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A SHABAK CONTEMPORARY POLEMIC
AGAINST THE YEZIDI RELIGION*

As the transmitted heritage of Yezidi¹ theology came to be more widely known and cultivated in *imāmī* Shiite² intellectual circles, a number of religious scholars came to have an increasing sense that traditional ‘*ulamā*’ and *fiqh* were fundamentally able to show the ‘basic Yezidi lies’ to the medieval *imāmī* Shiites. So we can show the same to the modern Shiites too. It is within this context that some contemporary scholars undertook the construction of the new synthesizes of *imāmī* polemics against the Yezidis, especially, because the vast majority of the *imāmīs*, however, do not have knowledge in any *fiqhī* sense of the ‘Yezidi deviated beliefs’ and because there are, possibly, some scattered ‘Yezidi *šayṭānīs*’ (i.e. Yezidi devil-worshippers), and not *šayṭānī* sects of Ahl-i Haqq,³ in the Kurdish lands of Shiite Iran. Several months ago, perplexed as to what might be the origin of a formally specialized use of the phrase ‘Iranian Yezidis’ which is peculiar to the *imāmī* informants and equally dissatisfied with my own earlier speculations on the matter, I set about looking into the writings of *faqīhs* who were contemporary with the modern Yezidis, if perchance they might offer some evidence on which the question might be solved. In order to this one has to come to an understanding of how they construed and dealt with a number of related problems in which they talk of both Yezidis and Ahl-i

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1 – The best general account regarding the Yezidis is still P.G. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism, its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition*, Lewiston, N.Y., 1995. For other useful surveys see, e.g., M. Guidi, “Origine dei Yezidi e Storia Religiosa dell’Islam e del Dualismo”, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 12 (1932), p. 266-300; Kh. Silēman and Kh. Jindī, *Ēzdiyatī: liber Roşnaya Hindek Tēkstēd Ainīyē Ēzdiyan*, Baghdad, 1979 (repr.1995 in Latin script).

2 – Among the many sources regarding the Shiites one might cite, the following will be useful: S. H. M. Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi‘a Islam*, Beirut, 1979.

3 – They distinguish Ahl-i Haqq *šayṭānīs* or *gōranīs* from Yezidi *šayṭānīs*. A somewhat related discussion has been put forward in Anonymous, “Ahl-i Haqq”, in: *Dā’ iratul-ma‘ārif-i Ta-šayyū‘*, Tehran, 1996, ii, p. 613. For the general discussion of Ahl-i Haqq views about the Satan, cf. M. van Bruinessen, “When Haji Bektash still bore the Name of Sultan Sahak: Notes on the Ahl-i Haqq of the Guran District”, in: A. Popovic & G. Veinstein (eds.), *Bektachiyya: études sur l’ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach*, Istanbul, 1995, p. 119, n. 7; idem, “Satan’s Psalmists: Some Heterodox Beliefs and Practices among the Ahl-i Haqq of the Gurān District” (forthcoming), passim; for the Yezidism: J. Menant, *Les Yézidiz, épisodes de l’histoire des adorateurs du diable*, Paris, 1892.

Haqq, but the focus of the present notes is only on the Shabak,⁴ another subsystem of Shiite doctrine, and the *risālah* of Ḥalīl b. Sulaymān al-Ḥābūrī, a native Kurdish-speaking of eastern Mosul, which is dedicated to Āqā Sayyid Muḥammad Ġawād al-Mudarrisī al-Yazdī, an *imāmi faqīh* from Yazd.⁵ What I wish to do here is only to call attention to the contemporary Arabic manuscript of Malā Ḥalīl's work, entitled *al-Muḥāḍarāt ḥawl al-Diyānāh al-Yazīdiyyah*, found recently in Yazd, and to look very briefly at some aspects of Shabak-Yezidi religious disputes in Kurdistan.

