and MP fly to his father's kingdom. MP feeds the bird with meat and wine. When the meat is finished, he cuts a piece of flesh from his leg and gives it to her. Having realized that the meat is human, the bird hides it under her tongue.

28. When they land in the father's kingdom, Simarkho takes the flesh out of her mouth, puts it back on MP's leg, and flies away.

29. The king does not recognize MP and does not accept him, because he believes that he was eaten by the ogre.

30. The bride of the king is shown different chickens with seven small chickens, but none of them are any good. Only one set of chickens finds favor with the bride, the one brought by MP, and she understands that MP has returned.

31. MP is invited to the king, and the girl announces that this is Mirza Pamat. He tells the whole story to the king. His brothers are forgiven; all three brothers marry. Only the king is now left without a bride.

32. MP suggests stealing the wife of a Jew as a bride for his father. Overcoming many obstacles (seven doors with seven keys and others), MP brings the woman to his father.

Seven texts with the same plot and with the same hero, named Mîrza Mihemed, were identified within the available Kurdish (Kurmanji) and Neo-Aramaic sources. (The sigla used to refer to these texts in the subsequent discussion are given in boldface.)

Aramaic examples:

"A King and Three Sons" (*Malka u ṭla bruni*). The text was recorded by K. Tsereteli between 1944 and 1962 in Georgia from Rezo Khoshabayev, a speaker of Christian Urmi Neo-Aramaic. It was published in phonological transcription with Russian translation in Tsereteli 1965:104-17 (story no. XIV). The name of the hero is Mirza-Mamed. **T**.

Kurdish examples:

1. "Мирзэ Мэһ'муд у тайре симьр" ("Mirze Mehmud and Tayrê Sîmir"[13]). It was recorded by Hejiyê Cindî in Tbilisi (Georgia) from Têliyê Esedê Biro (Cindî 1962:169-76). **C62**.
2. "Мирзэ Мэ'муд у бре wи" ("Mirza Memud and His Brothers"). The text was recorded by Hejiyê Cindî in Armenia from Ecemê Hemîdê Huso (Husoyan) from the village Emençayrê, Kars province, Turkey (Cindî 1988:135-40). **C88**.
3. "Gulperî."[14] Recorded by Emînê Evdal in 1950 from Kamile Alo originating from the village Alagyaz (Elegez) in Armenia (Evdal 2006:175-78). The name of the hero is Mîrze Mehmûd. **E**.
4. "Mirzemhema und der Vogel Teyre Simir" ("Mirzemhema and the Bird Teyrê Simir"). The author of this collection of folktales does not give the names of the informants for each tale. He has recorded most of the tales from his father, who lived in the province Siirt, but he added some material from other informants and did some editing of the original texts. The text is available only in German translation (Yas 2010:45-54). **Y**.
5. "Çîroka duyemîn" ("The Second Fairytale"). This text and the next one on the list were published within a master's dissertation dealing with the narrative motifs of Mirza Mihemed fairytales (Demir 2016:156-68). Recorded by Mehmet Yıldırım and Bedrettin Kırkağaç in Erciş (Kurd. Erdîş) from Sakîne Yıldırım, who was born in the village Qeremêlik near Erdîş. The name of the hero is Mîrze Mihemed. **D2**.
6. "Çîroka heftemîn" ("The Seventh Fairytale"). Recorded from Rukiye Izçi, without indication of the informant's origin (Demir 2016:200-14). The hero's name is Mîr Mihemed. **D7**.

The plot of all these stories represents the widespread tale type ATU 301, "The Three Stolen Princesses." The succession of episodes, and a number of motifs, allow us to assign all the eight texts to a subtype 301A, which usually is found throughout the Eastern Mediterranean (Puchner

[13] Kurd. Teyrê Sîmir (Simir) may function as a personal name, but the first element means "bird." Therefore, this appellative may be translated as "the bird Simir." The name Simir must be a Kurdish adaptation of the name of the Persian mythological bird Simurgh, سیمرغ.

[14] This is the name of the main heroine.

2002:1365).[15] There are several narrative features shared by all eight variants. These features are presented below as episodes:

1. *The hero guards the garden*.[16] Three princes guard the king's garden at night in an effort to catch a creature which steals all the fruit (apples). Two older sons fail to fulfill their task because of fear or sleepiness; only the youngest son manages to catch the thief (it turns out to be a *dev*) and to wound him. Usually, the youngest son overcomes his sleepiness by cutting his finger and pouring salt on the wound (motif H1481; BL, T, E, Y).

2. *The hero kills the wounded* dev *(or three* devs*) in the underworld*. The way to the underworld is a well. After killing the *dev*, the hero rescues three girls to become brides for three brothers. In some versions one of the girls warns the hero of the taboo of striking the *dev* twice (motif C742; T, C88, E, D7).

3. *The hero falls down into another underworld*. When taking away the girls sent by the hero from the well, the older brothers betray the youngest brother and leave him in the well. Following the instructions of the youngest girl, the hero is ready to meet a white and a black sheep;[17] his task is to jump on the white sheep to get into the upper world. But the hero jumps on the black sheep[18] by mistake and falls "seven layers down."

4. *The hero kills the dragon in the next underworld*. The old lady with whom the hero stays in the underworld offers him her urine instead of water, because the dragon[19] keeps the water and only gives it when he is given a girl to eat. The king's daughter is going to be sacrificed the day the hero comes. Waiting for the dragon, the hero falls asleep and is awakened by her teardrop (BL and T). Once the dragon has been killed by the hero, the rescued girl smears the dragon's blood on the hero's back: it helps to recognize the hero among the many men who pretend to be the dragon-slayer.

5. *The hero saves the chicks of the bird Simurgh from a serpent.* This deed is intended to win the heart of the bird Simurgh,[20] who is able to bring the hero back to his world (the light world). The hero kills the serpent (or dragon) who was the bird's eternal enemy and ate her chicks every time

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[15] The survey of the existing indexes and the present research suggests that this subtype is widespread in Anatolia and Iran. Is this really an oicotype specific to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East? This question merits further study.

[16] The only version without this episode is D7. Instead of this, there is an episode with a long-bearded dwarf, who asks each of the brothers for food and beats them after they reject his request. Only the youngest brother wounds the dwarf, who disappears in a well. Uther (2004:I, 177) describes this variant as one of the possible introductory episodes for tale type 301.

[17] In C62 and E the girl says that the sheep come every Friday. The importance of Friday is typical for Kurdish texts (Ritter 1967:18), but it must be an Islamic motif, not necessarily specific to Kurdish texts. In D2 and D7 the sheep appear with the help of magic objects: a ring (D2), or two feathers (D7). This motif appears in complementary distribution with the "Friday" motif.

[18] The sheep fight each other and change their color while fighting (C62, C88, E), which complicates the hero's task.

[19] The dragon is seven-headed in BL, T, and D2.

[20] Kurd. *Sîmir*, Aramaic *Simarkho* (BL), or *Simurkosh* (T). One of the Kurdish versions has the bird's name Pava (E). The versions C88 and D7 do not name the bird.

the bird produced them. When the bird finds the hero near its chicks, she thinks the boy is the enemy, but the chicks defend him, saying to their mother that it is he who saved them from the serpent.

6. *The bird Simurgh brings the hero back to the light world.* In order to sustain the bird during the long flight, the hero must provide it with food and drink (seven sheep tails and seven wineskins of water).[21] When there is no more food (or when the last piece of meat drops down), the hero cuts a piece of his thigh to feed the bird. Upon landing, having kept the piece of human meat under its tongue, the bird restores the muscles of the hero's thigh. Only two versions preserve the motif of the bird's checking the stages of the flight by asking the hero what it is like (T and C62).[22]

7. *The hero wins his own bride through tricks and (or) a contest.*[23] There are two distinctive strategies: 1) the hero asks an old lady to bring some food (milk, porridge, apple) to the bride, who does not want to eat anything; he hides a ring inside the food as a sign of his presence for the girl (T, D2, D7); 2) the hero works for a blacksmith (or goldsmith) and, with the help of magic, performs difficult tasks for the bride(s), producing a golden hen dancing on a golden tray or the like (BL, C62, E); he also takes part in a *jereed* (Kurd. *cirîd*, Tur. *cirit*), a horseback game (C62, E).[24]

The most important result of this comparison is that the plots of Aramaic and Kurdish versions are very similar. There are only two motifs shared by the Aramaic versions and lacking in the Kurdish versions: the magic sleep of the hero waiting for the dragon (D1975) in episode (4) and his being awakened by a tear of the girl (D1978.2). The present collection of eight stories is too small to conclude that these motifs are characteristic of the Aramaic oral tradition. Given the universal nature of this combination of two motifs within the tale type ATU 300 (see Uther 2004:I, 174), it may well have been lost only in that part of the Kurdish tradition which is currently available to the author. Talking about local features, one may point out the *jereed* (equestrian competition) motif in some of the variants. It is shared by Turkish and Kurdish variants of ATU 301A.

Some motifs have rare variants or unusual aspects, whose significance is not always clear. Thus, in one of the variants, the girl gives her instructions from above, when she has already left the well (T). Two of the girls in the first netherworld have red apples (D2). This is

[21] There is a certain degree of variation in the list of products, but it does not seem significant. One of the sources has forty instead of the usual seven (tails and wineskins).

[22] On this motif in the literature of Ancient Mesopotamia, in Hellenistic and Jewish sources, and in Arabian and Kurdish folklore, see Aro 1976.

[23] The episode is absent from the version C88.

[24] The same versions have another motif of the hero assuming the appearance of a baldpate (bald boy); cf. the Turkish personage Keloğlan (Paksoy 2001).

related to the motif of the apple garden (C62, Y), or an apple tree within the garden (T, D2).[25] Other versions have a garden with various kinds of fruit.

