

# THE RELIGION OF THE YEZIDIS



# **BERSERKER**

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## **BOOKS**

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## PART I

# THE ONE GOD

Although the relevant literature will often classify the Yezidis as followers of polytheism, and thus as worshipping an array of gods with differing degrees of significance, a closer scrutiny will show this view of matters requires a radical review.

Using this older style of approach, some will identify elements of polytheism in the unambiguously monotheistic religions as well. Muslims, for instance, erroneously see the concept of the Christian Trinity – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – as a manifestation of polytheism in Christianity. Meanwhile, in Islam itself, where monotheism is an indisputable basis – even “the alpha and omega” of the entire theology – some heterodox sects (the extreme Shi‘as, for example) deify the fourth caliph, ‘Ali ibn Abi-Talib, and other figures such as Fatima. They thereby come in for criticism by orthodox Islamic theologians for their departure from the monolithic Allah – from the very idea of *tauḥīd*, monotheism.

The poly-variation in the Yezidis’ religious thought, or rather, their dismembered representation of the divine entity or of god, is none other than the personification of the functional division of the divine, which has nothing to do with polytheism in its pure form, the essential nature of which does not change even in the presence of a manifestly principal divinity within the system of gods. This principal divinity in a “polytheistic system”, while endowed with a greater power compared to others (greater attributes, functions, and so on), is, however, not the Absolute, which is the main characteristic of the One God. It is therefore necessary to differentiate clearly between the Yezidis’ dismembered representations of the divine (by different spheres of manifestation and even under differing names) reduced to the single initiation, and polytheism characterized by a dispersed representation of the divine.

In “classical” monotheism the Divine Essence in its manifestations does not in any way lose even partially the role, functions or power of God, the sole

source of divine emanation and of the Divine in its entirety, but rather manifests its qualities within different hypostases. From this viewpoint, even Zoroastrianism, often represented as a dualistic religion, can only be regarded as such with great reservations. Indeed, despite quite an impressive pantheon of gods as a whole, Ahura Mazdā is featured generally as the supreme god, with the functions of the demiurge or creator deity.<sup>1</sup>

In the Old Iranian religion, god is designated by the term *\*bāga-* (cf. Old Persian *baga* “god”, Avestan *baga-* “lot, good fortune”, Sogdian *bay*). This denotes one (single) God (rather, supreme god), unlike the Yazats (Avestan *yazata*, Middle Pers. *yazat*, New Pers. *izad*, literally meaning “one [or any being] worthy of worship or of sacrifice”). As for *\*bāga-*, this concept also means “dispenser (of good fortune)” (cf. Skt. *bhāga-*). Another denotation of the supreme god in Old Iran was *\*dātār-*, that is, “creator” (New Pers. *dādār*). At the present time the general designation of god in New Persian and in most New Iranian dialects is *xudāy*, from Old Iranian *\*xwa-tāwan-*, literally “autocrat”, and basically the same term, *xwādē*, also designates the one god among the Yezidis, the subject of this study.<sup>2</sup>

As for Angra Mainyu or Ahriman in the Zoroastrian religion, he is only a manifestation of evil, a force of destruction, and to some degree a parallel of Satan, although possessing more significant attributes than the devil in Christianity because he is the author of part of creation and is hostile to Ahura Mazdā and his creation. The classical Iranian religion, which was never unambiguously monotheistic, even after Zarathustra, nonetheless tended in its various manifestations towards monotheism, with one god, Ahura Mazdā, dominating over a whole array of divinities. The situation did not change radically when the priority of Ahura Mazdā was challenged by Zurvān, even by Mithra. In effect, a thoroughgoing dualism, with equally significant god and demon locked in unending combat with an unpredictable outcome, has never been known in Iran, although the Manichaeans came to draw on Zoroastrianism to accentuate a greater dualism than that which was indigenously Iranian.<sup>3</sup> Some students of Zoroastrianism characterize its theology as monotheism, while they read the speculative philosophy of this religion to be dualistic.<sup>4</sup>

In the meantime, even classical Greek religion, whose designation as “polytheism” is unambiguously substantiated, had monotheistic tendencies with ancient roots: “Der monotheistische Gedanke war alt in Griechenland”, as noted by one well-known expert of the “Old Greek religion”.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean we should doubt its polytheistic nature in general terms, for clearly if we are to face up to genuine dominances of religious mentality, and not be too taken by particular ideas allowed to co-exist within a common system, pre-Christian or pagan Greek religion attended to many deities and spirits. And in any case, when characterizing any discrete religion, especially a syncretic one such as Yezidism, it is necessary to consider the entire complex of its structure without leaning mainly upon the external manifestation of the transcendental in the system of the religious dogmas.

