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‘When Haji Bektash Still Bore the Name of Sultan Sahak: Notes on the Ahl-i Haqq of the Guran district’

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When Haji Bektash Still Bore the Name of Sultan Sahak:

Notes on the Ahl-i Haqq of the Guran district

Martin van Bruinessen

After Sultan Sahak, the last great Divine Manifestation, had completed the revelation of his esoteric teachings (*haqiqat*) to his first disciples among the Guran, he took his leave of them. Disappearing from the Guran country without a trace, he reappeared in Anatolia, in the form of Haji Bektash. He taught mystical doctrines and techniques (*tariqat*) in those lands for almost a hundred years, and then returned to the Guran country. In the perception of his disciples there, he had been away for only an hour.

(Ahl-i Haqq legend)

Haji Bektash' popularity and influence have by and large remained restricted to the former Ottoman territories, but not entirely so. In Iran, his name is well known among the Ahl-i Haqq, a syncretistic sect that may, all in all, have several million followers.¹ Pockets of Ahl-i Haqq are to be found in many parts of Iran and among various ethnic groups: among Azari around Tabriz, Persian speakers in northern Iran, Kurds of the Hamadan region, Lur south and west of Kermanshah, and finally, the oldest surviving Ahl-i Haqq community, the Guran, living in the mountains north of the Baghdad-Kermanshah road. The oldest sacred texts of the Ahl-i Haqq are in Gurani, the (north-west Iranian) language that is associated with the Guran, although not all Guran speak Gurani, nor are all Gurani speakers Guran.² In Iraq too, there is a number of enclaves of Ahl-i Haqq (called Kaka'i there), especially in the districts between

¹ The Ahl-i Haqq sect (or religion) was first made known to the West in an enthusiastic description by the Comte de Gobineau, and was studied in depth by V. Minorsky and W. Ivanow; the numerous books and articles by M. Mokri (only some of which are mentioned in the bibliography) present essential source materials.

² See the discussion in Minorsky 1943 and Bruinessen 1992, ch. II.1-m.

Kirkuk and Khaniqin. Most of these Kaka'i speak Kurdish or Gurani dialects, but there are also Turcoman Kaka'i, in the same region.

Ahl-i Haqq beliefs: successive divine incarnations

The various Ahl-i Haqq (AH) communities differ to some extent in their beliefs, traditions and practices; the Guran are on the whole the most 'heterodox' among them, while some of the Persian urban communities have attempted to be accepted into the fold of orthodox (*ithna`ashari*) Shi'i Islam. They all share, however, certain basic tenets of belief: the transmigration of human souls (*tanasukh*), and the repeated manifestation of God, accompanied by four or more angels, in human form. Like many other 'pseudo-Islamic' sects, the AH recognise `Ali as one of their divine incarnations. He is, however, surpassed in importance by Sultan Sahak, the reputed founder of the AH religion. This Sultan Sahak appeared among the Guran in the mid- or late 15th century,³ and was, in the view of the Guran, the last great divine incarnation. Other AH communities, however, recognise several later incarnations, leaders or reformers of the religion, such as Atesh Beg, who introduced the AH religion to Azarbaijan, whence it spread all over northern Iran.

When the Divine Principle appeared as `Ali, say the Guran, he revealed *shari`at*; in a later incarnation, as Shah Khushin, he revealed *tariqat*; next, as Shah Fazl, he brought *ma`rifat*. The revelation was finally completed with the arrival of Sultan Sahak, who taught *haqiqat*. Not unnaturally, the Guran tend to consider the last revelation, which they follow, as superior to the previous ones. The use of such terms as '*shari`ati*' or '*khanagahi*' (i.e., associated with a khanagah or dervish lodge, and therefore with a *tariqat*) for their Shi'i neighbours is slightly derogatory, and implies that the latter still are on a lower level of understanding, however superior they may be in other respects. Sultan Sahak brought his *haqiqat* teachings not to Persians, Kurds or Turks first, but appeared, and made his first disciples, among the simple Guran.

³ This date is established in Bruinessen, forthcoming.

Sultan Sahak and Haji Bektash

The identification of Haji Bektash with Sultan Sahak, made by various AH communities, shows among other things that the AH considered the Bektashi (and Alevi, as we shall see) as a closely related religious community - although still of a lower level of esoteric knowledge. In the Guran version of the story,⁴ Sultan Sahak, having revealed the haqiqat among the Guran, vanished and re-appeared in the form of Haji Bektash, in order to spread the *tariqat-i `Alawiya* in Anatolia or, as some say, in Syria. This means that the Guran must for some time have been aware of the presence of communities known as Alevi/`Alawi in Turkey and Syria, and of the similarities between these sects' beliefs and practices and their own. (Significantly, however, Haji Bektash is said only to have taught a *tariqat*, thus keeping the superiority of the Ahl-i Haqq, or *ahl-i haqiqat*, intact).

Most AH communities know this story, but its form varies. According to some, it was not Sultan Sahak who transformed himself into Haji Bektash but a later theophany, Muhammad Beg;⁵ the followers of the Ateshbegi branch hold that it was their own saint, Atesh Beg,⁶ who performed this feat. And according to one of the best informed keepers of the Guran's traditions, kalamkhan Ka Karim of Tut-Shami, Haji Bektash was not an incarnation of the Deity himself, as Sultan Sahak was, but of his closest and most powerful angel, Satan.⁷ These variations suggest that the similarity of Bektashi and Alevi or `Alawi to the AH has been recognised not just once, but repeatedly, by various sub-sects and at various times, or that there has been a continuous contact between these sects over a longer period.

Some variants of the story make even more elaborate identifications. In each of his incarnations, the Deity is accompanied by a number of angels and other spiritual beings. In the case of `Ali, for instance, these appeared in the guises of companions like Salman Farsi,

⁴ Laid down in written form in several *kalam* or religious poems of the AH, and also retained in oral lore. I heard it in several Guran villages during my visits in 1975 and 1976. Variant forms are recorded in Khan 1927:32 (oral); Suri 1344:46-7 (a *kalam*), Jaihunabadi 1966:404-9 (an early 20th-century Persian reformulation, based on Gurani *kalam*).

⁵ Ivanow 1953:144, T125 (a ms. acquired in Khurasan).

⁶ According to the Guran *kalamkhan* Ka A`zam of Gahwara, who regularly toured the Ateshbegi communities of Azarbaijan.

⁷ Among the Guran, there is a sub-sect of the AH that venerates Satan as the Lord of this world and denies he is the Evil One. See my forthcoming paper on this 'Satan-worship'. These Guran identify Satan with Dawud, one of the angels in the AH pantheon. Jaihunabadi (stanzas 7832-8) identifies Haji Bektash with both Dawud and Sultan Sahak: he was a full incarnation of the former, while the latter inhabited the same body 'as a guest' (see the discussion below).