I. The Manuscript

The manuscript collections kept at the Yazd Wazīrī Library, in central Iran, are some of the fullest and most interesting in the Middle East. They number around 4,000 manuscripts, reflect the full diversity of the cultures of the medieval and modern worlds. The *al-Muḥāḍarāt ḥawl al-Diyānāh al-Yazīdiyyah* is a forgotten contemporary manuscript (call number 32297, 124 fols., 19/5 × 33/5 cm.) of the Wazīrī Library not mentioned neither in the *Fihrist-i Nusḥa-hā-yi Kitābhāna-yi Wazīrī-yi Yazd* nor in any other catalogues.⁶

The exact depository of the manuscript is the Personal Library of āqā Sayyid Muḥammad Jawād al-Mudarrisī al-Yazdī, the former *imām ḡum'ah muwaqqat* of Yazd and the close friend of Malā Ḥalīl, and the manuscript was initially registered in the Yazd Wazīrī Library in 1978 as received from him. The manuscript, which I considered it after I overcame many difficulties, is typed in the Arabic script in a very fine typescript, 28-32 lines to the folio. The writing is very meticulous; diacritical marks are perfectly omitted; *šaddah* is not indicated and *hamzah* is marked in some places. There are some handwritten Arabism in the margins- Arabic words, phrases, and sentences.⁷ Kurdish and Arabic verses are rarely cited.⁸ The author clearly did not know Persian, but there are some scattered Persian words in the text.⁹ There are also some mistakes; the binding is

4 – On the Shabak community, their sacred book, and customs cf. A. Ḥ. al-Ṣarrāf, *al-Ṣabak*, Baghdad, 1954; M. van Bruinessen, "A Kizilbash Community in Iraqī Kurdistan: The Shabak", in: M. van Bruinessen & J. Blau (eds.), *Islam des kurdes, les annales de l'autre Islam*, no 5, INALCO-ERISM, Paris, 1998, p. 185-196.

5 – He is a member of famous Mudarrisī family, who lived in Naḡaf and Karbalā' for many years, still alive but sick and very near to the point of death. Cf. generally, M. M. Kāzīmāynī, *Dānišnāma-yi Mašāhīr-i Yazd*, 3 vols., Yazd, 2003, ii, p. 1359-1383.

6 – For the catalogue of Wazīrī's manuscripts, see M. Šīrwānī, *Fihrist-i Nusḥa-hā-yi Kitābhāna-yi Wazīrī-yi Yazd*, 5 vols., Tehran, 1971-1979. There is also a defective microfilm of the same manuscript in the Astan Quds Library, in Mašhad (*al-Muḥāḍarāt ḥawl al-Diyānāh al-Yazīdiyyah*, Microfilm Collections, call number 26253). I wish to thank Mrs. Ilahi Mehub who called my attention to the microfilm of *al-Muḥāḍarāt*.

7 – Cf. *muḥāḍarah* 4, fol. 58; 9, fol. 74; 12, fol. 107; 14, fol. 110.

8 – Cf. *muḥāḍarah* 1, fol. 10; 9, fol. 74; 11, fol. 99; 18, fol. 114; *al-ḥukm al-šar'ī* fols. 123-124.

9 – Cf. *muḥāḍarah* 11, fol. 98.

late, of thick cardboard with marble paper. The manuscript is dated but the author has placed dates at the end of several of the separate parts and one may infer that *al-Muḥāḍarāt* was typed on *Rabiʿ al-tānī* 11th 1398 (March 16th 1978).¹⁰