A careful analysis of the Yezidi triad will show its component deities to be unambiguous manifestations of the one god worshipped by adherents. In establishing this, an absence of canonized dogmatic literature admittedly leaves us no choice but to lean upon the oral religious code of the Yezidis, yet the folkloric religious texts, particularly within the context of a wider analysis, provide material quite sufficient for research needs. The monotheism of the Yezidis is seen, for example, in the following prayer adopted as their Symbol of Faith called *Šahdā dīnī*:

Šahdā dīnē min ēk Allāh, ...  
 Silt'ān Šēxadī pādšē mina, ...  
 Silt'ān Ēzdī pādšē mina, ...  
 Tāwūsī malak šahdā ū imānēd mina. ...  
*Haqa, xwadē kir, [am] ēzdīna,*  
*Sar nāvē Silt'ān Ēzdīna.*  
*Al-h'amd lillāh, am ži ōl ū tariqēd xō di-řāzīnā.*

The testimony of my faith is one god,  
 Sultan Sheikh 'Adi is my king,  
 Sultan Yezid is my king,  
 Malak-Tāwūs [The Peacock Angel] is the Symbol [of Faith] and my faith.  
 Indeed, by god's will [we] are Yezidis,  
 We are called by the name of Sultan Yezid.  
 God be praised, we are content with our religion and our  
 community.<sup>6</sup>

As for the minor deities of the Yezidi pantheon, the spirits, demons, and so on, their existence provides no reason to talk of polytheism, for similar characters (including the exact counterparts of those of the Yezidis) have been retained by many Iranian (and non-Iranian) Islamic nations at the level of so-called popular or folk Islam.

The Yezidi triad comprises the following: Malak-Tāwūs, the Peacock-Angel (in the Yezidi imagination being featured as a bird, a peacock or a cock, and sometimes even a dove); Sheikh 'Adi (Šeyx 'Ādī = Sheikh 'Adi bin Musafir, a historical personality, the founder of the proto-Yezidi community, as an old man); and Sultan Yezid (*Silt'ān Ēzīd*, as a youth). All three characters are manifestations of god – *xwadē* (or *xwadī*, *xudā*, the term, deriving from New Pers. *xudāy*). There are also other variations to designate god: *xudāvand*, *rab(b)ī*, as well as *Allāh* (mostly in the Arabic formulas); occurring in some religious songs is the term *ēzdān* (from New Pers. *yazdān* – “god”).

The Yezidi ideas on *xwadē* are quite hazy and blurred, and can be subjected to systemic processing only with great difficulty. The Yezidi *xwadē* resembles neither Zeus, the humanized father of the gods of Hellas, nor Yahweh, the almighty and “jealous” God of Judaism.

*Xwadē* is a little reminiscent of the absolute Allah in Islam or the all-forgiving and merciful God of the Christians. The main thing that makes him equivalent to the One God of the dogmatic religions, and what actually is essential, is his transcendence and his function as demiurge, as the creator. However, according to the Yezidi tradition, despite being creator of the universe, *xwadē* is completely indifferent to its fate; he is not concerned with worldly affairs or human fortune.