Special attention should be given to two motifs which are present only in the Neo-Aramaic version BL. Both involve Jewish characters who are held up for ridicule. The first one is an extension of the motif H1481 (*Thumb cut and salt put on it in order to remain awake*). In most of the versions where this motif is present, there is no question about the origin of this idea; it looks like a trick invented by MM himself. But in BL Mirza Pamat goes to a Jewish man and asks him for a remedy against sleepiness (motifs 5-6 in the summary given above). At first the Jewish character hides this secret and gives this advice only when he is scared by the threats of Mirza Pamat (Tumasova 2015:65):

> (73) *zille go beṯad huḏaya. kis huḏaya politle sepa midde pqaṭlannux.* (74) *maddi dermana xa dermana halli šinṯi ṭla hal qadimta.* (75) *huḏaya midde leṯ dermana čuməndi. adia midde bqaṭlannux.* (76) *huḏaya midde ṭlalew aya səbutux prumla dri məlxa i šinṯux le aṯi*.
>
> (73) He went to a Jew's house. (When he came) to the Jew he took out the sword and said: "I will kill you! (74) Tell (me), give me a remedy in order not to sleep until the morning!" (75) The Jew said: "No remedy, (I have) nothing."—"Now I will kill you!" (76) The Jew said to him: "Cut your finger, pour salt (on it), and sleep won't come to you."[26]

The story concludes with another episode in which a Jewish character is treated in a mocking fashion (motif 32). Mirza Pamat steals the wife of a Jew to give his father a wife. Once again, the Jewish figure is handled derisively, and he appears to be one of the villains tricked and/or killed by the hero. Given the background of the other seven texts from the group of oral sources, these motifs are distinctive of the Neo-Aramaic version (BL). Are they specifically Christian (Assyrian)? It is impossible to give a definite answer based on only eight texts, but at least one parallel from an Assyrian source may be relevant. There is an episode with a Jewish character in the Assyrian epic tradition about the hero Qaṭīne Gabbara known through the poem "Qaṭīne Gabbara" by William Daniel.[27] Qaṭīne Gabbara is a hero of the same type as MM (Mirza Pamat). He comes to a Jewish blacksmith to buy a unique sword from him. The blacksmith tries to trick the hero by offering him all kinds of other swords rather than the right one. The hero being insistent (there is no scaring by death), the blacksmith finally agrees to sell to him the right sword but demands the enormous sum of ten gold coins (Daniel 1961:I, 34-37). The oral tradition about Qaṭīne Gabbara originates from Hakkari, where our version BL was originally transmitted. Therefore, these episodes involving encounters with Jewish characters (portrayed in

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[25] This motif finds explanation in one of the Persian versions of ATU 301, "Apple Orchard" (باغ سیب). The apple tree in the king's garden bears three apples at a time for each of his sons. When the elder brothers fail to guard the tree, each of them overlooks the thief (*dev*) who steals two apples one by one. Only the youngest brother manages to guard his apple. Later, in the well, he sees these very apples in the hands of two girls, who are, according to some versions, the *dev*'s daughters (https://rasekhoon.net/article/show/1230373/باغ-سیب).

[26] The translation of this passage is by the present author.

[27] On this tradition and on the poem of W. Daniel see Donabed 2007. This poem has not yet been translated completely into any European language. There is only a Russian translation of the first volume.

unflattering terms) may represent a specifically Assyrian theme. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that this theme is part of the common Near Eastern tradition.

As was shown by the analysis of the episodes and motifs of eight Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic (Assyrian) fairytales belonging to the same tale type (ATU 301), these versions are very close to each other in their plot. The Assyrian versions do not show a set of elements that would suggest that they belong to a separate tradition. There is only one specific motif shared by the Assyrian versions, but this is an exception, since it is archaic and known from other national traditions. On the other hand, stories with the same plot are found in Turkish and Persian oral traditions.[28] At this stage of the research, only the name of the hero Mirza Pamat (Mirza Mamed) helps to conclude that these two Assyrian versions originate from Kurdish oral tradition.

3.2.2 The Tale of Mərza Pămət

This text was recorded by Geoffrey Khan in 2005 from Dawiḏ ʻAdam, a speaker of the North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic dialect Barwar.[29] The informant was born in the village Dure (Duhok province, Northern Iraq). The informant's family left Iraq around 1980 and the recording was made in Turku (Finland). The transcription and the translation of this text into English have been published by Khan (2008:1752-61).[30] The speakers of the Barwar dialect are Christians, the majority of whom belong to the Assyrian Church of the East (2008:6). In the area where they lived until the end of the twentieth century, Kurdish was the main contact language alongside Arabic. The Neo-Aramaic Barwar dialect exhibits a profound degree of influence from Kurdish, which is reflected in its lexicon and grammar (2008:18-22). According to Khan, the village of Dure was Assyrian, but the majority of the local population were Kurds. This text will be referred to here as **GK**.

1. Mirza Pamat is a robber and hunter who lives in the mountains.
2. He catches a lion, a bear, a tiger, and a fox, and brings them to his home to live with him.
3. On the initiative of the fox, the animals choose him as their leader.
4. The fox suggests that the animals should help their host Mirza Pamat and bring him a wife.
5. For that purpose, the fox sends the bear to catch a sheep, to flay it, and to have a goldsmith attach bells to every hair on the sheep's skin. This becomes a costume for the bear, who dances in it and entices the king's daughter to come out.
6. With their noise and dancing the fox and the bear make the daughter of the king come out on the palace roof. The bird Simarkho catches the girl and brings her to Mirza Pamat, and the girl becomes his wife.
7. The king offers to enrich anyone who can bring his daughter back.
8. An old witch is ready to help.

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[28] Interestingly, there are Persian variants of ATU 301 with the hero named Malik Muḥammad (Osmanov 1987:53-71, 109-24). One of the Arabic versions of ATU 301 has a hero with the name Muḥammad (Lebedev 1990:118-23).

[29] Kurd. *berwar*, "slope, incline, descent" (Chyet 2003:45).

[30] The audio recording is available at https://nena.ames.cam.ac.uk/audio/49/.

9. The witch takes a pot which moves like a helicopter, and she flies to the house of Mirza Pamat.
10. The witch tells Mirza Pamat that she wants to join the group and live with them in the house.
11. Under the pretext of the need to wash Mirza Pamat's wife, the witch secretly puts the king's daughter into her magic pot and flies her back to the father.
12. The fox and the bear again steal the king's daughter with the help of Simarkho.
13. The witch again offers her help to the king; she comes to the house of Mirza Pamat, but the animals kill and dismember her.
14. The king raises the army against Mirza Pamat, but the army fails to overcome him and his animals.
15. Mirza Pamat and his wife leave the animals to start living on their own.
16. The fox pretends to be ill and feigns death to check the behavior of other animals and their attitude to him.
17. When the fox really dies, his fellow animals do not believe him.

Tale type: ATU 535 "The boy adopted by tigers (animals)"; TTV 36 "Der Fuchs als Schulze." Marzolph 1984, *545; ATU 545B "Puss in Boots."

Kurdish parallels:
1. Mirza-Mamud. The text was recorded from Nazar Akhmet in Mary (Turkmenistan). The informant was born in 1907 in Zangilan (formerly in Iran, now in Azerbaijan). The text was published in Russian translation by Rudenko (1970). **R**.
2. Mihemedê Nêçîrvan. This Kurmanji text was recorded from Şikriyê Pîrkanî (Midyat—Mardin) by Adnan Arslan in 2016. It was published by Keskin (2019:127-28). **NK**.

These three texts have the same plot with several divergences in the instantiation of certain motifs, which is shown in the following summary of the episodes. Again, the same episodes occur in the same order in all three texts.

1. *The hunter gathers a group of animals in his house (cave)*. The group of four or five animals includes a fox (GK, R, NK), a wolf (R, NK), a lion (GK, NK), a bear (GK, R), a tiger / a leopard (GK, R), and a bird (GK, R, NK).[31] The bird is called Simarkho (GK) or Simurgh (R). The number of partridges killed by the hunter every day corresponds to the number of members of his household (R, NK). The fox has a leading role in this group, which is manifested in different elements of the narrative. In GK and NK the animals choose him as their leader (GK) or housekeeper (NK). In R the fox invites other animals to live with the hunter.
2. *The animals kidnap the king's daughter*. Apparently, the key element of this narrative must be a ruse by which the animals entice the king's daughter to come out of her room, to help the bird to grab and take her to her future husband (GK, R). Only in NK is this absent: the bird alone grabs the girl without any tricks. The ruse in R is that the fox is ploughing a field using the bear and the wolf as draft animals, which forces the king's daughter to come out (cf. TTV, type 36 III.8).

[31] In GK the bird appears only at the moment of kidnapping the king's daughter.

Another cunning trick is used in GK: the fox arranges a performance—the bear dances in special attire with bells, and the fox makes a great noise.

3. *A witch brings back the king's daughter to her father.* A witch,[32] hired by the king, uses a specific magical transportation device: a pot-helicopter (GK), a floating clay vessel (R), or an artificial bird (NK). With this device she reaches the location of the hero, and with the same device she brings the king's daughter back to her father. When the witch tries to become a member of the hunter's family, she pretends to be a pilgrim who lost her fellow pilgrims (R, NK). In GK there are only traces of this motif: "I am a stranger. I have no relatives here. . . ." In every version the witch puts the king's daughter into her magic vehicle by a kind of ruse or trick.

4. *The animals again kidnap the king's daughter.* This is achieved by the bird alone (NK), by the bird with the help of the fox (R), or by the fox and the bear (GK).

5. *The king comes with the army, but the animal army overcomes the human army*. The versions R and NK go into detail describing how the animal army is gathered: wolf summons his fellow wolves, lion summons lions, etc. GK uses only a very short remark to describe this army: "the animals were numerous" (*heywane rabe wawa*).

The text GK has an additional episode: the fox feigns illness, but the animals do not believe him. This episode is authentic in plot 545 and was probably lost in the other two versions in the course of the transmission. It is highly relevant to the question of the tale type of our story. There is a problem defining the tale type of this story with the help of the Europe-oriented index of Aarne-Thompson-Uther (Uther 2004). More helpful here are the indexes of Eberhard and Boratav (1953, TTV) and Marzolph (1984) for the Turkish and Persian traditions, respectively. The Turkish type 36 in TTV squares very well with our story, including a specific realization of the motif of the ruse to steal the princess (TTV type 36 III.8).[33] The Persian type *545 (Marzolph 1984) has many variants, some of which share several motifs with our story. The number 545 is taken by Marzolph from the Aarne-Thompson index, but the description of its variants 545A and 545B in Uther 2004 does not correspond to the plot of the present Kurdish-Aramaic story. It is true that the helper is the fox (= the cat in Uther 2004), and there are some common motifs, but the story is fundamentally different. On the other hand, Uther (2004) assigns the Turkish type 36, which is exactly the type of our story, to ATU 535, "The boy adopted by tigers (animals)." Although ATU 535 shares two key motifs with TTV 36 (the hero and the animals become one family; the animals find a wife for the hero), a very important group of motifs related to the outstanding role of the fox as a helper in the discussed story makes this decision of Uther unsatisfactory. Therefore, Marzolph is right in identifying the similar Persian stories with ATU

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[32] Neo-Aramaic *ʈoṭo sere* ("old woman of magic") is a loan-translation from Kurdish *pîra sêhr*. Neo-Aramaic *sere* (pl.) ("magic") might be a loanword from Arabic *siḥr* ("magic"). Nevertheless, since it is used only within the phrase "old woman of magic" in the corpus of Neo-Aramaic texts from Barwar (Khan 2008), it must be a loanword from Kurdish, because the phrase *pîra sêhr* ("old woman of magic") is idiomatic and specific for Kurdish. For other attestations of *pîra sêhr* (*pîra sêr*) in Kurdish see Celîl and Celîl 1978:II, 283; Demir 2016:174, 176.

[33] There is one more motif shared by the story under discussion (it is found in GK) with the Turkish variants: when the witch comes again to bring the king's daughter back, she is killed by the animal team (cf. TTV type 36, motif 9).

545. Moreover, the motif of the fox feigning illness in GK brings at least this variant even closer to 545, namely to 545B ("Puss in Boots").

It can be concluded that the type 36 in TTV and *545 in Marzolph 1984 has no reliable correspondence in Uther 2004. It cannot be decided here, but there are reasons to believe that these types represent a Middle Eastern oicotype of ATU 545B. If this is true, the Kurdish-Aramaic variants discussed here are additional examples of this local manifestation of the universal tale type.