The complete text of the manuscript consists of individual *muḥāḍaras*, which usually begin with the phrase *ayyubā al-qārī al-karīm* (i.e. Āqā Sayyid Muḥammad Ġawād al-Mudarrisī al-Yazdī). The essential parts of the manuscript were nearly composed in form of catechisms, questions and answers: Who are the Kurds? Who are the Yezidis? From where have they come? What is their religious doctrine? What is their opinion about *ḥusayniyyīn* (i.e. Muslims)? What is their opinion about *Ahl al-bayt* (i.e. Prophet's Household)? ... etc. These questions are followed by Malā Ḥalīl's responses. There are a total of 19 *muḥāḍarabs* in the manuscript. The *muḥāḍarabs* are numbered: (1) *al-Šaʿb al-kurdī*, fol. 5; (2) ... *tasmih al-Yazidiyyīn bi-hādā al-ism...*, fol.15; (3) *al-uṣūl...*, fol. 20; (4) *al-ruḥāniyyūn...*, fol. 32; (5) *hal kāna al-Yazidiyyūn al-ḥālīyyūn...*, fol. 59; (6) *al-ṣalāt*, fol. 61; (7) *al-muḥarramāt...*, fol. 66; (8) *al-Sayḥ ʿAdī ibn Musāfir*, fol. 68; (9) ... *al-ḥurūb...*, fol. 73; (10) *al-Ṭāwūs*, fol. 82; (11) *al-aʿyād*, fol. 83; (12) ... *al-sanḡaq*, fol. 104; (13) *Ġilwa wa Muṣḥaf Raš*, fol. 107; (14) *al-aḥwāl al-šaḥṣiyyah*, fol. 110; (15) *al-talāq...*, fol. 111; (16) ... *ṣidāqah al-dam*, fol. 112; (17) ... *hijrān...*, fol. 113; (18) *al-mayyit...*, fol. 114; (19) *ḥiwār maʿa al-qalam*, fol. 117. The final brief parts are separated by other titles and begin where the last *muḥāḍarah* ends. The final section may be divided into three categories: (1) ... *taʾrīḥ al-ʿIrāq maʿa al-istiʿmār*, fol. 118, which deals with the modern history of Iraq including ʿAbd al-Karīm Qāsim, Muṣṭafā Bār-zānī... etc; (2) *ṣarḥ ḥālī...*, fol. 122, a very brief autobiography of Malā Ḥalīl; (3) *al-ḥukm al-šarʿī...*, fol. 123, which indicates the Yezidi *irtidād* and perversion.

II. Who is Malā Ḥalīl, the Author of *al-Muḥāḍarāt*?

Ḥalīl b. Sulaymān al-Ḥābūrī al-Kurdī al-Šayḥānī, known as Malā Ḥalīl (b. 1903?), is one of the most knowledgeable Shabak priests, whose interests and writings spanned religion, history, and literature. Like most contemporary Kurdish writers in Iraqi Kurdistan, Malā Ḥalīl wrote in Kurdish and Arabic, and drew almost on sources available to him in those languages. But since some of these were translations from Persian, Turkish, and European languages, Malā Ḥalīl can be viewed as a modern researcher who especially developed his own Shabak ideas through a polemical dialogue with two Kurdish communities: Yezidis and Ahl-i Haqq.¹¹

10 – The other dates, at the folios 118 and 124 are: *Rabiʿ al-awwal* 1396 and *sanah al-ḥiḡriyyah* 1397

11 – According to oral accounts, Malā Ḥalīl talked about 'Ahl-i Haqq heterodox sect' in a letter to a fellow *imāmī*, preserved in his personal library

Our knowledge of Malā Ḥalīl's life is very scanty. There is only a short note in the present text¹² and some references to him in oral literature. He has probably born in 1903 and lived most of his life in ʿAyn Safan, in Mosul, which have a small Shabak community. In *al-Muḥāḍarāt* we find several references to the Shabak as the tribe of Malā Ḥalīl, signified by ʿ*ašīratī*.¹³ A note at the folio 122 mentions the course of his studies in Aleppo and his teachers: Mullā Aḥmad al-ʿAqrāwī, Mullā Muḥammad al-Aswad, Muḥammad ʿAwnī (*al-šīʿah al-imāmiyyah*), al-Sayyid Ḥasan al-Ġamāsī, and Mullā Ṭāhā. In parallel, however, he has composed two series of works. The first series, written in Kurdish, includes *al-Qiṣaṣ wa al-amtāl*, a Kurdish commentary on *Qurʾān (tafsīr)*, *Dīwān*, and *Qāmūs kurdī wa ʿarabī*. Concomitantly with these Kurdish writings, Malā Ḥalīl pursued an Arabic research program: *Šarḥ al-muġnī fī al-naḥw*, *al-Yazīdiyyah fī al-ḥuṭuwāt*, and *Iʿlāl al-amāl* [sic].