Qanbar, Khalid ibn Walid and Fatima. Similarly, when Sultan Sahak became Haji Bektash, several of these angels followed him. The Persian *Shahname-ye Haqiqat*, probably following older Gurani *kalam*, mentions six *pir* who were the incarnations of major spiritual beings: Qayansuz Abdal, Gul Baba, Pir Kabar, Ka `Arab, Shamsuddin and Safiuddin; other incarnations mentioned are Malak Tawus(!) and a certain Zahab.⁸ Of these names, only the first two are recognizable as those of Bektashi saints; the fifth and sixth bring to mind the Tabrizi and Ardabili mystics of those names, who are highly respected in both the Alevi and the AH traditions. It seems obvious that the author, who compiled his text in the early 20th century, had no direct acquaintance with Alevi or Bektashi, and only adopted from older texts names (some of them distorted) that were vaguely associated with them. There is more precision in the materials collected in Iraq by Edmonds (1969:94). His Kaka'i informants dictated to him Gurani *kalam* mentioning the following *pir* as incarnations of the major angels: Qayghusiz Abdal, Gul Baba, Shahin Baba, Qaftan(?), Qizil Dede, Turabi Orman, and either Balim Sultan or (in another *kalam*) Viran Abdal. This list suggests a better acquaintance with Bektashi lore - not astonishing in a community living in former Ottoman territory - although here too, some of the names are unfamiliar or distorted, and no system can be detected in this seemingly random collection.⁹

What can we conclude from the above? Nothing very spectacular yet: the Ahl-i Haqq know the names of Haji Bektash and a few other Bektashi saints, so there must have been contacts, probably at several times and places independently. Moreover, the Ahl-i Haqq consider the Bektashi and Alevi as kindred communities. Our story illustrates, however, and may clarify, several central elements of the AH religion: a 'structuralist' world-view and the idea of cyclical history through the repetition of divine incarnation; the elasticity of time; the various types of incarnation recognised; and processes of self-definition with respect to other sects and religions by means of 'theological' explanation. I shall return to these points later, but wish to say a few more things about the Bektashi/Alevi nexus.

⁸ Jaihunabadi 1966, stanzas 7846-7. The author was a Kurd of the Hamadan region, well versed in the oral and written Gurani traditions but reworking those into a synthesis entirely his own.

⁹ There is a Turabi Baba buried in Konitza, Epirus (Hasluck 1929:II,536) and a Shahin Baba in Kupekli, Thessalia (ibid.:533). These are both rather far from Iraq, and neither of these saints is very widely known. By Viran Abdal the poet Virani Baba could be meant, but there is also a simple Hurufi text of that name (C.Huart 1909:xx). Qaftan might in fact be Haji Bektash' mantle (*qaftan*): the AH believe that spirits may also inhabit certain objects (such as `Ali's Zulfiqar) and endow these with supernatural powers.

Contacts of Ahl-i Haqq with Bektashi and Alevi

The Kaka'i of Iraq, especially the Turcomans among them, may for centuries have had regular contacts with Bektashi, if only indirectly through the Janissaries stationed in the garrison towns of the area. But even in Iran, there must at one time have been direct contacts. Evliya Celebi, who travelled through western Iran on a diplomatic mission in 1656, noticed Bektashi convents in the towns of Nihawand and Hamadan,¹⁰ near both of which there lived (and still live) considerable numbers of AH. It is not clear until when these Bektashi settlements in Iran survived, nor how close their relations with the Ottoman Bektashi were. We have direct evidence, however, of contacts between the AH of the Guran district and Alevi of Anatolia and Syria about a century ago. The American missionary Trowbridge, working at `Aintab (present Gaziantep) noticed that his Alevi acquaintances considered as their highest spiritual leaders an AH sayyid family in the Guran district. During the late 19th century, these sayyid had sent their envoys to those distant districts, and the latter had apparently succeeded in convincing the Alevi of the basic identity of the two creeds and of the sayyid's semi-divinity. The sayyid's homestead (or rather, their hearth, *ojaq*) in Tut-Shami had become a place of pilgrimage for Trowbridge's Alevi as well as for the Guran Ahl-i Haqq.¹¹

These two, rather fortuitous, observations show that there have been various sorts of contacts between the (Guran) AH and Alevi/Bektashi groups. Such contacts may account for the identification of Haji Bektash with the major AH saint; they do, however, not explain why AH and Alevi/Bektashi recognised each other's creeds as similar or identical. To the uncommitted outside observer, there are quite significant differences between the beliefs and practices of the `Alawi (Nusairi), the Alevi (Qizilbash), the Bektashi and the Ahl-i Haqq; these sects moreover have distinctly different historical origins. Nevertheless, they have a large number of cultural traits in common; underneath the real differences there is a common substratum. Part of this substratum may belong to West Asia's pre-Islamic past, part seems to be Turkic/Central Asian in origin, another part results from common later influences.

All the pre-islamic elements that Ocak detected in Bektashi menaqibname (Ocak 1983), many of which are distinctly Turkish, are also abundantly present in the sacred scriptures and

¹⁰ *Seyahatname* vol. IV. Ms. Bagdat Kökü 305, fol. 307r, 310r. The relevant sections are extremely defective in the printed edition.

¹¹ Trowbridge 1909:342-3. More on these sayyids and their relations with the Alevi in my forthcoming "Satan's Psalmists".

the oral traditions of the Guran.¹² The popular religious practices and legends of the Guran Ahl-i Haqq show especially striking similarities to those of the Dersim Alevi. These two groups are also linguistically close, while both are quite different from their direct neighbours: most of the Dersim Alevi speak Zaza, an Iranian language closely related to Gurani and only distantly to Kurdish proper. The available evidence suggests for these two particular groups a common cultural origin, associated with early medieval Dailam; essentially Iranian but with many later Turkish admixtures.¹³

Some of the elements the various sects have in common may be due to relatively recent external influences. There is for instance the well-known story of the miracle-worker who, mounted on a wild lion and wielding a venomous snake as a whip, challenged Haji Bektash but was defeated when the latter caused the wall on which he was seated to run about. The story was known to Bektashi all over the Ottoman Empire, with various rival saints being cast into the role of the challenger. The Alevi of Dersim tell the same story with two of their local saints as its protagonists. It is also part of the Guran's religious lore; here it is Sultan Sahak who orders his associate Dawud to ride the wall. The same story is even told as far as India, with various pairs of saints in the leading roles. In fact, it can be shown that the various themes that make up this story are of Indian origin. Religious lore of this kind, as well as various yogi-like practices such as walking on fire, were probably carried to the west by Qalandar-type vagrant dervishes.¹⁴ Especially during the 13th-15th centuries, large numbers of these half-naked, mendicant dervishes, repositories of antinomian mysticism and popular religious and magical lore, roamed about the entire islamic world, from India to the Maghrib. Their role in the formation of the Ahl-i Haqq, the Bektashi order and the various Alevi sects can hardly be overestimated. Although their numbers rapidly declined after 1500, they are still frequently mentioned as late as the 17th century, and they may have formed one of the major channels of communication between the various sects mentioned.