It is not an accident that in the Yezidi liturgy, as well as in the oral tradition, direct address to *xwadē* is made only on very rare occasions, and that he does not want any offerings. There is, however, at least one specimen of religious text dedicated to *xwadē* directly, which can be described rather as a glorification than an address in prayer. It is called “*Madh’ē Xwadē*”, that is, the “Glorification of *Xwadē*” or “Praise to *Xwadē*”.<sup>7</sup> Consider the text of this prayer, emended occasionally:

*Yā, řabīō, tu dāymī,*  
*Tu k’arīmī,*  
*Tu řāh’īmī,*  
*Tu qadīmī,*  
*Tu xudāye har xudāyī,*  
*Xudāye milk-ē k’arīmī,*  
*Tu xudāne a’ršē a’zīmī [rather, a’zmānī],*  
*A’nzaldā dānī qadīmī,*  
*Har xudāyē har xudāyī.*  
*Hin mak’āyī [that is, mak’ānī], hin majāyī [majālī],.*  
*Tu xudāyē in ū isī [insī],*  
*Xudāyē a’rš ū k’ursī.*  
*Tu xudāyē ‘ālam ū qusī [rather, ‘ālamī qudsī],*  
*Har xudāyē har xudāyī.*  
*Hin mak’āyī, hin majāyī,*  
*Kas nizāna tu čawāyī,*  
*Har xudāne har xudāyī ...*  
*Ta na māla, ta na p’arda,*  
*Ta na lawma [rather, lawna], ta na ranga,*  
*Ta na āwāza, ta na danga,*  
*Kas nizāna tu čāwānī,*  
*Har xudāyē har xudāyī.*  
*Walīyē farz ū nimēžanī ...*  
*Řuh’ā didī, ruh’ā diparēžī.*  
*H’ākimē šāh ū gadānī,*  
*H’ākimē jīm’h’ī ‘ālamī.*  
*Ta dihār kir Īsā ū Maryam,*  
*Ta am kirin tazbatī [perhaps, ži batnī; cf. Arab. baṭn] Ādam.*  
*Har xudāyē har xudāyī ...*

O, my lord, you are eternal,  
 You are merciful,  
 You are graceful,  
 You are ancient,  
 You are god of all gods,  
 The god possessing kindness.  
 You are god of the firmament of heaven,  
 Initially ancient,  
 [You] are god of all gods.  
 [You] are both refuge and might,  
 [You] are god of spirits and people,  
 God of the firmament and throne.  
 You are god of the realm of sanctity,  
 You are god of all gods.  
 [You] are both refuge and might,  
 No one knows what you are,  
 [You] are god of all gods.  
 You have no home, no shelter,  
 You have no colouration, no colour,  
 You have no voice, nor sound,  
 No one knows what you are,  
 [You] are god of all gods.  
 [You] are the master of rituals and prayers ...  
 You give souls [to people] and [yourself] break the souls,  
 [You] are the ruler over both kings and plebeians,  
 [You] are the ruler of the entire world,  
 You have created Jesus and Mary,  
 You have created us [the Yezidis] from the loins of Adam.<sup>8</sup>  
 [You] are god of all gods, [etc.].

The quoted eulogy is a typical specimen of the *maddāḥī* genre (praise of god or rulers) common in Oriental and Persian poetry.

There is also another Yezidi prayerful address to god, which is commonly read in the morning:

*Yā, xwadē, wara hawārā*  
*Hafti-du milatē,*  
*Girtiyā hawsā,*  
*Nafsē tangiyā,*  
*K'asivā-k'ūsivā;*  
*Pāšē wara hawārā*  
*Milatē ma, ēzdīyā.*<sup>9</sup>

O god, come to the rescue of  
 Seventy-two nations,



Prisoners,  
 [People] in straits,  
 To paupers and the downcast;  
 And then only come to the rescue of  
 Our people, the Yezidis.

However, there are not too many references to the singular *xwadē* in Yezidi religious knowledge and perceptions in general. Everything is done by the hand of his manifestations – the triad. *Xwadē* himself for the Yezidis is an utterly transcendent entity: his features are vague, being perceived only through the activity of the triad, particularly of Malak-Tāwūs, its main representative, often posing as the creator as well. Actually the members of the triad, as the hypostases of *xwadē*, are not always distinctly explicated; the triad is more an implication. Neither the oral tradition nor the so-called holy scriptures of the Yezidis make a note of the triad as a derivation from *xwadē*.