3.2.3 The Tale of Mali Mamed and Mirza Mamed

This text was recorded by K. Tsereteli between 1944 and 1962 in Georgia from Vano Khoshabayev, a speaker of Christian Urmi Neo-Aramaic. It was published in phonological transcription with Russian translation in Tsereteli 1965:54-63 (story no. VIII). The plot of the story may be identified with ATU 314 ("Goldener"), with some reservations. Kurdish parallels to this story have not yet been found. There is a Kurdish fairytale that shares very important episodes with this Neo-Aramaic text, "Mirza Mahmud and Dunya Guzal" (Dzhalilov et al. 1989:108-17). The core of this Kurdish story belongs to the expanded variants of the type TTV 204 ("Die Geschichte des Sinan Pascha") with one episode which corresponds to ATU 449; it has no exact parallels in Uther 2004. However, the opening episodes of the story follow the pattern of ATU 314: a childless king meets a dervish, who gives him an apple to share with his wife as a promise of future children; the king promises to give one of two children to the dervish; the dervish takes one of two boys with him. This opening with the motif of a child promised to a dervish is shared by the Neo-Aramaic text "Mali Mamed and Mirza Mamed" and the Kurdish text "Mirza Mahmud and Dunya Guzal." Since the hero Mirza Mamed can only be of Kurdish origin, the discussed Neo-Aramaic text may be considered as indirect evidence of the existence of this type of oral narrative in the Kurdish tradition.

3.3 The Traditions of the Western Syriac Christians

By "Western Syriac" we mean that part of the Syriac Christian world which is associated with the Syriac Orthodox Church.[34] The core location of Western Syriac Christians is the Ṭur Abdin region in the vicinity of the city of Midyad (Turkey, Mardin province). The oral tradition of the Western Syriacs is known through the recordings of their spoken language, a Neo-Aramaic language, Ṭuroyo (Surayt), through the work of such linguists as Eugen Prym and Albert Socin, Helmut Ritter, Otto Jastrow, and others. In 2018-19, a number of new recordings were made in Ṭur Abdin by the Russian linguistic expedition headed by Sergey Loesov.[35] In the following, I will briefly discuss only the texts recorded by Helmut Ritter in Istanbul, because up to now the folktales with this Kurdish name of the hero Mirza Muḥamma (Mḥamma) were only found in the

[34] As is the case with the Eastern Syriac Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church has split into the traditional one and the Syriac Catholic Church (Murre-van den Berg 2018:771).

[35] For a publication of one of the Kurdish fairytales, Zêrka Zêra, retold in Turoyo and recorded by Sergey Loesov, see Häberl et al. 2020.

corpus of texts that was recorded by this researcher in the 1960s. Ritter observes that most of the fairytales and other narratives he recorded from Ṭuroyo speakers are of Kurdish origin. This is stated by the speakers themselves, and the Kurdish origin of the texts is confirmed by Kurdish formulas, the mentions of the *Molla* as a main religious figure (rather than *qašo*, "priest"), and by the fact that Friday is the most important day of the week (1967:18).

There are two texts with the same core plot of the type ATU 552 ("The girl who marries animals"): "Mirza Muḥamma and his brothers" (Ritter 1969, no. 61) and "Koese the two-haired" (Ritter 1969, no. 67).[36] They have one Kurdish parallel with the same basic plot, "Mirzemehmed" (Cindi 1962:II, 133-39). One of these three stories (Ritter 1969, no. 61) is complicated by the presence of features of the story ATU 304 ("The Dangerous Night-Watch"). Again, these stories belong to that group of plots where a young hero, usually a prince, struggles with demons and dragons and finally marries a princess.

Another Ṭuroyo story has a hero Mirza Mḥamma, a king's son: "Jusuf Pelawan" (Ritter 1971, no. 113). The text has no clear parallels in the sources we studied. Further investigation is needed to define its tale type. An interesting feature of this story is that the storyteller calls the hero Mḥammad throughout the story, and identifies the hero with the popular name only once, switching to Mirza Mḥamma.

Conclusion

The name Mîrza Mihemed (Mehmud) is an integral part of the Kurdish oral tradition of fairytales. It is the most popular name of the main male hero of the fairytales, usually a prince, the youngest brother, or a bold boy, the one who kills dragons and demons and finally marries a beautiful princess. The available texts of Mîrza Mihemed fairytales testify to the northern part of Kurdistan as the localization of these traditions, the places where the Kurmanji dialect is spoken. This name as a typical name of the fairytale hero seems to be unique to the Kurdish tradition. If it appears elsewhere, it must be considered a borrowing from Kurdish folklore.

The folktales, or, to be precise, fairytales with the main male hero Mirza Muḥammad (Maḥmūd), were found in different branches of Christian Neo-Aramaic oral traditions. First of all, there are examples of this tradition in the areas with very close contact between Kurdish and Neo-Aramaic speakers (Hakkari and Ṭur Abdin). There are also two texts originating from the Urmia region in Iranian Azerbaijan, where the main contact language for speakers of Neo-Aramaic in recent centuries was Azerbaijani (Azeri Turkish). It is argued that all the Neo-Aramaic fairytales with the main male hero named Mirza Pamat (Mamed) or Mirza Muḥammad are borrowings from the Kurdish oral tradition. The calque (loan translation) from Kurdish in a Neo-Aramaic text[37] is additional evidence of the borrowing of the story from a Kurdish source.

Some of the Neo-Aramaic texts with the name Mîrza Mihemed which do not have exact or close parallels in the corpus of Kurdish folktales provide indirect evidence of the existence of such narratives in the Kurdish tradition. Therefore, the recordings and publications of the Neo-

[36] The name of the hero is Mirza Mḥamma.

[37] Neo-Aram. *ṯoṭo sere* < Kurd. *pîra sêhr*, "old woman of magic."

Aramaic texts may indirectly contribute to the corpus of Kurdish folktales. This in itself is not a novelty, but if one takes Mîrza Mihemed stories, the case for the borrowing of a text with this name from Kurdish folklore may be based on a more convincing argument than a tale type, which is in most cases unspecific to a given tradition.

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"Metran Îsa! Do Not Stir Up Trouble, Trouble Is Bad": A Kurdish Folk Song through a Christian Lens[1]

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Introduction: General Remarks and Plot

In this paper, we would like to present a popular Kurdish folk song, *Metran Îsa*, performed in Kurmanji and Ṭuroyo (Surayt) by an Aramaic-speaking woman, Nisane Ergün (NE). Our performer lives in the Mardin province of Turkey in the vicinity of Kerboran (Turkish: Dargeçit) and belongs to the religious minority of Syriac Orthodox Christians. The number of Syriac Orthodox Christians in this region (also called Ṭur Abdin) is approximately 2,000-3,000. Ṭuroyo (endonym Surayt), an unwritten Neo-Aramaic (Semitic) language, is the first language for most of them. Almost every member of the community above thirty years old is also familiar with Kurdish (Kurmanji), but the level of command varies from native to elementary depending on age and place of living.

The Moscow research group under the supervision of Sergey Loesov started its expeditions into the region in the winter of 2018. Our primary task is to collect the material for further documentation and description of the language. As a secondary goal, we occupy ourselves with oral literature by studying motives and characters of the stories we hear from our consultants (see for example the commentary on motives in Häberl et al. 2020).

Our first meeting with Nisane took place on January 14, 2018, in the village Ḥaḥ (Turkish: Anıtlı), where she stayed at her daughter's place during the Feast of the Virgin of the Crops (Syriac: *ʕēḏā d yāldaṯ ʔalāhā d ʕal zarʕē*). That time she spontaneously told us several fairy tales and stories about local saints, and since then we regularly came back to her to make more recordings: so far Nisane has contributed most of the material to our corpus, gathered in 2018-19. She is eighty-seven years old, born in 1933 in the village Bequsyone (Turkish: Alagöz). After marriage, she moved to a neighboring settlement called Derqube (Turkish: Karagöl). Her mother tongue is Ṭuroyo (Surayt), and she also speaks Kurmanji fluently as her second language.

The culture of storytelling was thriving in the community of Syriac Christians until the electrification of the region and the arrival of television in the 1980s. The inhabitants of a village

[1] We would like to thank our Ṭuroyo consultants Efrem Aydın and Ilyas Iranlı, Khanna Omarkhali, with whom we discussed the Kurmanji version of the text, and our colleague and friend Michael Sims, who corrected the English style of the paper and the translations of the song as well as made numerous helpful suggestions during our work.

used to gather in the evenings for the so-called *ğəvate* (< Kurmanji: *civat*), "assembly," talk to each other, and listen to a storyteller. Nisane has never performed in these assemblies, as this was the men's task, so her only audience must have been her children and grandchildren. However, her natural talent, wit, good memory, and rich and unique language make her a skilled and engaging storyteller. Nisane memorized different tales while attending the above-mentioned *ğəvate* in the Christian villages where she used to live, as well as in places with a mixed population. As a child she spent a couple of years in the village Marbobo (Turkish: Günyurdu), close to Nusaybin on the border with Syria, where Christians, Yezidis, and Muslims came to escape famine. There, she must have become acquainted with Kurdish oral literature and language. Her knowledge of the lives of saints and biblical narratives she acquired from church sermons and conversations with priests. Additionally, she got to know some stories from her late husband, who used to sing them in Kurdish. One of these was the song *Metran Îsa*, which Nisane performed for us in Kurdish and in Ṭuroyo on July 18, 2019, in Derqube.

During our visit we asked Nisane about the Kurdish version of *Mem û Zîn* (in Ṭuroyo, the story is called *Mamoye Ala u Sətya Zin*), the prosaic summary of which she told us in Ṭuroyo in January, 2018. Instead, she offered to sing a song called *Metran Îsa*. According to her own statement, she heard it from her husband and did not remember it well. First, Nisane sang the song in Kurdish and then, being aware of our imperfect knowledge of Kurmanji, elucidated it to us in Ṭuroyo. In what follows, we will present both versions of the song with a commentary and translation. Before we proceed with that, some information about this text and its historical background is provided.

Metran Îsa, also known as *Metrano* or *Elî û Meyrem*, despite being one of the more popular Kurdish *stran* (Kurmanji: "song"), has rarely been the subject of scholarly publications.[2] Still, one can find numerous renditions of it on YouTube.

Although details may vary from version to version, the main plot of the song can be put as follows:[3]

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[2] One printed version of the song known to us is found in the book by Salihê Kevirbirî, *Filîtê Quto* (2002:19-25). The song itself was performed by the *dengbêj* Salihê Qubinê. A Turkish summary of this version was published by Sinan Gündoğar (2003:54-61). Another variant of the text with a Russian translation was published by Ordikhan Dzhalilov (2003:158-60, 493-95). A short (three-stanza) song mentioning Metran Îsa and some other details particular to this story (the girl Meyrem, elopement, ship, the Aghtamar church) is found in L. Turgut's book (2010:248-49), but it has no clear plot and was not considered for the synopsis.