In the following paragraphs, I shall discuss some of the major elements of AH cosmology. Unless stated otherwise, this refers to the AH of the Guran district; other sub-sects may not

¹² Numerous Gurani texts have been edited and analyzed by Mokri (especially Mokri 1962, 1966, 1967, 1968). Cf. Roux 1969.

¹³ On the beliefs and practices of the Dersim Alevi, see Andranik 1900, Öztürk 1972, Bumke 1979. Theories on their relationship with the Guran are discussed in Bruinessen 1992, ch.II, l-m.

¹⁴ The genealogy of the tale of the miracle contest is traced in Bruinessen 1991. On the Qalandar, see: Digby 1984 and Yazici 1974. [Since this article was written, two important studies on the Qalandariyya have appeared, that should be mentioned here: Ocak 1992 and Karamustafa 1994.]

share all these beliefs, or give them different interpretations. I shall not explicitly point out all correspondences and differences with Alevi-Bektashi lore. To the expert these will be obvious; to others not very relevant.

Earlier divine incarnations

Establishing who is God, is also a way of defining who one is oneself. By identifying earlier incarnations of Soltan Sahak, the AH declare where they stand, if not politically, at least philosophically. A list of these incarnations serves as a legitimation as well as a declaration of allegiance; its function is not unlike that of a sufi's *silsila*.

Of the four greatest divine incarnations recognised by the AH, the first was `Ali. Interestingly, Muhammad is not important at all; moreover, he is thought to belong to a group of seven beings that are the dark counterpart to the radiant angelic heptad presided over by `Ali. The AH thus associate themselves with Shi`i Islam, and more strictly with the extremist Shi`a. They consider all sects that deify `Ali as brothers in faith, almost irrespective of the other tenets held. The *ithna`ashari* Shi`a is considered as a more distant relative, having accepted only `Ali's shari`at teachings. Most AH branches in Iran prefer to call themselves Muslims, but several of my Guran informants emphatically denied that their beliefs had anything to do with Islam.

The second great manifestation, bringer of the tariqat, was Shah Khushin. In him we do not recognise a specific historical person, but rather a certain class of popular mystics. The legends about him seem to be related to the incursion of large numbers of Qalandar-type dervishes into western Iran.¹⁵ The deification of Shah Khushin, therefore, may be read as an acknowledgement of spiritual indebtedness to Qalandar-ism. It is not the only acknowledgement: the term Qalandar has strong honorific overtones among the AH; one of the most beloved later saints of the Guran was called `Ali Qalandar.

In the name of the third great manifestation, Shah Fazl, we may recognise that of Fazlallah Astarabadi, the founder of the Hurufi sect (d.1393). One of his associates in the AH myths is called Nasimi, obviously the Turkish Hurufi poet of that name, who was flayed alive in Aleppo

¹⁵ Bruinessen 1991; cf. Ivanow 1953:17-8 and the literature quoted in note 14.

in the early 15th century.¹⁶ The association of the AH with the Hurufi is vague. There may have been Hurufi in or near the Guran district at the time when the AH took its form: one of Fazlallah's major disciples, Ahmad Lur, obviously hailed from Luristan, and as late as 1656 Evliya Çelebi claimed there were Hurufi in Hamadan.¹⁷ These Hurufi or Hurufi-influenced groups may gradually have been incorporated into the new sect. The Hurufi believed, like later the AH, in a series of successive divine incarnations, the latest of them being Fazlallah. This seems to be the major reason for the latter's incorporation into the AH pantheon. It is virtually the only belief the AH have in common with the Hurufi. The cabbalistic speculations typical of Hurufism are (at present) unknown among them.¹⁸

With such an acknowledged spiritual pedigree, it is not astonishing that the AH consider the Bektashi, who are heirs to the same three traditions, as very close to themselves, and Haji Bektash as identical with their founder Sultan Sahak (or with one of the other greatest saints). They show a remarkable aptitude for assimilating other religious traditions into their cosmology. The major semitic prophets are identified as incarnations of the various angelic beings emanated from the Divine Essence, and so are the heroes of old Iranian myths and legendary history. Even Jesus is recognised as an incarnation, though not of God himself but of the archangel Jibra'il. The Deity (i.e., Sultan Sahak) rarely manifests himself alone; he is believed to be accompanied by four, or six or seven angelic beings (together the *haft tan*, or luminous heptad), and in the most complete manifestations by a whole panoply of other spiritual beings. I shall refer to these companions by the names they had in the period of Sultan Sahak. The four archangels were called Benyamin (Jibra'il), Dawud (Mika'il), Pir Musi (Israfil) and Mustafa (Azra'il); a female spirit, Ramzbar, and another male, Baba Yadigar, completed the seven. A dissenting view does not count Sultan Sahak among the *haft tan*, and adds Shah Ibrahim instead. Some AH have gone so far as to make detailed lists identifying

¹⁶ Nasimi's poetry, incidentally, was not only popular in Bektashi circles but also among Qalandar-type vagrant dervishes, as noted by the 16th-century Italian traveller Menavino (quoted by G.Jacob, *Abh. Philos.-Philol. Kl. Kön. Bay. Ak.d.W.* 24 (1909), Abt.3, p.20).

¹⁷ In an, admittedly, rather imprecise statement (op.cit., f. 310v): the people of Hamadan are "*..cümle şî'i ve rafîzi ve mu'tezîli ve müşebbehî ve hurufî mezhebinde bi-mezheb havarîci tayfeler*", which almost reads like a random list of sects offensive to the orthodox Sunni. The Mu'tazili may seem out of place in this list of extremist Shi'i sects. Their inclusion may be related to the fact that the heresiographies mention several Mu'tazili as propounders of the doctrine of reincarnation (Freitag 1985:113-127).