To all appearances, the emergence of the triad in the Yezidi doctrine seems to have moved *xwadē* aside, providing him with an implicit character also. In other words, the triad, having developed in Yezidism, was superimposed upon the already available tradition of monotheism initially present in the Yezidi religion, along with prior dogmas from proto-Yezidi formations – from bearers of the mystic Islam. Thus, the Yezidi *xwadē* looks to sit as a typical example of a *deus otiosus*, an impartial and removed god, whose image in sacred history will naturally lose its distinct outlines against the background of the trivial phenomena of creation, the aggrandizement of supernatural creatures, minor divinities, cultural heroes and ancestors directly related to human life. The initial stage of creation and the role of demiurge thus end up, in a way, falling into oblivion. In other words, as maintained by Franciscus Kuiper (in appealing to Mircea Eliade) the consecutive chain of events forming sacred history is endlessly recollected and praised, while the primordial stage, involving everything that existed prior to that sacred history – above all the majestic and solitary presence of god the creator but also the origins of the universe itself – goes dark or dim, or increasingly faint or obscure. If the great god is still remembered, they know that he created humans and the universe and that is it. The supreme god seems to have played out his role on finishing the course of his creation.<sup>10</sup> It is tempting, and perhaps we should leave this open as a possibility, that *xwadē* is the residue of the “hidden god” of some ancient Gnostic system, and that his manifestations in the triad are comparable to emanations from the far removed divine,<sup>11</sup> but we cannot be preemptive in our judgements before assessing the extent of (other) Gnostic elements in Yezidism. The same applies to influences of Shi’a Islamic emanationism.

## NOTES

1. Cf. in Old Persian inscriptions: *baga vazarka Auramazdā haya imām būmim adā haya avam asmānam adā haya martiyam adā haya šiyātim adā martiyahyā*, etc., “A great god is Ahura Mazdā, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created Man, who created happiness for Man” (Naqš-i-Rustam Inscr., 16; see R. G. Kent, *Old Persian Grammar* [New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1953], 137–8). Also: *Auramazdā бага vazarka haya maθišta bagānām* – “Ahura Mazdā, great god, who [is] the greatest of gods” ([Arsames] Hamadan Inscr., 5–7; Kent, *Old Persian Grammar*, 116).
2. In Middle and New Iranian (Middle Pers. *xvatāy/xudāy*) this term reveals a wide range of meanings. The Middle Persian antecedent of this word, *xvatāy*, meant predominantly “lord; king; owner”. In early New Persian *xudāy* still means “lord”, but later it became a prevailing term for “god” (for a detailed account of this term in Iranian, see C. Bartholomae, *Zur Kenntnis der mittelpersischen Mundarten III* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1920).
3. “The Iranian religion has never been as unambiguously monotheistic as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But it does represent, in some of its sources, an attempt at monotheism, with one god, Ahura Mazdā (later Ōhrmazd) dominating a series of abstract entities. In other sources, other gods exist also, whose relationship with the main god is not always clearly defined. They can be equivalents of the saints in Roman Catholicism or in Islam; or they can, as in the case of Mithra or Zurvān, tend to rob Ahura Mazdā of his supremacy; or else they are simply, besides Ahura Mazdā, the other gods” (J. Duchesne-Guillemin, “The Religion of Ancient Iran”, in *Historia Religionum*, C. Bleeker & G. Widengren (eds) (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 323, see also 324.
4. See W. Jackson, *Zoroastrian Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 33, cf. also 28, 32.
5. M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* (Munich: Beck, 1961), 569–77.
6. P. G. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism: Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 226.
7. O. Celil & C. Celil, *Zargotina k’urda* (Yerevan: Academy of Sciences of Armenian SSR, 1978), 323–4.
8. An allusion to the origin of the Yezidis from the seed of Adam; cf. G. S. Asatrian, “The Foremother of the Yezidis”, in *Religious Texts in Iranian Languages*, F. Vahman & C. V. Pedersen (eds) (Copenhagen: Kongelige Danske Videnskabskabernes Selskab, 2007), 323–8; see also in detail E. Spät, “Shahid bin Jarr, Forefather of the Yezidis and the Gnostic Seed of Seth”, *Iran and the Caucasus* 6(1–2) (2002), 27–56.
9. Recorded from Sheikh Hasane Mamud (Tamoyan), Yerevan, Armenia.
10. F. B. J. Kuiper, *Trudy po vedijskoj mifologii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1986), 112–15.
11. On emanations in ancient Gnosticism, esp. K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion*, R. M. Wilson (trans.) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), chs 1–3.