[3] The synopsis is based upon a number of versions: (1) one by Salihê Kevirbirî (2002:19-25); (2) a version performed by the Kurdish *dengbêj* Miradê Kinê (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxNEH8gcl3c); (3) a version published by O. Dzhalilov (2003). The latter was performed by a Christian (?) *dengbêj* of Armenian origin, I. Oganyan, who was born in the vicinity of Diyarbekir in 1910 and who later lived in Qamishli, Syria, for a long time (for more details on his background, see Dzhalilov 2003:251). This fact places him very close to the place where Nisane lives, and it may be no coincidence that Oganyan's version resembles the version performed by Nisane the most. Admittedly Miradê Kinê, born in 1943 in the village Gêrka Cehfer near Kerboran, must have also spent part of his life in a place not so far from where our storyteller lived, but his version is in many aspects unlike other three versions at our disposal; (4) a version by Mihemed Arif Cizîrî/Cizrawî (1912-1986), who was born in Cizre (Turkey); (5) a version by Miço Kendeş (b. 1966 in Kobane, Syria) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuSWauev8kY); (6) a version by Dr. Metin Barlik (b. 1964 in Van, Turkey) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLV_amcO9dQ).

The governor (*Vali*) of Van falls in love with an Armenian girl, Meyrem, and sends his man, Ali, to fetch her. However, Meyrem falls in love with Ali and persuades him to elope with her. Alternatively, in the version recorded by O. Dzhalilov and in Miradê Kine's version, Meyrem and Ali see each other on the streets of Van and fall in love with each other. In all versions, the couple decides to go to the island of Aghtamar to seek refuge with the famous bishop of the Armenians Metran Îsa. Ali asks him to marry them either according to the Christian or the Muslim rite. The bishop refuses to convert Ali to Christianity, unwilling to violate the established norms and to bring shame upon Islam. He suggests marrying them according to the Muslim rite instead and hides the couple in his church. Having found out that Meyrem and Ali are in the church of Aghtamar under the protection of Metran Îsa, the *Vali* of Van demands from the bishop to hand them over. After Metran Îsa ignores his demands and threatens to confront him, the governor retreats empty-handed. In some versions (recorded by ourselves and Dzhalilov), the Metran starts a battle against the army of the *Vali* and defeats them either single-handedly or with the help of other clerics at the Aghtamar church.[4]

Historical Background

The song belongs to the genre "historical battle song" (*tarîxî*, or *şer*): the story as such and the protagonists are considered to be historical individuals (Allison 2001:142).

It is, however, doubtful that the characters of *Metran Îsa* go back to specific historical personalities. Most probably, the tale reflects a fictitious collective image. However, the song has many details that are anchored in history and traditional life.

Armenians were one of the largest *millets* in the Ottoman State: in the nineteenth century, they constituted around 20% of the entire population (Verheij 2012:87-89; Karpat 1985:51-55; Hovannisian 1997:191-92). They were unevenly distributed across the empire, mostly in the so-called "Six Vilayets" (the provinces of Van, Diyarbakır, Bitlis, Erzurum, Sivas, and Mamuretülaziz), the mountainous parts of Cilicia, and big cities. The majority of Armenians lived to the east and north of the river Tigris. Lake Van and the surrounding area, the scene of the story, was a part of their historical homeland. This region played a great role in the cultural and religious life of the Armenians. Since 1113, the region had its own catholicos, residing on the island of Aghtamar (Hovannisian 1997:25). In the fifteenth century, the Catholicos of Aghtamar gained influence and even managed for a short period of time to occupy the seat of the Catholicos in Etchmiadzin, and thus to assume the office of Catholicos of All Armenians. However, later on, Aghtamar became a regional Patriarchate, and its authority was restricted to the neighboring areas (Hovannisian 1997:35). The office of Catholicos of Aghtamar continued its existence into the twentieth century, when it was finally eliminated in 1916 during the Armenian Genocide.

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[4] Christine Allison in her book, *The Yezidi Oral Tradition in Iraqi Kurdistan*, mentions another version of the song. According to it, Meyrem is a Muslim and the daughter of the *Vali* of Van. Ali abducts Meyrem, and they take refuge with the Christian bishop, or Metran. The Metran refuses to surrender the couple and is killed (Allison 2001:142-43). The source of the version is not specified.

The prototype of the church of Aghtamar, the seat of Metran Îsa, is the Church of the Holy Cross, located on the island of Aghtamar. The island of Aghtamar, situated on the southern side of Lake Van, was once the center of the kingdom of Vaspurakan and the residence of the Armenian kings of the Ardsruni line. The church, together with the royal palace, was built by Gagik Ardsruni in the tenth century (Adalian 2010:74-75).

Most probably, the character of Metran Îsa, an influential and powerful Christian protector and mediator, is not based on a certain historical figure, but rather represents a collective image with some historical basis. Indeed, the leaders of the Christian communities in this region played an important role in the everyday life of their congregations, ensuring the observance of both civil and religious law, and protecting their flock. For example, Zachariah III (1434-1464), a Catholicos of Aghtamar, the most famous in the line of the Aghtamar Catholicoi, was venerated by both Christians and Muslims. It is said that he protected the region from pillaging by local rulers and mediated the negotiations between Jahan Shah, the leader of the Qara Qoyunlu, and Jahangir, a representative of the rival tribal confederation, the Aq Qoyunlu. This was necessary to prevent a devastating war on these territories (Macler 1923:53-54). Another example comes from the neighboring region of Hakkari, where the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, who belonged to the family of Mar Shimun, was a temporal and spiritual leader of the Christian tribes living there. At times, his influence reached even further, and he was second to the Mir of Hakkari and could be his *locum* when he was absent from the principality (McDowall 2004:45). Finally, from the eighteenth century onwards the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople had jurisdiction over all Armenians of the Ottoman Empire, except for some places where independent Catholicosates were operating (such as Sis or Aghtamar). As a *Milletbaşı* (head of a *millet*), the Patriarch was responsible for the collection of state taxes and was in charge of religious and educational affairs of the community (Hovannisian 1997:184-85).

The fact that Ali and Meyrem sought protection by Metran Îsa also has its grounds in the traditions of this region and reflects a common practice that is widespread in Kurdish society: after performing *revandin* (“abduction” or “elopement”), the couple stays under the protection of an influential person, who takes part in negotiations to settle the matter (Allison 2001:138-39).

The figure of the *Vali* of Van and its treatment in the song may also have some historical background. Both in the Kurdish versions that we know and in the variant that we recorded the *Vali* of Van is depicted as a villain. Using his power and influence, he wants to marry an Armenian girl, Meyrem, against her will. After he realizes that Ali and Meyrem are hiding in the church of Aghtamar under the protection of Metran Îsa, he is headed to the island to bribe the bishop or to take Meyrem by force. Depending on the version, he either refuses a direct confrontation with Metran Îsa, or he is killed by his own men. Despite his high position, he does not succeed, his power turns out to be illusive, and his end is most disgraceful and miserable.

Most probably, the figure of the *Vali* has its prototype in popular perceptions of Ottoman functionaries, who had a complicated relationship with the local population. When Kurdistan and Eastern Anatolia became part of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Kurdish chiefs accepted the sultan’s suzerainty, but in fact remained independent (Shaw 1976:82-83). The process of centralization, which affected all parts of the empire, began only in the nineteenth century (Hanioğlu 2008:49-50, 60, 86). After the Russo-Turkish war of 1806-12, Sultan Mahmud started replacing local *derebeyis*—semi-autonomous rulers of *eyalets*

("provinces") from powerful local families—with officials appointed in Istanbul (Van Bruinessen 1992:176). By the middle of the century, Kurdistan was ruled by Ottoman governors, and the Kurdish emirates were eliminated. The province of Van had a similar fate. The fortress of Van was seized in 1533 by the grand vizier Ibrahim Pasha and finally became part of the Ottoman State in 1555 (Shaw 1976:95; Kılıç 2012:507). After the incorporation of Van into the Ottoman Empire, it was administered by centrally appointed governors (*vali*), but the sub-districts were ruled by local Kurdish families (Van Bruinessen 1992:197, n. 42). Thus, it is not surprising that the *Vali* of Van, a nameless personification of the authorities of the central government, is negatively portrayed in the song. It is quite typical of the Kurdish oral tradition of the late Ottoman period that "the government" is presented as a villain (Allison 2001:128-30).

It remains unclear when the song was created. Some details in the text suggest the late-nineteenth century as the time when Nisane's version might have been composed. It is mentioned that Metran Îsa fought the *Vali* of Van and his army with a Martini rifle (Kurmanji: *eynelî*; Turkish: *aynalı*). This rifle had been adopted by the Ottoman State in the late-nineteenth century and had been used in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78.[5] It is of course entirely plausible that such details were gradually added to the song, whose core elements could be much older.

Features of Nisane Ergün's Versions

Metran Îsa can be performed as an actual song (see the versions of Mihemed Arif Cizîrî/ Cizrawî, Miço Kendeş, and Dr. Metin Barlik) or as sung poetry with interspersed prosaic commentary (the versions of Salihê Kevirbirî and Miradê Kinê). The sung part of the story usually begins with the journey of Ali and Meyrem to the island of Aghtamar, while the opening can be told in prose. The Kurdish version of the text was presented by our speaker as a rhymed song which starts with the words *Ez ê çime Wanê, naçime Wanê. Wan di vê de*. The Ṭuroyo version was performed as a narration; it is more detailed and includes an introduction, which was absent from the original. The very last part of the Kurmanji version, describing the execution of the *Vali*, is told in Ṭuroyo, which may indicate that this ending represents a later addition to the "canonical" version. In the versions performed by Kurdish *dengbêjs*, the *Vali* is not killed but rather admits his defeat in the pursuit of Meyrem, and retreats.

There are other features that single out Nisane's variant from the songs performed by the Kurdish *dengbêjs*. Although the scene of *Metran Îsa* is Lake Van and surroundings, Nisane introduces geographic details from her own region and thus places the song into the world known to her. When the *Vali* of Van threatens to destroy the church of Aghtamar, he says: *Ez ê hêlim çiyayê Bagokê, kevirê dêra te, çiyayê Bagokê xelas bikin, berê top û mitilyoza*, "I will have [my] cannons and machine-guns launch the stones of your church all the way to the Bagok mountains." The Bagok mountains (Ṭuroyo: *Ṭuro d ʕIzlo*, "Izlo mountains") are a chain of mountains north of Nusaybin, near the border with Syria. These mountains are the southernmost part of Ṭur Abdin, the area where Syriac Christians, including Nisane, live. Not only does she

[5] The Martini rifle features in both Turkish and Kurdish folk songs. It appears in the song *Hekimoğlu Türküsü*, dedicated to the Turkish folk hero Hekimoğlu. In the Kurdish song *Bişarê Çeto*, two brothers, Bişar and Cemîl, fight against the Turkish government using this weapon (Nikitine 1956:267). See also Gaunt 2012:256.

locate the song spatially closer to her, but also temporally: the *Vali* of Van uses a telephone (probably a mobile) to summon reinforcements.

Additionally, the part which describes the confrontation between Metran Îsa and the governor is exceptionally detailed when compared to the other versions of the song, and it constitutes the core of Nisane's story.