¹⁸ I found one other idea possibly of Hurufi origins in an AH text: the emergence of mankind (in this case, the angels) from the lines of God's face. See note 34 below.

each of the *haft tan* and at least one other heptad, the *haftawana* (the former's more worldly counterpart) with specific persons in the environment of the various incarnations.¹⁹

Cyclical time

Such identifications appear to be based on the idea that certain basic events recur time and again, and that all major saints and mythical heroes can be reduced to a limited number of archetypal roles. I have heard Guran villagers, after we had listened to a ballad on the old Iranian theme of Farhad and Shirin, seriously discuss who Farhad and Shirin 'really' were. The characters of the persons, and the major events in the legends about them are believed to indicate of which of the spiritual beings they are the embodiments. One striking example of frequently recurring events is that of death by beheading. The angel who manifested himself in Husain was not only killed that one time in Karbala, but in many other incarnations as well: he was also Yahya (John the Baptist) and `Ali Qalandar, an AH saint beheaded by unbelievers; and in the story of Shah Fazl below we shall see him in yet another guise. All other events of esoteric significance are also repetitive; the sacred history of the AH is cyclical. In each period or cycle (*daura*) essentially the same drama unfolds itself, enacted by the human incarnations of always the same spirits. The circularity is not perfect, however: the AH admit of a gradual evolution, there being a clear progress from the revelations brought by `Ali to those of Sultan Sahak. Moreover, the protagonists in the drama seem at times to switch roles. In every *daura* there is at least one virgin birth; the virgin (who usually delivers the child from her mouth, or in some other preternatural way) is always the same, but the child is not. Sometimes it is the Deity himself, at other times one of the angels.

As an illustration of how AH popular devotion recognises in widely known legends, historical events, and ideas the essence of its sacred history, and incorporates them into its myths, thereby giving them new and unconventional meanings, I shall retell one of the less known episodes.

¹⁹ For a number of such lists, including one of the two heptads around Jesus, see: Edmonds 1969:94.

The daura of Shah Fazl

Shah Fazl appeared into the world with six companions, together the *haft tan*. The four archangels assumed the personalities of Mansur [al-Hallaj], Nasimi, Zakariya and Turka; the one female spirit of the heptad (the primordial virgin mother) that of `Aina, while the sixth companion, the one who suffered beheading in many of his manifestations, appeared as a lamb, called Barra. These companions followed the shah on his peregrinations through often wild and deserted lands. At times when they were completely without food, Shah Fazl would tell his human companions to slaughter and eat Barra, taking care not to break any of his bones. After their meal, the bones were carefully placed in front of Shah Fazl, who then struck the ground with his magical staff, bringing Barra back to life. Many times the lamb Barra was thus sacrificed, and each time Shah Fazl resuscitated him from the bones.

One day Shah Fazl had gone somewhere alone, leaving his companions behind without food, and was late in returning. After a few days, the friends became quite hungry, and eagerly eyed Barra: having eaten him so often already, what wrong would there be in eating him again? `Aina strongly objected, the lamb was Shah Fazl's and they had no right to kill him; disaster would certainly befall them if they did. The four men, very hungry by then, did not listen to her but cut Barra's throat and prepared a meal. They carefully avoided breaking the bones and collected them as usual, but whatever they tried, they failed to resuscitate Barra again. Suddenly overcome with fear of Shah Fazl's anger, they hid the bones in a distant place.

When Shah Fazl finally returned, he immediately noticed Barra's absence and asked for him. The four men replied that Barra had run away, they did not know where. The shah then loudly called out Barra's name, and from the distance the bones answered moaningly. Shah Fazl sent the companions to collect the bones and put them in front of him, then asked Barra's bones what had happened to him. "They had no patience and killed me; only `Aina tried to stop them". The shah continued his questioning:

- "Who cut your throat?"
- "Turka"
- "Who flayed you?"
- "Nasimi"
- "Who dragged you over the woodfire?"

- "Mansur"
- "Who cut up your meat?"
- "Zakariya"

Shah Fazl then caused these four companions to suffer the same treatment: Turka's throat was slashed, Nasimi flayed alive, Mansur burnt on the pyre, and Zakariya cut to pieces.

When Mansur was burnt, his ashes flew in all directions; one particle happened to fall on a piece of wood floating in the river. So strong was Mansur's repentance at not having listened to `Aina, that even these ashes kept calling out "`Aina haqq, `Aina haqq...". The river carrying the log with the wailing ashes passed by a garden belonging to Mulla Rumi, and the Mulla's virgin daughter happened to be fetching water when the log approached this spot. Hearing a voice moaning "`Aina haqq...", she looked around for who was crying, and discovered that the voice came forth from the ashes on the log floating by. In astonishment she let out a "Wai", her mouth fell wide open. Just then, the last bit of ashes jumped up and entered her mouth; surprised, she swallowed it. Within months, she was visibly pregnant, and her reputation and the Mulla's were accordingly damaged. All calumny stopped, however, when she gave birth preternaturally, from her side. The boy thus born was given the name of Shams-i Tabriz...²⁰

Themes in the Shah Fazl tale

Hallaj, Nasimi and Shams have long exercised a strong appeal to the popular imagination, the former two for the way they met their ends, the last for the romantic way he entered, and departed from, Rumi's life, all three for their 'intoxicated' mysticism. Various elements of the tale above are not unique for the AH. The miraculous birth of Shams-i Tabrizi is the subject of various popular legends in Iran, to which Ivanow has earlier drawn attention.²¹ It has also been observed that certain Alevi, as well as some of the AH, attribute the famous words

²⁰ I owe this version of the tale to *kalamkhan* Baba A`zam Manu'i of Gahwara. It is much more elaborate than any published version known to me. The tale is alluded to in many *kalam*, which as usual do not narrate it in full but assume it to be well known among the hearers (e.g. Mokri 1967, verses 99-114; Suri 1344:177). The tale itself was apparently handed down orally only, and elaborated upon by successive generations of *kalamkhan*, the persons who know not only the *kalam* (one form of sacred scripture) but also the oral traditions on which the *kalam* are comments.

²¹ Rumi finds a human skull possessing dangerous magical properties, and tries to destroy these by pounding the skull to powder. Rumi's daughter accidentally eats the powder, becomes pregnant and gives birth to Shams (Ivanow 1948:12). The numerous variants on the theme of the impregnating head/skull in Alevi-Bektashi legends are well known (e.g. Hasluck 1929:I,146-7; Molyneux-Seel 1914:64-5; Birge 1937:56).

“*Ana’l-haqq*” to Shams rather than Hallaj (Roux 1969:66). Our tale not only gives an unconventional interpretation to this mystic’s utterance but also explains why it belongs to both Hallaj and Shams. This way of reconciling several seemingly contradictory traditions, and of combining events of different times and places into a new meaningful order is, in my opinion, one of the most characteristic traits of the AH cosmology. In this system, perceived similarities between historical or legendary persons are explained in either of two ways. Most commonly, these persons are considered as incarnations of the same spiritual being; once the identification has been made, more elements of the life of one may be projected onto that of the other. Alternatively, they may be placed into the same cycle of sacred time, as contemporaries esoterically if not temporally. The similarity in the circumstances of their lives is then ascribed to the specific *daura* in which they appear.