In final decades of his life, however, Malā Ḥalīl and his wife, ʿĀmina al-ʿAlawiyyah, migrated to Yazd (*madīnah al-ḥayr wa al-barakah*). Finally in his life, as we learn from a number of doubtful oral accounts, Malā Ḥalīl converted from Shabak to *Imāmiyyah* and lived as a *muḥāġir* in Yazd. Last but not least, I should mention that this contention was not accepted by Aqā Sayyid Muḥammad Ġawād.

III. Malā Ḥalīl's View on the Yezidis

The first important question that can be submitted to Malā Ḥalīl's inquiry is whether the Yezidis are *murtadd*s (i.e. apostate) or non-*murtadd*s. Malā Ḥalīl, unambiguously, believes that, except during Farīq Pāšā's period which they were converted to Islam [sic],¹⁴ they are *al-murtaddūn* (i.e. apostates).¹⁵ In sum, he rejects Yezidi religion both medieval Yezidism and modern Yezidism.

The topical agenda of his religious disputes with Yezidis are set under two basic headings: doctrinal claims and religious practices. In the area of doctrinal claims Malā Ḥalīl is concerned to provide a defense from Shiite scripture in favor of the veracity of a basic Shabak teaching the Yezidism seems to deny: *imām Ḥusayn* and the other *Ahl al-bayt*.¹⁶ Also, there are some doctrinal issues, like the *laʿn* of Yazīd b. Muʿāwiyah, important to Shabaks that statements in the Yezidi literature seem to abuse, or that Yezidi polemicists attacked. In this area, there are also questions about Satan's status as a 'God', and the position of dual-

12 – Cf. *šarḥ ḥālī*, fols. 121-122, where his short autobiography is given.

13 – Cf. *muḥāḍarah* 3, fol. 24; 8, fol. 69.

14 – Cf. the discussion of this aspect of Malā Ḥalīl's argument in *muḥāḍarah* 9, fol. 81.

15 – Cf. *al-ḥukm al-šarʿī*, fol. 123.

16 – On the Shabak-Yezidi struggles and Shiite inclinations of Malā Ḥalīl, see *muḥāḍarah* 3, fol. 29; 4, fol. 48; 5, fols. 59-60; 9, fol. 80; 19, fol. 119; et passim. For some Western academic points of Yezidi un-Shiite or 'anti-Shiite' traditions see R. Lescot, *Enquête sur les Yezidis de Syrie et du Djebel Sinjār*, Beirut, 1938, p. 19ff.

ity or 'Zoroastrian duality'.¹⁷ He also discusses at some length, without so designating it, the Yezidi view of the incarnation.¹⁸

Religious practices that regularly appear as topics in *al-Muḥāḍarāt* are: the pray (*ṣalāt*); the Yezidi practice of venerating sanjaqs; Yezidi priests; death; marriage; customs etc.

He deceitfully opposed Yezidism, not to attack them, and supplied ready answers rather than scholarly disquisitions on the matters. It is clear that some disputed questions in *al-Muḥāḍarāt* reflect the religious objections Yezidis most commonly and most consistently voiced to Shabaks. Malā Ḥalīl composed his *muḥāḍarāhs* to assure his *imāmi* reader, i.e. Āqā Sayyid Muḥammad Ğawād, that there were effective answers to these objections and to supply him with replies he might use in his own arguments about religion with 'Iranian Yezidis'.¹⁹

17 – Cf. *muḥāḍarāh* 3, fols. 20-21.

18 – Cf. *muḥāḍarāh* 3, fols. 23-25. On the Yezidi reincarnation see Kreyenbroek, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

19 – For a forceful statement of 'Iranian Yezidis', cf. *muḥāḍarāh* 4, fol. 59. Since there are only some unsubstantiated reports of the presence of Yezidis in Iranian Kurdistan, the statement of Malā Ḥalīl and *imāmi* Shiites regarding the presence and the spread of Kurdish-speaking Yezidism eastwards can be considered as many important witnesses. On this topic cf. P. G. Kreyenbroek, "On the Study of Some Heterodox Sects in Kurdistan", in: M. van Bruinessen & J. Blau, *op. cit.*, p. 163, n. 1.