The main emphasis of the versions composed and performed in the Muslim environment is placed upon the reaction of Metran Îsa to Ali's request to marry him and Meyrem according to either religious tradition. The Armenian bishop unexpectedly defends the alien and even hostile religion and the customs ("women follow men") against his own beliefs. That this action is performed by an outsider, who is not a member of the Muslim community, elevates Islam and indicates its higher status compared to other religions. Another point made in the story is Metran Îsa's intention to defend the interests of the common and poor man against a rich and powerful governor.[6]

In our version, the focus shifts to Metran Îsa's defense of his decision, and the story acquires a new interpretation from the perspective of the Christian community, which our storyteller represents. Pro-Christian elements are especially prominent in the Ṭuroyo version. The song starts in the familiar manner: Ali and Meyrem arrive at the island of Aghtamar seeking the protection of Metran Îsa. After Ali requests the bishop to marry them the way he, the bishop, prefers, Metran Îsa upholds the honor of Islam and invites the mullah to perform the rite. The next morning, the *Vali* of Van besieges the church and threatens to destroy it if the bishop does not hand Meyrem over. Then, the story takes a dramatic turn: Metran Îsa, outraged at the *Vali*'s proposition, kills some of the soldiers led by the governor and routs the rest. The *Vali* mobilizes the army, but instead of helping him, the officers make the governor (not the bishop!) responsible for getting his people killed and try to establish the reason for such a heavy-handed reaction. The *Vali*, obviously willing to have the Muslim army on his side, puts forward a pretext for this violence, stating that the bishop converted a Muslim man to Christianity. The Ṭuroyo version conveys the answer of the officers, absent from the Kurdish original: *Hawi ṣuroyo, hawi ṣuroyo*, "So what if he has become a Christian?" The conversion to Christianity does not seem to be a reason strong enough for commencing a war. After the bishop and the mullah have been questioned, it becomes clear that the governor not only wasted manpower but falsely accused Metran Îsa. The *Vali* gets punished and killed, and Metran Îsa is rewarded with decorations from the *Vali*'s shoulders. This action can be interpreted in two different ways: either Metran Îsa received the decorations as a trophy, or it was an indication that from now on he assumed the office of the *Vali* of Van.

Thus, unlike in the mainstream Kurdish version, where the figure of the Metran is used to elevate Islam over other religions, in Nisane's version the firmness and courage of a Christian bishop are praised, and his actions receive approval from the state (the army in this case).

Syriac Orthodox Christians and Kurdish Sunni Muslims have lived side by side in Ṭur Abdin and the neighboring regions for centuries. Their languages, oral traditions, and culture exhibit enormous mutual influence. The case of *Metran Îsa* shows how the material which

[6] The discussion of the version published in Kevirbirî 2002 is available in the dissertation by Wendelmoet Hamelink (2016:86-93).

originated in one tradition can be borrowed, adopted, and creatively reinterpreted in a different cultural and religious environment.

Linguistic and Poetic Features of the Kurmanji Version

The text has a number of features common in spoken Kurmanji of this region, as opposed to the standard grammars of Kurmanji (Bedir Khan and Lescot 1970; Thackston 2006):

— Lack of *-n* endings for plural ezafe and plural oblique endings, for example *çadirê kesk û spî* (v. 20), *jin pey mêra diçin* (v. 11).
— Orthographic <*e*> is pronounced as [*æ*] (Öpengin and Haig 2014).
— The word *çav*, "eye," is pronounced with pharyngealization: [tʃaːʕv] (Öpengin and Haig 2014).

The language and the structure of the text also exhibit a few properties of the sung narrative genre (*stran*):

— Smaller units (lines) often rhyme, for example, *daye* - *spî ye* - *ketiye* - *çi ye*. However, besides shorter lines, longer ones (approximately twice as long) also occur, where the rhyme is present only at the end.
— The meter seems to be unstable, as syllable counts vary, so we have split the lines based on rhymes and, in some cases, on a perceivable fall in pitch. For stanzas, the fall in pitch is more significant (cf. Allison 2001:67), but we did not separate the text into stanzas because of the necessity to align the Kurmanji version with the Ṭuroyo one.
— Vowels are often prolonged, especially at the end, and special words, like *lo*, are added to fit a line to the meter and perhaps to help with singing. For verbs, the present perfect form is preferred possibly because it ends in a vowel: *hatiye* instead of *hat*, *derketiye* instead of *derket*, and so on. Alternatively, verbs receive the directive ending *-e*: *'Eli mahr kire mehreke misilmanî* (v. 25); *Metran rahişt**e** kopala xwe* (v. 31).

In the following section, we provide the text in its two versions, Kurmanji and Ṭuroyo (for audio recordings of the respective performances, consult the eCompanion). The presentation of the text is structured in a way that facilitates comparative analysis and convenience. The two versions have common numbering, and verses with similar content are aligned. If one of the versions lacks the content the other version has, then the verse with this number is left blank in the former. The Kurdish text is mostly split on the basis of rhyming lines: when a rhyme occurs in the text, the following text is put into the next verse until the next rhyme, and so on. Because of this, one verse in the prosaic Ṭuroyo version usually corresponds to two verses in the poetic Kurmanji one.

Special Characters and Signs Used in the Text

Parentheses () mark sidenotes of the narrator, which do not belong to the main text. Parentheses () with a long dash together with an author's note mark clarifications by us, the authors. Square brackets [] denote additions to the English translation to make it clearer and more felicitous. Elements in square brackets are absent in the original text. In the original, these are used to mark the shift from one language to another in the narration.

The Kurmanji version is given in Bedir Khan's system (with a few exceptions as noted above).

The Ṭuroyo text uses the orthography developed by O. Jastrow (1992).

Text

N	**Kurdish version**	**Ṭuroyo version**
	Introduction	
	Ṭuroyo *Matrān ʕIsa, ša ṭaʕyono*,[7] *kuḏʕutəlla? Matrān di=ʕito d-Axtaman.*[8]	*D-əmmanwa b-surayt, falga lo=kowe*.
	Metran Îsa, I have forgotten [it] anyway, are you familiar with it? Metran of the Aghtamar church.	If I tell it in Ṭuroyo, then it is not half as good [as the Kurmanji version].
	Ṭuroyo *Hawo-ste šar kamilo*[9]*-yo. Hayo-ste b-Kurmānğ gdəmmalla, d-əbʕat?*	*E. Kummi . . . d-əmmalla b-surayt?*
	This one is a complete tale. This one I can tell you in Kurmanci if you want.	Yes, they say . . . Shall I tell it in Ṭuroyo?

[7] Perhaps a shortened Ṭur. *šx(w)a ṭaʕyono*. For *šx(w)a*, see Ritter 1979:505, and also Kurmanji *ji xwe* "naturally; already" (Chyet 2003:289).

[8] The name of the island and, accordingly, of the church in Kurmanji is *Axtamar*. However, NE consistently pronounces it with a final /n/.

[9] The primary meaning of the word *šar* in Ṭuroyo (and *şer* in Kurmanji) is "war, battle." Here, however, it is used in the derived meaning "a song or a tale about a war or a battle," recognized by some as a subgenre of *stran*, "song" (Allison 2001:65). These meanings are also recognized by the Ṭuroyo and Kurmanji dictionaries we consulted: "Kampfgeschichten, Kampfepen, die beim Tode eines berühmten Helden gesungen warden" (Ritter 1979:489); "type of song in which a fight is portrayed" (Chyet 2003:574).

1		*Əmmi, e, əmmi u=wali du=Wan marfele ʕayne bᵊ-ḥḏo arᵊmnayto.* They say, yes, they say that the *Vali* of Van cast his eyes on an Armenian girl.
2		*Marfele ʕayne bᵊ-ḥḏo arᵊmnayto. Məllele l-ʕAli šawiša (u=ʕaskărayḏe-wa), omər: Zux, mṭili Merame.* He cast his eyes on an Armenian girl. He told sergeant Ali, who was his soldier: Go and bring Meyrem to me!
3		*Aṯi, omər: Merame, ašár u=wali du=Wan komər: "Izux, mṭili Merame.* He went and said [to her]: Meyrem, the *Vali* of Van has ordered: Go and bring Meyrem to me!
4		*Qa hiye xwəšktər mine-wa.* Now, he was more handsome than him (the *Vali—the authors*).
5		*Ummo: Madām gmublatli šan u=wali du=Wan, hăma ono hat, tux, mbali šar ruḥux.* She said: If you take me to the *Vali* of Van . . . look, you and I . . . come on, take me yourself!
6		*Omər: Ma gmiṣarfoliyo? Omar . . . əmmo: Hăma gəzzán, mḥalqina ruḥan tore w baxt*[10] *du=ḥasyo du=Wan.* He said: Can I get away with that? She answered: We will go and ask the bishop of Van for help and protection.
7		*Kalayo i=ʕitayḏe bayne falge du=băḥar.* His church was situated in the middle of the lake.
8		*Əmmi maḥatwa i=ʕabayayḏe ʕal u=baḥar, mṣalewa ʕal u=baḥar, d-kətwa mhaymno.* They say that he used to lay his cloak upon the [waters of] the lake and pray on top of it because he was pious.

[10] The ending *-e* on the word *tore* is the Kurdish ezafe ending *-ê*.

9	*Ez ê çime Wanê, naçime*[11] *Wanê. Wan di vê de.* I will go to Van, I will not go to Van. Van [is] over there.	*Əmmi, qām hedika azzeyo, hedika azzeyo, məblole w azzé mḥalaqle ruḥe bi=gămiyo, bi=hno.* Then he went, they say, he took her and went, he got into a boat, into . . . what's it called?
10	*Bikeve, bi qeyik û bi gemiya lo ser beḥrê de.* Go down, in boats or ships, by sea.	
11	*Here xwe bavêje tor û bextê Metranê dêra Yaxtamanê lo di dêrê de.*[12] Go and ask the Metran of the Aghtamar church for help and protection, in the church.	
	Interjection: Turoyo *(Kălăwəžəkat, ḥreno kummanne.)*[13] (It is nonsense, I will tell them another one).	
12	*ʕElî çû destê Metrên di dêrê de, dibê, Metrano,*[14] *ḥal û meqseda te çi ye?* Ali went to [kiss] the Metran's hand in the church, and [the Metran] asked: What is the matter?	*Mḥalaqle ruḥe l-gawa di=ʕito, d-əzze l-iḏe du=ḥasyo bi=ʕito: "Mən-yo?" Mḥalaqle ruḥe gab u=ḥasyo.* He rushed into the church and went to kiss the bishop's hand: What is it? He hurried over to the bishop.

[11] The form *neçime* is also possible.

[12] It is unclear who pronounces verses 9-11 in the story. In verse 3, it is conceivable that Ali expresses his doubts about going to Metran Îsa. Verses 4-5 are more likely to be Meyrem's words. In all versions known to us, it is Meyrem who convinces Ali to take her for himself and who suggests asking for the help of Metran Îsa.

[13] The meaning of this comment is unclear. The story goes on further without any significant omissions if we compare it to the Ṭuroyo version or to the version found in Kevirbirî 2002. Perhaps a longer monologue/dialogue of Meyrem and Ali has been skipped by NE (cf. Kevirbirî 2002:20-21).

[14] This form is obviously a mistake, because the following question, "*ḥal û meqseda te çi ye?*," must be asked by Metran Îsa himself, and the following verse undoubtedly contains Ali's reply.