The deaths of Nasimi and Hallaj, though taking place at quite different times, had enough in common to be thus combined. The number of four being of great importance in AH lore - the four archangels are associated with the four elements, the four seasons, the four directions of the compass; four degrees of religious knowledge were revealed by four major divine incarnations, etc. -it is not surprising that they were given two companions who also suffered violent deaths. One might have expected Fazlullah himself to be cast into the role of one of the other victims; after all, he was also done to death himself. But he, as the Deity Himself, was already given another role to play. Zakariya and Turka cannot easily be identified with any historical persons; they were probably invented because the logic of AH cosmology demanded their existence.

Apart from legends on popular sufi saints, we may discern various elements of older religious traditions. The sacrificial lamb, that had time and again come into the world just in order to be killed, and that in this tale redeems the companions from famine, reminds one of another religion originating in the Middle East. Missionaries working in Iran perceived other similarities with Christianity as well, but these may mean no more than that both religions borrowed and recombined elements from the same rich stock of ideas of the Hellenistic world. Virgin birth, very important in AH mythology, is another case. It is logically connected with the fact that in none of his incarnations the Deity (and, in fact, any of the *haft tan*) ever engages in physical procreation. I believe that these themes owe more to the highly negative attitude of gnosticism towards sexuality than to any direct Christian influences.

The resuscitation of an animal from its bones is a theme that occurs almost all over the world;²² in the present context, it may have Central Asian, or possibly Indian, origins. Apart from the tale of Barra, there is one other well-known AH myth in which this occurs. Sultan Sahak catches from the river a cooked fish, to feed a rival saint. When later another fish accusingly asks Sultan why he has killed her spouse, he takes the (unbroken) bones and from them brings the fish back to life.²³ My AH informants told me that the bones of animals slaughtered for their ritual meals marking the beginning of the seasons should under no circumstance be broken, and referred to these myths as the origin of this custom.

Concepts of the soul and of reincarnation

The resuscitations in these AH myths are related to one of several concepts of the soul that are held simultaneously by the AH: the soul as identical with, or closely associated with, the most imperishable parts of the body, the dry parts that do not putrefy. Mansur's ashes are in that sense a strict parallel to Barra's bones. They constitute the link between Mansur and Shams in a 'primitive' theory of transmigration of the soul. Very similar concepts of transmigration, incidentally, are still widespread in popular belief in South India, alongside the more sophisticated theories of 'high' Hinduism.

The AH, too, subscribe to various theories of transmigration simultaneously without being worried about apparent incompatibilities. In the tales about the births of divine incarnations, we may see initially distinct concepts gradually merge. Shah Khushin was conceived from a particle that detached itself from the sun and entered the mouth of a virgin, who later gave birth through her mouth. The difference with Shams is that the solar particle was not a 'body soul' like Mansur's ashes.

Similar again was the birth of Baba Yadigar, the youngest of Sultan Sahak's companions and in secular time his successor. Sultan Sahak and the older companions had ritually eaten a pomegranate, the fruit of a magical tree. One seed of the fruit had spilt on the floor, and Sultan's servant (a virgin, of course) found it and ate it. After sufficient time had passed, she sneezed and a child came forth from her mouth. Sultan Sahak then ordered one of the companions to place the child in a blazing oven. After three days he ordered the oven to be

²² Examples in Eliade 1964:160-5; Hertz 1960[1909]:70ff.

²³ In the myth referred to in note 14 above. The theme is discussed more extensively in Bruinessen 1991.

opened again, and out stepped the full-grown Yadigar.²⁴ According to some of the Guran, Sultan Sahak then breathed some of his own essence into the young man. The soul or spirit appears here as breath, and the same spirit can apparently manifest itself in two persons simultaneously.

Yadigar thus was not only the incarnation of a high spiritual being (the same that had earlier appeared as Husain and as Barra), his body was also host to the Deity himself. The AH recognise two distinct types of incarnation (with respect to divine spirits). The form discussed so far, in which the spirit assumes a body, in a way that is often compared to the putting on of a new dress, is sometimes called *zuhur*, 'manifestation'. In the second form, *hulul*, the spirit dwells as a guest in a body already possessing a soul, divine or human. My Guran informants did not agree whether *hulul* is temporary or permanent. Some of the cases of which they told me were reminiscent of spirit possession, and were clearly temporary; in others, like Yadigar's, the divine guest seemed to be a permanent presence. A slightly variant form yet is incarnation in an inanimate object, which is referred to in a few AH legends. The magical powers attributed to objects such as `Ali's sword Zulfikar or the regalia of some of Iran's legendary kings are explained by the presence in them of one of the haft tan - usually the one identified with the angel of death, `Azra'il. Properly speaking, this is neither *zuhur* nor *hulul* (the Guran avoid these terms here); it resembles, however, the presence of the spirit in Mansur's ashes. There is no strict limit to the number of spirits that may dwell in the same body. In most of the myths, there is at most one 'guest' in addition to the owner of the body. Political expediency, however, seems to have produced some doctrinal innovation. The highly ambitious (and successful) religious and political leader, Sayyid Baraka, who died in 1863, was believed by the Guran to be a complete manifestation of one of the angels, and in addition to be host to five other spirits, among which the Deity himself.

In discussing the concept or concepts of transmigration, we can further leave *hulul* and incarnation in immaterial objects aside, since all reincarnation myths refer to *zuhur* only. So far, we have encountered spirits transmigrating in the form of ashes, a light particle and a pomegranate seed. The most important of the forms in which the divine spirit migrates, however, is that of a bird - not a crane as in the Haji Bektash legend or a pigeon as in early Christian lore, but a falcon or eagle (*baz*), a bird with a prominent place in pre-Islamic Iranian

²⁴ After Safizade 1352:27-8 and various oral accounts. The 'baking' of Yadigar is remarkably similar to Alevi tales in which the young `Ali is hidden in a furnace for seven days, or the young Imam Baqir (Muhammad b. `Ali al-Baqir, Husain's grandson) put into a copper (*baqir*) cauldron heated on a fire (Hasluck 1929:I,147).

as well as Sufi tradition.²⁵ Shah Khushin is vaguely associated with this bird, but it appears most clearly in the myths surrounding Sultan Sahak's birth. Three of the companions were already in the world, biding his arrival. When they came to the house of the aged Sayyid `Isi, they smelt the fragrance of the divine and felt that this would be the place where the Deity would manifest himself. Not seeing anybody there who might become mother to the incarnation, they requested Sayyid `Isi to marry a young woman, Khatun Dairak. Because of the sayyid's age, Khatun Dayrak must still have been a virgin when a white falcon appeared and alighted on her lap. She embraced the bird and suddenly found it changed into a child.²⁶ In a less chaste variant of this myth, the bird descends between Khatun Dayrak's opened legs, she conceives, and almost at once gives birth to Sultan Sahak (Mokri 1970:39).

It is obvious that the bird is in some sense identical with the Deity, but much less clear what precisely this sense is. Speaking of the Deity, the AH rarely if ever use the names of Allah or Khuda. Often, they just speak of Sultan Sahak, even when referring to the Deity's other manifestations: "Ali was in reality a manifestation of Sultan Sahak", or "Haji Bektash was a great saint, he was Sultan Sahak." When they wish to abstract from the particulars of Sultan Sahak's earthly life, they use the term *zat*, 'essence' or 'self'. Was the falcon the *zat*? Or was it only another *manifestation* of the *zat*? A bird, after all, can hardly be considered as a disembodied spirit? My ontological questions were quite irrelevant to my Guran informants. The falcon was a falcon; it was also Sultan Sahak or, if I preferred, Shah Khushin; and in Reality it was also the *zat*. Speculations as to where and how the Deity and the other spirits exist between their successive incarnations was entirely alien to the Guran with whom I talked. Disembodied spirits existed in my imagination but appealed little to theirs.

Despite the fact that the *haft tan* and other superhuman spirits move on from one incarnation to the next, something of them appears to linger in the places where they once lived. Yadigar, for instance, in some ill-defined sense is still present in his shrine in Zarda, in the heart of the Guran country, which has become the major place of pilgrimage for all Ahl-i Haqq. Such a presence is not necessarily associated with a grave. One spring in the area is venerated because another incarnation of Yadigar 'went into occultation' (*ghaib shud*) there, and another spring because it is 'owned' by

²⁵ The 'Royal Eagle', *shahbaz*, is discussed extensively in Mokri 1967:23-43 and Mokri 1968. To Mokri's erudite exposé we might add that in Indian sufism, the title of Baz was added as an honorific to the names of some dervishes of outstanding spiritual achievement, such as the famous La'l Shahbaz Qalandar of Sehwan and Shaikh Abu Bakr Baz-i Safid. Cf. Rizvi 1978:306-7.

²⁶ After *kalamkhan* Ka Karim of Tut-Shami. The same myth in Ivanow 1953:121 (pp. 60-66 of the Persian text) and in Mokri 1970:179.

another saint. Both are believed to be present in these springs, just as Yadigar and others are in their shrines. My informants emphatically resisted calling this vague presence 'karamat', perhaps because this term is too much associated with Muslim saint worship. They believed that the saints themselves were actually present there, though in a different, occult, form of existence, in which the passing of secular time has no meaning. At one time they were physically present here and underwent some transformation: they died or otherwise left this world. In one time dimension, they then went on to their next incarnations, but there is yet another sort of time in which they have always been and will always remain present in these places of transformation.

The rebirth of the common human soul and eschatology

So far I have only spoken of the transmigration of the Deity and other spiritual beings from one incarnation to the next. The belief in successive divine manifestations neither implies, nor is it implied by, a belief in reincarnation in general. The AH, however, do believe that every ordinary mortal soul returns in another body after death. The more educated Guran use the common Arabic term *tanasukh* for this process of human reincarnation, and to explain it the same images of a duck diving and emerging at another place, or of a person laying off one set of clothes and putting on another, are employed that also serve as simple metaphors for the successive divine incarnations. In fact, the individual embodiment of human soul as well as of divine spirit is called its *dûn* or *jâma*, both of which words mean 'garb'. The views of the Guran on *tanasukh* are not very sophisticated, and they do not appear to entertain any curiosity concerning what might happen to them after death. Their funeral practices, almost identical to those of the surrounding Muslims tribes, appear to imply that death is a tragic, irreversible, one-time event, rather than the liberation of which a more philosophically minded informant spoke. I have, in spite of much querying, not heard any speculations as to who and where one might have been during those previous lives. When questioned, most Guran would admit that incarnation in animal bodies is a possibility, but no one ever told me so spontaneously. The concept of reincarnation seems only tenuously related to notions of reward and punishment in the form of higher or lower rebirth.

Other branches of the AH have developed various ways of accommodating the belief in reincarnation with partly Islamic, partly Gnostic eschatology.²⁷ The Guran, however, showed no

²⁷ See Minorsky's *Encyclopaedia of Islam* article (1960); cf. Minorsky 1920-1921, *passim*.

interest at all in such questions as whether the chain of incarnations is finite and how it might end. Several Gurani *kalam* refer obliquely to a last judgement expected to take place in the plain of Shahrazur, but that was about all that my informants could tell me. Only my philosophically minded friend had more explicit messianic expectations; I do not dare to guess how widely such ideas are shared. In the last days, he told me, all men will be gathered in a wide plain and `Ali will appear, brandishing his Zulfiqar. This terrifying weapon will not hurt those whose souls are pure, but all others will be beheaded and this will be the definitive end. Not even this informant had any idea as to what the mode of existence of the pure souls will be after this last judgement. The Guran AH all appeared to be in agreement that the notion of Paradise (*bihisht*) as another sort of world is a Muslim misconception; for them, *bihisht* is a state of mind (*hal*) alone.

The Guran district as a mirror of world history

For the AH, to recapitulate, sacred time is cyclical, and the major events of each cycle are, with certain reservations, basically identical. We find the same idea in the early Isma'iliya and, in one form or another, in almost all *ghulat* sects. This does not mean, of course, that the AH have a different sense of time from those who see time as linear. In daily life, they adopt the same pragmatic attitude towards time as anybody else. Circular time belongs to a different order of reality than everyday life; it is the time dimension in which events of cosmic significance take place, and with which one only deals during and by means of ritual acts.²⁸ An AH would be hard pressed if asked for a summary of these ever-recurring sacred events. Much of this sacred history remains hidden from the ordinary mortal, and even for the Ahl-i Haqq only a tip of the veil has been lifted. Only a few of the cosmic events are known and partly understood : the mystery of virgin birth, the Deity's incarnation and revelation, the decapitation of Husain ; and, as part of the Guran claim, a struggle between the forces of light and of darkness, represented by the *haft tan* and *haftawana*, respectively. The cosmic events consist of the acts of the Deity and his companions. Even though there might be disagreement as to their meaning, all agree that the essential aspects of these events are repetitive, recurring in every cycle.