13	*Go, Metran Efendî! Meyremê ji dînê te ye, mi revand,* He said: Metran efendi! Meyrem is from your religion, I have kidnapped her,	*Mən-yo? Omər: "Merame mu=dinayḏux-yo. Mhara aʕli kəbʕat b-ṣurayt w kəbʕat b-ṭayət.*[15] What is it? He said: Meyrem is of your religion. Marry her to me according to the Christian rite or the Muslim rite, as you wish.
14	*U tê divê li mi mehr ke, te divê filhî, te divê misilmanî.* And you should marry [her] to me. You may do it according to the Christian or the Muslim rite.	
15	*Go, Lo, ʕEliyo, ez bextê xwe û dêra xwe xira nakim.* [He] replied: O Ali, I am not going to compromise my honor and the honor of my church.	*Omər: ʕAliyo. Omər: Lo=komaḥrawno baxt diḏi w di=ʕitayḏi. W lo=kombaṭanno u=qanūn, i=šăriʕa.* He answered: O Ali! I am not going to compromise my honor and the honor of my church. I am not going to abandon the law and the norms.
16	*Firmana dewle . . . dînê . . . şerîʕet û qanûnê*[16] *betal nakim,* The order of the state . . . the religion . . . I will not abandon the norms and the law.	
17	*Dîne Îslamê rezîl nakim.* [and] bring shame to Islam.	*W lo=komaqənno*[17] *u=dinaṯxu daṭ=ṭaye w lo=komaqəmno fərmān di=dawla aʕli, ʕal i=ʕitayḏi.* I will not disgrace your religion, of the Muslims, and I will not bring the wrath of the state on myself and my church.
18	*Firmana dewletê*[18] *ser serê xwe dêra xwe narakim.* [I] will not bring the government's wrath upon myself and my church.	

[15] Normally, unlike in this verse, the expressions *b ṣurayt* and *b ṭayət* (or *b ṭayayt*) refer to the language: in Christian (that is Aramaic) or in Muslim (that is Kurdish) language.

[16] This refers to the late Ottoman legal system with *šariʕa* ("traditional Islamic law"), and the imperial code with its *kanunnâmes* ("code books"). See Hanioğlu 2008:18-19.

[17] This is what NE pronounces on the recording. However, the form does not make much sense. There exists a verb *maqər*, "to tell; to give away; to reveal; to betray," but it has to do with revealing or betraying a piece of information. Alternatively, there is an Arabic root √*qyl* II/IV "aufheben; rückgängig machen" (Wehr 1985:1076). The first-person masculine form of this verb in Ṭuroyo would be exactly *maqənno*. However, the verb is not attested in our corpus and is not familiar to our consultants. We offer an alternative solution—to understand this form as a mistake, while the form *komakəmno*, "to make black; to put to shame," was intended. In its second meaning, it agrees with the verb *rezîl kirin* of the Kurdish version.

[18] For Christian minorities, the word *firman* denoting a decree or order issued by the highest authority is associated with state persecution and genocide (see Talay 2017 for more details). Here, uttered by Metran Îsa, it likely refers to punitive measures against his church and possibly Christian population for converting a Muslim into a Christian.

19	*Miqîmî dinyayê*[19] *jin pey mêra diçin.* It's the way of the world: the woman follows the man.	*Məqimi dəna*[20] *i=pire kuzzá bə̲tr u=zlam. Madām a̲tyo bə̲trux, gməhrínala bi=ṭayu̲to*. It's the way of the world: the woman follows the man. Since she came with you, we shall marry her [to you] according to the Muslim rite.
20	*ʕElî here melê. Dîsa rabû li ser piya.* Ali, go to the mullah! [Ali] again got up on his feet.	
21	*Pelek kaxez nivisiye ji melê re*. [The Metran] wrote a note to the mullah.	
22	*Hatî,*[21] *mela hatî, bi çelengî ye.* He came, the mullah came in a hurry.	*Hedika mtarasse lu=malla. U malla a̲ti, mhirole bi=ṭayu̲to w azzeyo.* So then they sent for the mullah. The mullah came, married her [to him] according to the Muslim rite and went away.
23	*Go, He begê Metrano, ḥewal û meqseda te çi ye?* He asked: Metran Beg, what is the matter?	
24	*Go, Melawo, Meyremê li 'Elî mehr ke mehreke misilmanî.* He replied: Mullah, marry Meyrem and Ali according to the Muslim rite!	
25	*ʕEli mehr kire mehreke misilmanî, mela çû mala xwe.* He married Ali [and Meyrem] according to the Muslim rite. The mullah went home.	

[19] This expression is not understood well by Kurmanji speakers we consulted. A few interpretations that have been offered to us include: "(by) an established custom or a way things are done," "(in) the whole world." Cf. perhaps also *miqîmî*, "constance; continuité" (Nezan 2017:1019).

[20] NE apparently just copies the expression *miqîmî dinyayê* from the Kurdish version, but the form is further reduced.

[21] NE pronounces a clear [i:] at the end of both forms, which is unusual. Perhaps this is a shortened variant of present perfect *hatiye*? Cf. forms *şidandî* and *avetî* in verses 45 and 46.

26	*Go, ʕEliyo, here serê ʕolîka banî.*[22] [The Metran] said: Ali, go to the rooftop room.	*Omər: De ánnaqqa zoxu lalʕal, li=ʕolike=bani.*[23] *Azzán hənnək li=ʕolike=bani, u=malla azzé lu=bayto.* The bishop said: Now go upstairs, to the rooftop room. They went to the rooftop room, and the mullah went home.
27	*Berê vê cihê*[24] *. . . dirave*[25] *. . . ga dora dêrê çadin*[26] *daye.* In front of that place . . . [Ali] wakes up . . . they have put tents around the church!	*Ṣafro koqoyəm, mašəġ iḏe w foṯe, sōm dastəlmēž, koḥōr ga lu=wali du=Wan kosəmle i=ʕaskar hawir di=ʕito, simole qaləb.* In the morning, [Ali] woke up, washed his hands and face, performed his ablutions and saw: the *Vali* of Van had surrounded the church with his soldiers.
28	*Ji çadirê kesk û spî ye.* Tents of white and green color.	
29	*Go, çîrîn—misîn ca te*[27] *ʕElî ketiye*. There was a loud clank—a pitcher had fallen from Ali's hands.	*Maz=zuḥṯe nafilo i=məssine m-iḏe, hawi čənge diḏa. Nafiqo Merame, əmmo: Mə=mqām aʕlux?* He became afraid, and the pitcher fell down from his hands with a clank. Meyrem came out and said: What happened to you?
30	*Meyremê derketiye go, ʕElî—go—ḥewala te çi ye?* Meyrem went out and asked: Ali, what is the matter?	
31	Go, *Meyremê, ʕecêba min û te nekiriye,*[28] He said: Meyrem, [no one else] has caused such a disaster like the one we have.	*Omar: Nošo lo=səmme aʕ=ʕağobe d-səmlan.* He answered: No one else has caused such a disaster like the one we have.

[22] Only the form *olî*, "maison à étage; chambre à étage" (Nezan 2017:1128), is known to us from the dictionaries, but the variant form *ʕolik* probably existed (or exists) in the Kurmanci of Ṭur Abdin; see Ṭuroyo *ʕolike*, "auf dem Dach eines Hauses aufgebautes Zimmer, höchster Stock" (Ritter 1979:22). According to our consultants, the word denotes a small room or space on the top of a roof.

[23] Again, the expression from Kurmanji is copied, although with modifications. The Kurdish version has *ʕolîka*, where *-a* is the ezafe ending. Ṭuroyo has no case marking, so the default form *ʕolike* is used (loanwords of feminine gender in Ṭuroyo often end in -e). Further, *banî* does not exist in Ṭuroyo. The native word *goro*, "roof," is used later in the text.

[24] Our interpretation is that *berê vê cihê* is syntactically connected with *ga dora dêrê çadin daye*.

[25] *Dirave* < *dirabe*; see *rabûn* in the glossary.

[26] *Çadin* < *çadir*; see *çadir* in the glossary.

[27] *Ca te* < *ji destê*.

[28] Our interpretation is supported by the corresponding verse in the Ṭuroyo version. In this case, the subject for the verb *nekiriye* is not expressed.

32	*Dora dêrê qalib daye,* He has surrounded the church,	*Omər: Ḥēḏr i=ʕito kohawi qaləb mač=čadrat di=ʕaskar.* He said: A belt of tents, full of soldiers, has appeared around the church!
33	*Ji çadirê kesk û spî ye.* With green and white tents.	
34	*Wextê wilo gotiye, Metran bi lez derketiye.* When he said so, the Metran quickly came out.	*U=ḥasyo šaməʕ qole, nafəq, omər: Mən-yo? Omər: I=măsăle hawxa-yo.* The bishop heard his voice, came out, and said: What is going on? Ali replied: The situation is like this.
35	*Go, ʕElîyo, ḥewal û meqseda te çi ye?* He said: Ali, what's the matter?	
36	Go, Metran begê, te çi ʕecêba wilo bi çaʕvê xwe nedîtiye. He said: Metran Beg, you have never seen such a disaster!	
37	*Dora dêrê qalib daye,* He has surrounded the church	
38	*Ji çadirê kesk û spî ye.* With green and white tents.	
39	*Metran rahişte kopala xwe, çiye,*[29] *derge vekir*. The Metran picked up his cane, went down, opened the gate.	*Nafəq, mədle lu=čuganayḏe, azzé baynaṯṯe, ftəḥle u=tarʕo di=darga, omər: U=wali du=Wan, xēr-yo aʕlux bu=šăvăqano hawxa?* The bishop went out, took his cane and went towards them (the army—*the authors*). He opened the gate door and said: *Vali* of Van! What is going on this early in the morning?
40	*Go, Waliyê Wanê, hal û meqseda te çi ye?* He said: *Vali* of Van, what do you want?	
41	*Go, 'Lo Metrano, lo Metrano, Metran ʕÎsa. Fitneyê neke, lo, fitne pîs e.* He replied: O Metran, Metran Îsa. Do not stir up trouble, trouble is bad.	*Omər: Matrān ʕIsa!" Omar: Ḥasyo ʕIsa, lo=səm*[30] *fətna, i fətna pīs-yo!* [The *Vali* of Van] said: Metran Îsa! Bishop Îsa! Do not stir up trouble! Trouble is bad.

[29] *Çiye* < *çûye*, "he went"; see *çûn* in the glossary.

[30] Negative commands in Ṭuroyo are usually formed by using another verbal form (subjunctive), so the "normative" variant would be *lo saymat*. Here, the shorter imperative form *səm* is used, perhaps because it better fits the meter.