This idea has an interesting corollary: since most or all events of cosmic significance are repeated in every cycle, they must also all have taken place in the Guran country, where the

²⁸ Cf. the similar discussion of non-linear time concepts by Maurice Bloch, "The past and the present in the

most important of all cycles was enacted. Cosmologically speaking, every meaningful event that ever occurred anywhere has also taken place in the Guran country. It is not necessary to make pilgrimages to far-away places, for every sacred spot on the globe has its equivalent here. The Ka'ba in Mecca, the world axis of Islam, has its parallel in the shrine of Yadigar, in the Dalahu mountains just north of Sar-i Pul-i Zuhab, which is the major gate connecting our manifest world with the hidden one, and the most important centre of pilgrimage. (It does not, however, constitute the *qiblat* of the AH : the favoured direction in ritual is the south.)²⁹ In a small area around the shrine, there are numerous other sacred places. One of the other haft tan, Dawud, lies buried nearby; another, Mustafa, is somehow present in a tree that he planted at a place where he once rested. The shrine of the fourth, Benyamin, is in the nearby town of Kirind, and whoever might wish to pay their respects to the haft tan collectively can do so at Aftab-i Sharif, a high place overlooking the shrine, with a wide view towards the south, where the seven used to meet.

The drama of Karbala was enacted several times among the Ahl-i Haqq, once at Aftab-i Sharif, where Yadigar (or another incarnation of the same angel) was killed by the primordial enemy. His head disappeared in the spring Qaslan or Kosar (Kauthar) in the same area, and his *zat* is believed still to be present in that spring. This is, incidentally, the same spring Kauthar that Muslims believe to be in Paradise. The Guran look with pity upon those Shi'ites who go all the way to Karbala on a pilgrimage that has no greater value than a visit to the Kosar.

Pilgrimages to the shrine of Imam Riza in Mashhad, the major holy centre in Iran, are equally superfluous. Imam Riza was an incarnation of Dawud (who is also the angel Mika'il, and who according to some was Haji Bektash). A visit to the simple tomb of Dawud, in the foothills leading up to Yadigar's shrine, is sufficient to achieve the same effect. Dawud was also, in the belief of one AH sub-sect among the Guran, the same as Iblis, whom the Muslims call Satan because of his refusal to worship man. To them Iblis is not the king of evil and the warden of hell, as the Muslim claim — hell, after all, is not a place but a state of mind — but the Lord of this world. Whoever wishes success in a worldly enterprise would be well advised to pay a visit to Dawud's shrine and invoke his support.³⁰

present," *Man*, 12 (1977) : 278-292.

²⁹ According to some of my informants, the dead are buried lying on their right side, facing towards the south, "the *qiblat* of Sultan Sahak." When sacrificial animals are slaughtered, their heads should ideally also be turned into the same direction. This may be a remnant of an ancient solar cult.

³⁰ On the place of "Satan worship" in the beliefs and practices of the Guran, see M. van Bruinessen, "Satan's psalmists...", *art.cit.*

The other heptad, *haftawana*, the dark and material counterpart of the luminous and spiritual *haft tan*, is represented in the Guran territory by the shrine of one of the seven, Sayyid Muhammad, in nearby Zarda, and also by a second spring, named Anahita, in which the essence of the latter's son Shah Ibrahim dwells. The Guran may roughly be divided into the devotees of Yadigar and those of Ibrahim; the two halves adhere to different cosmologies, and there is a definite rivalry between them. (In reality, Yadigar and Ibrahim appear to have been rivals for the succession to the leadership on the early AH community.) The former tend to associate the *haftawana* with evil and to liken Ibrahim to Husain's murderer Yazid. They do not make special pilgrimages to the said two holy places, but when passing them are highly respectful. Ibrahim's devotees do visit Yadigar's shrine, the holiest of the holy for their religion, and then continue to their own spring, the Anahita, while the Yadigari go to the spring Qaslan.

It is not only these two heptads that are present in the area around Yadigar's shrine, other members of the AH pantheon are also represented here. Overlooking the Qaslan is a spot where the *chil tan*, the primordial forty dervishes, used to sit (and somehow still linger). From there, one can almost see the group of twelve trees reputedly planted by the twelve imams. The Deity himself, in his Guran incarnation of Sultan Sahak, is not directly present here; he lies buried some 100 kilometres to the north, near Nosud in Hawraman. Strangely enough, his shrine has not become a major centre of pilgrimage for the AH. Those who wish to worship the Deity commonly do this at the shrine of Yadigar, whose body had been host to a manifestation (*hulul*) of the Deity as well.

The Deity is also present in yet another form, not far from the shrine, in a place called Bahlul, after one of his minor manifestations. Bahlul was a legendary "holy idiot" of Baghdad, who is believed "in reality" to have been the brother of the Caliph Harun ar-Rashid. The companions appeared as, among others, the great mystics Hasan Basri and Ma'ruf Karkhi. Bahlul is popular among the Guran, maybe because of the antinomian behaviour and the resistance against his brother's tyranny with which the AH legends credit him. His name lives on in one of the seasonal sacrificial meals of the Guran Ahl-i Haqq, which is called *mal Bahlul* and which takes place at the onset of the Kurdish winter (in late October).³¹ The Guran believe that Bahlul did not die but went into occultation, and that he still dwells in several places, including the one just mentioned. This was also the place where, in another popular

³¹ The other seasons are associated with Dawud (spring), Benyamin (summer) and Pir Musi (autumn).

AH legend, Kai Khusrau, the hero from the Shahnama, passed into the invisible world, together with his paladins.

Several other heroes of the old Iranian epics, which are still very much alive in popular tradition, are also present in this area in various ways. The nearby town of Qasr-i Shirin is a permanent reminder of the epic love stories involving the beautiful Shirin, king Khusrau and the strong Farhad. Shirin was an incarnation of Benyamin (surprisingly not of the female spirit, Ramz), her lover Farhad was Dawud, and Khusrau none less than Yadigar. Their adventures therefore were re-enactments of the same scenario that had unfolded among the Guran, in the *daura* of Sultan Sahak. The presence of the imposing late Sasanian castle of Yazdagard II, within walking distance from Yadigar's shrine, seems to prove to the Guran that many of the Iranian legends even literally took place here.

Another great legend is associated with the uncompleted Sasanian rock relief called Dukkan-i Da'ud, near the place where the ancient trans-Zagros road passes through its narrowest defile, not far from Sar-i Pul. The rock relief is frequently visited, candles are lighted in front of it, and gradually a large cemetery has spread around it. In the eyes of the Guran, this is an ancient blacksmith's workshop, belonging to Dawud in his incarnation as Kawa the Blacksmith. Kawa, the only commoner in the Shahnama who killed a king, the tyrant Zahhak, has been adopted by the Kurds as their national hero and is associated by them with the onset of spring (Noruz). In the presence of the rock relief that was his workshop, the Guran see a proof that he, too, once lived here.