42	*Kevil û kerîs*[31] *e Meyremê bide min û ez ê bexşîşa te bidim te, hezar kîs e.* I swear to you, give me Meyrem, and I will give you a reward of a thousand sacks [of gold].	*Hawli Merame, gdobenux alfo=kise. W d-obatla l-ʕAli šawiša, kṭoreno ak=kefe di=ʕitayḏux bat=top w mătəlyosa d-šəfʕi u=ṭuro di=Bagoke.* Give me Meyrem and I will give you a thousand sacks. And if you give her to sergeant Ali, I will have the stones of your church fly all the way past the Bagok mountains from [the fire of] the cannons and machine guns.
43	*Tu Meyremê nedê min û tu bidê ʕElî çawîşa,*[32] *ez ê hêlim çiyayê Bagokê, kevirê dêra te, çiyayê Bagokê xelas bikin, berê top û mitilyoza.* If you do not give me Meyrem, and you give her to sergeant Ali, I will have [my] cannons and machine-guns launch the stones of your church all the way to the Bagok mountains.	
44	*Wextê wilo gotiye, Metran qeḥiriye,* When he said so, Metran got angry,	*I=naqqa d-məlle hawxa, qḥir u=ḥasyo, hedika ḥəṣle, maḥatle u=raxt ʕal ḥaṣe, mədle li=tfənge, saləq ʕal i=goro, maḥatle i=kummayḏe ʕal u=šuro, nafəl qərrēn ebe w marəṣle aʕlayye bi=ʕaskar.* When he said this, the bishop became angry. He fastened a cartridge belt around his waist, took a rifle, ran up to the roof, put his hat on the wall, shouted and started spraying [bullets] at them, at the soldiers.
45	*Xwe şidandî bi rextê ʕeyneliya,* Equipped himself with a cartridge belt for a Martini rifle	
46	*Destê xwe avêtî tifinga misraniya.*[33] [And] grabbed an Egyptian rifle.	
47	*Û bi hewa kete serê ʕolîka baniya, qirên Metran Îsa ketiye,* He rushed up to the rooftop, shouted:	

[31] The expression is unknown to our consultants. *Kevil* means "(animal) skin, hide, pelt" (Chyet 2003:313), but this word makes little sense in this context. The version in Salihê Kevirbirî's book (2002) has a somewhat similar expression: *ez ê bi qewlê Xwedê, bi hedîsa Resûlallah bînim / Meyrema File lo lo li te mar kim*, "I am going to marry you and Meyrem according to the Lord's commandment and according to the hadith of the Prophet." If we understand *kevil* as *qewl*, then the expression used by NE can be interpreted as a corrupted version of an oath. In Dzhalilov's text, the *Vali* follows up his demands with a threat introduced with *bi xwedê*, "by God," so it seems plausible that *kevil û karîs* should stand for something similar.

[32] The dictionary form is *çawîş* (Chyet 2003:102); the form with the ending *-a* is likely used because it is easier to sing (see the notes on the language of the text above).

[33] We were unable to find any weapon which would be named *tifinga misraniya*, "Egyptian (?) rifle." The *ʕeynelî* rifle is, in turn, well known—it is the Martini rifle (Turkish: *aynalı Martin*), which was used by the Turkish army in the second half of the nineteenth century.

48	*ʕEskeriya waliyê Wanê ḥemû kuştiye û reviye.*[34] All soldiers of the *Vali* were either killed or ran away.	*Ayna d-qṭile w ayna d-ʕarəq. (Hawxa kəmmi, u=šarrayḏe hawxa-yo.)* Some of them he killed and some of them ran away. (People say this, his tale goes like this).
49	*Hebû zirzira telefona waliyê Wanê.* The telephone of the *Vali* of Van started ringing.	*Hawxa kəmmi, qṭile kulle-wayne . . . qṭil. Hawi zərazər du=wali du=wan, hule tălăfūn li=ʕaskar,*[35] *laš=šawiše, la=zbašiye, lab=binbašiye, lat=toġaye.* It is said that he killed all of them. They were killed. [The phone] of the *Vali* of Van started ringing. He called other soldiers, sergeants, captains, majors, and brigades.
50	*Û hatine toxay, yuzbaşî, bînbaşî, toxay hatine.* And the brigade came, captains, majors came.	*Latimi i=ʕaskar kula aʕle. Tux lal=lašat!*[36] The soldiers gathered by him. Look how many dead bodies there were!
51	*Go, Erê, waliyê Wanê, hewal û meqseda te çi ye?* They said: So, Vali of Van, what do you want?	*Kŭro,*[37] *mə=mqām aʕlux? U wali omar: Lu=zlamano u=ḥasyano səmle zlām ṭayo ṣuroyo.* Son, what has happened here? The Vali said: This man, this bishop has converted a Muslim into a Christian.
52	*Go, Vî Metranî zilamekî misilman fileh kiriye.* He replied: This Metran has turned a Muslim into a Christian.	
53	*Go, Cehnema te û bavê wî kiriye, te ewqa ʕesker da kuştin ser çi?* They said: Damn you and his father, for what have you got so many soldiers killed?	*Əmmi: Ǧaḥnam diḏux w du=babo. Ma qṭilux, maqṭelux i=qa=ʕaskaraṯe ʕal mə? Hawi ṣuroyo, hawi ṣuroyo.* They said: Damn you and his father! You have let so many soldiers be killed for what? So what if he has become a Christian?

[34] NE omits the way in which the Metran killed and routed the soldiers, but we assume that he shot at them with his rifle, judging by the preceding context and by the parallel verse in the Ṭuroyo version.

[35] The two versions do not agree with each other in this respect. In the Kurdish version, the *Vali* receives a phone call, while here it is said that he calls his other soldiers.

[36] A rhetorical exclamation by NE.

[37] This form of address is unexpected in this case, given that the soldiers and the officers address the governor, who is clearly superior in rank. One possible interpretation would be that NE puts herself, as the narrator, in the story and phrases this question as if she asked the question herself.

54	*Ba kirine Metrên. Go, Metrano, çi mesele ye?* They called the Metran and said: O Metran, what's the matter here?	*Qralle lu=ḥasyo, u=ḥasyo qrele lu=malla, u=malla aṯi, omar "Xayr, ašár, mhiroli b-ṭayuṯo.*
55	*Metran ba kire melê, mela hatiye.* The Metran called the mullah, and he came.	They called the bishop, the bishop called the mullah, the mullah came and said: No, I have actually married her according to the Muslim rite.
56	*Go, Çima? Go, Welle mi bi destê xwe mahr kir, mehreke misilmanî ye.* He said: What's the matter? By God, I have married them by my own hands according to the Muslim rite.	
57	Ṭuroyo *Hedika qṭəʕʕe riše du=wali du=Wan, mʕalaqqe at=terfiyayḏe b-kaṯpe du=ḥasyo.* Then they cut off the *Vali*'s head and pinned his decorations to the bishop's shoulders.	*Hedika nḥərre u=Wali, maḥatte at=tarfiyayḏe b-kaṯpe du=ḥasyo. W tŭ žmərra sāx.*[38] Then they executed the *Vali* and put his decorations on the bishop's shoulders. And you be well for me!

Glossary

Abbreviations for the Glossary

1, 2, 3—first, second, third person
adj.—adjective
adj. m.—adjective masculine
adv.—adverb
comp. adj.—comparative adjective
conj.—conjunction
def. art.—definite article
dem. pn.—demonstrative pronoun
exist. prt.—existential particle
f. s.—feminine singular
fut.—future
gen. prt.—genitive particle
geogr. n.—geographical name
imv.—imperative
interj.—interjection
interrog. pn.—interrogative pronoun
m. s.—masculine singular
n.—noun
n.f.—noun feminine
n. gen.—noun generic
n.m.—noun masculine
num.—numeral
obl. pn.—oblique pronoun

[38] A standard formula at the end of stories in Ṭuroyo; cf. Kurmanji *tu ji min re sax (bî)*.

perf.—perfect
pl.—plural
prep.—preposition
pres.—present
pres. cop.—present time copula
pret.—preterite
prp. n.—proper name
prt.—particle
pst. cop.—past time copula
refl. pn.—reflexive pronoun
s.—singular
s.o.—someone
s.th.—something
sub. conj.—subordinate conjunction
subj.—subjunctive
v.—verb
voc.—vocative

Selected Lexical Items from the Kurmanji Version

avêtin v. (1) *xwe* ~ "to ask, to beg s.o.": imv. *xwe bavêje tor û bextê* . . . "ask for help and protection!"; (2) *xwe* ~ "to rush to s.th.": pret. *destê xwe avêtî* "he hastily picked up"
ʕecêb n.f. "disaster, unfortunate thing": *ʕecêba wilo* "such a disaster"
ʕeynelî n.f. "Martini rifle": *rextê ʕeyneliya* "a cartridge belt for a Martini rifle"
ʕolîk(e) "room upstairs": *olîka banî* "rooftop room"
Bagok geogr. n.
ba kirin v. "to call s.o.": pret. *ba kire melê* "he called the mullah"
ban n.m. "roof": *olîka banî* "rooftop room"
ber "bullet, cannonball" n.m.: *berê top û mitilyosa* "cannonballs and bullets"
bexşîş n.f. "bribe, tip": *bexşîşa te* "your reward"
bînbaşî n.m. "major"
cehnem n.f. "hell": *cehnema te û bavê wî kiriye* "to hell with you and his father!"
çawîş n.m. "sergeant"
çelengî n.f. "haste"
çirin onomatopoeic interj., the sound of a metal object falling to the ground
derge n.f. "gate, entrance door"
firman n.f. "order, decree of the state (usually resulting in punishment and persecution)": *firmana dewletê* "the order of the state"
kevl û kerîs "?" (see commentary above)
kîs n.m. "bag, sack"
kopal n.f. "stick, cane": *kopala xwe* "his cane"
meqsed n.f. "goal, intention": *meqseda te* "your intention"
metran (voc. *metrano*) n.m. "bishop, catholicos": *metranê dêra Yaxtamanê* "the bishop of the Aghtamar church," *çû destê Metrên* "he went (to kiss) the bishop's hand," *vî Metranî zilamekî misilmanî fileh kiriye* "this bishop has turned a Muslim into a Christian"
miqîmî dinyayê adv. "according to the established way of things"
misîn n.m. "pitcher"
misranî adj. "Egyptian" (?): *tifînga misraniya* "an Egyptian rifle"
mitilyos n.m. "machine gun"; *berê top û mitilyosa* "cannonballs and bullets"
pel n.m./f. "leaf": *pelek kaxez* "a piece of paper"
qalib n.m. "form, mold"
qirên n. "shout, cry"
rext n.m. "cartridge belt": *rextê 'eyneliya* "the cartridge belt of a Martini rifle"
rezîl kirin v. "to bring shame to s.th.": pres. *rezîl nakim* "I am not going to bring shame"
şidandin v. + xwe "to equip oneself": pret. *xwe şidandî bi rexte 'eyneliya* "he equipped himself with a cartridge belt for a Martini rifle"
top n.f. "cannon": *berê top û mitilyosa* "cannonballs and bullets"
tor n.f. "protection"
toxay n. "brigade" (?)
xira kirin "to compromise, to destroy": pres. *xira nakim* "I am not going to compromise"
û conj. "and"
wellah interj. "by God!"
yuzbaşî n.m. "captain"
zirzir n.f. "ringing": *zirzira telefona Waliyê Wanê* "the ringing of the Vali's telephone"

Ṭuroyo Glossary

ʕăbaye n.f. “cloak”: *i=ʕăbayayḏe* “his cloak”
ʕağobo (pl. *ʕağobe*) n.m. “disaster”
ʕal prep. “on”
ʕAli prp. n.
ʕaskar (1) n.m. “soldier”: *u=ʕaskărayḏe* “his soldier”: (2) n.f. “army”: *i=qa=ʕaskaraṯe* “all these soldiers”
ʕayno (pl. *ʕayne*) n.f. “eye”: *ʕayne* “his eyes”
ʕIsa prp. n.
ʕito n.f. “church”: *i=ʕitayḏi* “my church, *i=ʕitayḏe* “his church,” *i=ʕitayḏux* “your (m.) church”
ʕolike bani n.f. “rooftop room”
aḥna pers. pn. “we”
alfo n.m. “thousand”
ánnaqqa prt. “now then”
arᵊmnayto adj. f. “Armenian”
ašár prt. “in fact”
b- prep. (1) “in, into”: (2) “with, by”
Bagoke geogr. n.
băḥar n.m. “sea, lake”
baxt n.m. “honor”
bayne “between”: *baynaṯṯe* “to them”
bayto n.m. “house”
bəṯr prep. “after”: *bəṯrux* “after you (m.)”
binbaši n. “major”
čadəre (pl. *čadrat*) “tent”
čənge n.m. “clank”
čugān n.m. “stick, cane”: *u=čuganayḏe* “his cane”
d gen. prt. “of”: *u=wali du=Wan* “the *Vali* of Van”
d sub. conj. “that; if”
darga n.f. “gate”
dastəlmēž n. “ablution”
dawla n.f. “government”
de hortative prt. “come on!”
diḏ- poss. pn. “of”: *diḏa* “her,” *diḏux* “your (m.),” *diḏi* “my”
dino n.m. “religion”: *u=dinayḏux* “your (m.) religion,” *u=dinaṯxu* “your (pl.) religion”
e interj. “Yes”
i= def. art. f. s.
iḏo (pl. iḏe) n.f. “hand”: *iḏe* “his hands”
i=naqqa conj. “when”
falgo n.m. “half”
fərmān n.m. “order; wrath”
fətna n.f. “trouble”
foṯo n.f. “face”: *foṯe* “his face”
ga presentative prt. “aha!”
gab prep. “near, by”
gamiyo n.f. “ship”
gawo n.m. “inside”: *gawa di=ʕito* “inside of the church”
goro n.f. “roof”
ha hawxa adv. “like this”
hăma prt. without an easily definable meaning
hawxa adv. “like this; so”
hawīr d- prep. “around”
hedika adv. “then”
hənnək pers. pn. “they”
hiye pers. pn “he”
ḥasyo n.m. “bishop”
ḥaṣo n.m. “back”: *ḥaṣe* “his back”
ḥḏo num. “one (f.)”
ḥēḏr prep. “around”
hno n.gen. “whatsit”
kal- presentative prt.: *kalayo* “it (f.) is”
kaṯpo (pl. *kaṯpe*) n.m. “shoulder”: *kaṯpe du=ḥasyo* “the bishop’s shoulders”
kefo (pl. *kefe*) n.f. “stone”
kətwa pst. cop.
kiso (pl. *kise*) n.m. “sack”
kul- adj. “all”: *kulle* “they all,” *kula* “it (f.) all”
kumme n.f. “hat”: *i=kummayḏe* “his hat”
kŭro voc. n.m. “lad”
l- prep. (1) “to, towards”: *zoxu lalʕal, li=ʕolike bani* “go upstairs, to the rooftop room”: (2) as a dative marker: *məllele l-ʕAli šawiša* “he told officer Ali”; (3) marker of nominal agents: *lu=zlamano u=ḥasyano səmle zlam ṭayo ṣuroyo* “this man, this bishop has converted a Muslim into a Christian”
lalʕal adv. “upstairs”
laše (pl. *lašat*) n.f. “corpse”
lo=/lə= verbal prefix of negation
ma interrog. prt.
madām conj. “since”
malla n.m. “mullah”
măsăle n.f. “matter, thing”
Matrān n.m. “Metran, bishop”
me prep. used in comparative constructions “than”: *hiye xwəšktər mine-wa* “he was more beautiful than him”
məqimi dəna adv. “according to the established way of things”
Merame prp. n.
məssine n.f. “pitcher”
mən interrog. pn. “what?”
mətəlyōs n.m. “machine gun”
mhaymno adj. m. “pious, religious”
nošo n.m. “person; someone”
ono pers. pn. “I”
pire n.f. “woman”
pīs adj. “bad”
qa < annaqqa a particle of transition “now then”
qaləb n.m. “mould, form”
qanūn n.m. “law”
qərrēn n.m. “cry”
qolo n.m. “voice”: *qole* “his voice”
raxt n.m. “cartridge belt”
rišo n.m. “head”: *riše du=wali* “wali’s head”
ruḥ- refl. pn. “self”: *šar ruḥux* “for yourself,” *mḥalqina ruḥan tore w baxt* “we will ask (lit. throw ourselves) for help,” *mḥalaqle ruḥe bi=gamiyo* “he jumped (lit. threw himself) into the ship”
ṣurayt adj. (1) “Aramaic language (Ṭuroyo)”: (2) *b-*

ṣurayt “according to a Christian rite”
ṣafro n.m. “morning”
ṣuroyo n.m. “Christian”
šan prep. “for”: *šar ruḥux* “for yourself”
šar n.m. “epic tale”
šăriʕa n.f. “customs”
šăvắq n.m. “early morning”
šawiša n. “sergeant”
šuro n.m. “wall”
tarʕo n.m. “door”
tălăfūn n.m. “telephone”
tfənge n.f. “rifle”
tarfī n. “medal, decoration”: *at=tarfiyayḏe* “his decorations”
toġay n. “brigade”
tope (pl. *tōp*) n.f. “gun”
tōr n.m. “honor”
ṭayət adj. “Muslim”: *b-ṭayət* “according to the Muslim rite”
ṭayo (pl. *ṭaye*) n.m. “Muslim”
ṭayuṯo n.f. “Islam”
ṭuro n.m. “mountain”
xayr interj. “no”
xēr n.m. “good thing”: *xēr-yo?* “what”s going on?”
xwəšktər comp. adj. “more beautiful”
u= def. art. m.s.
-wa pst. cop. 3 s.
wali n.m. “vali, governor”
Wan geogr. n.
-yo prs. cop. 3 s.
yuzbaši (pl. zbašiye) n.m. “captain”
zərazər n.m. “ringing”
zlam n.m. “man”
zuḥṯo (pl. zuḥṯe) n.f. “fear”

ʔb/hw **I** (1) “to give”: pres. *gdobenux* “I will give you,” *d-obatla* “if you give her,” imv. *hawli* “give me”: (2) ~ telefon “to call”: pret. *hule telefon* “he called”
ʔbʕ **I** “to want”: pres. *kəbʕat* “you want”
ʔḏʕ **I** “to know, to understand”: pres. *gdəḏʕutu* “will you (pl.) understand?”
ʔmr **I** “to say”: pres. *omər* “he said”: *kəmmi* “they say,” *əmmanwa* “if I (f.) told”
ʔṯy **I** “to come”: pret. *aṯi* “he came”: imv. *tux* “come (s.)!”
ʔzl **I** “to go”: pret. *d-əzze* “in order for him to go,” *gəzzan* “we will go,” pret. *azzeyo* “he went,” *azze* “he went,” *azzən* “they went,” imv. *zoxu* “go (pl.)!”
ʕlq **II** “to hang”: pret. *mʕalaqqe* “they hanged”
ʕrq **I** “to run away”: pret. *ʕarəq* “he ran away”
bṭl **II** “to abandon”: pres. *lo=kombaṭanno* “I am not going to abandon”
fhm **I** “to understand”: pres. *kfəhmutu* “will you (pl.) understand?”
fṯḥ **I** “to open”: pret. *fṯəḥle* “he opened”
hwy **I** (1) “to become”: pret. *hawi* “he became”: (2) “to appear” perf. *kohawi* “there has appeared”
ḥlq **II** (1) “to jump”: pret. *mḥalaqle ruḥe bi=gamiyo* “he jumped into the ship”: (2) “to rush”: *mḥalaqle ruḥe l-gawa di=ʕito* “he rushed into the church”: (3) ~ + ruḥ- tore w baxt “to ask for help”: pres. *mḥalqina ruḥan tore w baxt* “we are going to ask for help and protection”
ḥrw **III** (1) “to compromise, to destroy”: pres. *lo=komaḥrawno* “I will not compromise”
ḥyṣ **I** “to fasten”: pret. *ḥəṣle* “he fastened”
kym **III** “to disgrace”: pres. *lo=komakəmno* “I am not going to disgrace”
ltm **I** “to gather (intr.): pret. *latimi* “they gathered”
mbl **I** “to take (away)”: pret. *məblole* “he took her,” imv. *mbali* “take (s.) me!”
mhr **I** “to marry”: pres. *gməhrinala* “we will marry her,” pret. *mhirole* “he married her,” imv. *mhara* “marry her”
mḥt **III** “to put”: pres. *maḥatwa* “he used to put”: pret. *maḥatle* “he put,” *maḥatte* “they put”
mṭy **I** “bring”: imv. *mṭili* “bring (her) to me”
myd **I** “to grab s.t. (*l-*)”: pret. *mədle* “he took”
nfl **I** (1) “to fall”: pret. *nafilo* “she fell”: (2) ~ + qiren: “to let out a scream”
nfq **I** “to go out”: pret. *nafiqo* “she came out”
nḥr **I** “to slaughter”: pret. *nḥərrɛ* “they slaughtered”
qḥr **Ip** “to become angry”: pret. *qḥir* “he became angry”
qry **I** “to call”: pret. *qrele* “he called,” *qralle* “they called”
qṭʕ **I** “to cut off”: pret. *qṭəʕʕe* “they cut off”
qṭl **I** “to kill”: pret. *qṭile* “he killed,” *qṭilux* “you (m.) killed”
Ip “to be killed”: pret. *qtil* “he was killed”
III “to let s.o. be killed” pret. *maqṭelux* “you (m.) got (them) killed”
qwm **IIp** “to happen”: pret. *mqām* “it happened”
qym **I** “to get up”: pres. *koqoyəm* “he gets up”: pret. *qayəm* “he got up”
III “to raise; to bring about”: pres. *lo komaqəmno* “I will not bring about”
rfy **III** “to cast”: pret. *marfele* “he cast”
ryṣ **III** “to spray (bullets)”: pret. *marəṣle* “he sprayed”
slq **I** “to go up”: pret. *saləq* “he went up”
sym **I** “to do, to make”: pret. *səmlan* “we did”: *səmme* “they did,” *səmle* “he made,” perf. *kosəmle* “he has made”: imv. *lo səm* “do not do!”
ṣly **II** “to pray”: impf. *mṣalewa* “he used to pray”
ṣrf **IIp** “to get away with s.th. (*l-* introduces the subject): pres. *gmiṣarfoliyo* “will I get away with that”
šfʕ **I** “to pass”: pres. *šəfʕi* “so that they pass”
šmʕ **I** “to hear”: pret. *šaməʕ* “he heard”
šyġ **I** “to wash”: pres. *mašəġ* “he washed”
trs **II** “to send”: pret. *mtarasse* “they sent”
ṭry **I** “to let, to allow”: pres. *gṭoreno* “I will let”

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Allison Taylor Stuewe is a PhD student in sociocultural anthropology at the University of Arizona where she also completed her M.A. Her research focuses on questions of power, identity, and belonging among Iraqi Yezidi refugees living in Germany. Her M.A. thesis was entitled "'I Can't Dance in Two Weddings': Marriage as an Articulation of Emerging and Transforming Fractures in the Iraqi Ezidi Refugee Community in Germany."

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