Nature worship

There are undeniably numerous elements of nature worship in the beliefs and practices of the Guran AH that I have mentioned above. The form of this nature worship is very similar to that found among the Alevi, especially those of Dersim.³²

A trace of sun worship may be discerned in the story of Shah Khushin's conception from a particle of sunlight ; another maybe in the name of the *haft tan*'s place of assembly, Aftab-i Sharif ("Exalted Sun"). Aftab-i Sharif significantly offers a far view to the south, which is also the sacred direction for the Guran, "the *qiblat* of Sultan Sahak." The four seasons, whose beginnings are marked with ritual meals, have also an obvious connection with the sun. The

³² See the literature mentioned in note 13*.

sun may be said to consist of light and fire; it is from his same combination, *nar u nur*, that my most learned informant said Satan (i.e., Dawud) was created. Fire, in combination with light or just by itself, is sacred to the Guran AH. The rebellion of the blacksmith Kawa (a master of fire, for whom the Guran light candles) is associated with Noruz (return of the sun), and in central and southern Kurdistan this event is celebrated by lighting bonfires. The hearth (*ojaq*), especially that in the house of a *sayyid* lineage, is the sacred centre around which life revolves; the lineage itself is also called *ojaq*. In the house of the sayyids of Tut-Shami, visitors reverently kiss the fireplace. The practice of fire-eating or the fire-walk used to be part of the *jam*, the ritual assembly of the Guran AH.

The number of four has great cosmic significance for the AH. Many things come in fours, and usually each of the four is associated with one of the four archangels. Mortal man was created out of the four elements, and each of these was contributed by one of the angels: earth by Benyamin and water by Pir Musi. Fire, in this connection, was not brought by Dawud (Kawa) but by Mustafa, for Dawud is above all associated with the element air (or rather, wind). One of his epithets in Gurani is *Ko-sawar*, "rider of a grey steed;" there are several indications that the mythical grey horse he rode was in fact the wind.³³

The four elements are often mentioned in *kalam* because of their central place in the quaternary structure of the cosmos: four elements correspond with four seasons, four basic personality types, four angels, four degrees of religious revelation. I have not encountered any explicit worship of the elements, except for the great respect shown to (the fire in) the *ojaq*. Water receives its due in the remnants of spring worship: we have seen Yadigar and Shah Ibrahim worshipped in the springs Qaslan and Anahita.³⁴ There is yet a third sacred spring in the same area, the Kani Shifa, which is believed to have, as its name implies, curing properties.

Similarly, there are what appear remnants of tree and stone worship. Mustafa is present near Yadigar's shrine in the form of a tree he planted there during one of his sojourns. The tree must have been singled out for special attention because of a large vulva-shaped hole in

³³ See the *kalam* published in M. Mokri, "Le *kalam* gourani sur le cavalier au coursier gris, le dompteur du vent," *Journal Asiatique*, 262 (1974 : 47-93 and the editor's learned but not always relevant comments. Gurani *ko* (Persian *kabud*) is the colour of a slightly overcast sky. My Guran informants explained that the name *Ko-sawar* means that Dawud rides along the heavens. It was only in the context of the story of man's creation that they explicitly identified him with the wind.

³⁴ The *Shahname-ye Haqiqat*, which is largely but not entirely based on older Gurani *kalam*, interestingly says that Yadigar and Ibrahim (called Ruchyar here) were created from God's two eyes — an obvious play on Arabic *ʿayn* or Persian *chashm/ chashma*, which mean both "eye" and "spring." The same passage has Dawud created out of God's breath (wind !), Pir Musi from God's mouth (water), and Mustafa from God's anger (fire). This is one of the few AH texts in which traces of Hurufism may be detected.

its stem. (One wonders whether this is perhaps the remnant of a fertility cult rather than a tree cult.) Other, less quaint-looking trees are also worshipped however, or at least paid special respect. In the course of a visit to the shrine, Sayyid Baraka, the ambitious nineteenth-century religious leader, met Yadigar in person, holding a branch in his hands. As a souvenir and proof of their meeting, Yadigar gave Baraka the branch; the latter planted it, so that there is now a tree associated with both saints. Most striking, perhaps, is the group of twelve trees grown together, which the Guran believe to have been planted by the twelve imams.

Besides these specially named trees, trees near holy graves (those of Yadigar, Dawud as well as lesser men) are, like everywhere in the Middle East, the apparent carriers of the healing powers and general blessing attributed to the buried person, and visitors tie strings and bits of cloth to them without precisely knowing why. On the high mountain ridge overlooking Yadigar's shrine, many large stones have been erected. There is no special cult surrounding them now, but my informants told me these stones had been animals, that had come to pay their respects to Yadigar and that had been transformed into stones because of their desire never to leave the saint anymore.

These survivals of nature worship show many similarities to similar beliefs and practices elsewhere in the wider region, especially among the Alevi of Dersim. It should be stressed, however, that they are not much more than survivals, peripheral to the major tenets of the AH religion. The contemporary Guran do not hold essentially different beliefs regarding light and trees than the average European Christian who lights a candle in his or her Christmas tree. The worship of trees, rocks and springs has been legitimised by associating them with divine or angelic incarnations, and the believers are unaware of the older origins of their cult.

Conclusion: the Alevi, Haji Bektash, and the Ahl-i Haqq

During the 1970's, leftists in Turkey rediscovered the anti-establishment, "revolutionary" ethos of the Alevi tradition. Haji Bektash became for some a proto-revolutionary hero, a fighter against oppression, and the annual festival in his village turned into a left-wing cultural manifestation. Sultan Sahak never rose to the same position in Iran, but there is a distinct anti-establishment sentiment in the AH tradition too, especially among the Guran, which contributed to making many of them early and active participants in the Iranian revolution. The mythology takes a very favourable view of rebellion. Three of the mythical heroes mentioned above rebelled against injustice. There was Bahlul (the Deity himself) who, pretending to be mad, resisted Harun al-Rashid's oppression. And there was Kawa the blacksmith, a simple artisan who killed the tyrannical king Zahhak. And, last but not least, there was Dawud in his guise of Iblis, who even refused to obey God's command because it was unjust. ("Wouldn't you refuse to obey too, if your king gave you an unjust command?" one informant rhetorically asked me, in the course of his account of the Iblis tragedy.) Haji Bektash' Turkish admirers might have been delighted to hear that for this informant and his co-believers, Haji Bektash was the same as Iblis, the world's first revolutionary.

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