## CHAPTER 1

# MALAK-TĀWŪS: THE LEADER OF THE TRIAD

Malak-Tāwūs (*Malak tāwūs*, *Malakē tāwūs*, or *Tāwūsē/ī malak*, Arab. *Malak Ṭāwūs*, i.e. the Peacock Angel) is the most important character of the Yezidi triad. He dominates all major and minor divinities of the pantheon. Malak-Tāwūs is, in fact, the essence or *raison d'être* of the religion of the Yezidis. In a variant of the Yezidi Symbol (or Statement) of Faith he is featured directly after *xwadē*:

*Mīn ša'datiya īmānā xwa  
Bī nāvē xwadē ū Tāwūsī malak dāya.*

I attest that my faith is given  
In the names of god and Malak-Tāwūs.<sup>1</sup>

In another version of the same text,<sup>2</sup> Malak-Tāwūs and *xwadē* are both featured as Symbols of Faith, Malak-Tāwūs himself being characterized as Faith itself:

*Šahda dīnē min ēk Allāh, ...  
Tāwūsī malak šahdā ū īmānēd mīna ...*

The Testimony of my faith is one god, ...  
Malak-Tāwūs is the Symbol [of Faith] and my faith ...

Malak-Tāwūs is at the same time the main distinguishing feature of Yezidism, lending a unique character to this syncretic religion. Not one religious trend in the region has a comparable cult, including some dogmatically related extreme Shi'a sects, in which the same image of the peacock angel has but a nominal representation (see below and Chapter 5).<sup>3</sup>

Malak-Tāwūs is at the same time an eponym for the Yezidis: they are called *milatē Malak tāwūs* – the nation (or tribe) of Malak-Tāwūs. In the Yezidi text

known as “The Black Scripture” or *Mash’afê řaş* (Arab. *Kitāb al-aswad*), Malak-Tāwūs is identified with Azrail, the messenger of death, one of the four arch-angels nearest to god. ... *Malēkī xalq kird nāvēna ‘Azra’īl; awiš Malak tāwūsa kī gawra hamūyāna*, “... [God] created an angel and gave him the name Azrail; that was Malak-Tāwūs, who [is] the leader of all”; *Li siři Ādam ... milatī li sar arz paydā dibī, li pāštir milatī ‘Azra’īl, ya’nī Malak řawūs kī yazidiya paydā dibī*, “From the essence of Adam ... the people will emerge on earth from which later the people of Azrail, that is, Malak-Tāwūs, will be born, which is the Yezidi folk” (Pt. I, §§2, 14).<sup>4</sup>

Many peoples of the region go so far as to consider Malak-Tāwūs the embodiment of the lord of darkness. This claim has led travellers who have entered the Yezidi environment at different times to describe them as worshippers of Satan. The epithet “devil worshippers” has been attached to the Yezidis particularly among the followers of orthodox religions, primarily among Muslims.<sup>5</sup> That was the reason, no doubt formal, for the unending persecutions suffered by the tribe of Malak-Tāwūs. The Yezidis were very often, and with particular brutality, persecuted by the Kurds, even though they share with them the same language, the Kurmanji dialect. An interesting description of the Yezidis and Malak-Tāwūs, their symbol, was given in the report by Mēla Mehmūd Bayazîdî, a Kurdish Mullah, written under the instructions of the Russian Consul in Erzerum (present-day Eastern Turkey) at the end of the nineteenth century:

And there is a tribe of the Yezidis, which do not belong to the Muslims, being the Yezidis. And all their customs, and mores, and laws are different [from those of the Muslims]. That tribe (*tāyfa*) worship Iblis (the devil), and the one they call Malak-Tāwūs is Satan (*řayřān*). Their language, however, is also Kurdish.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the shadowy character of the image of *xwadē* as well as by virtue of the members of the triad being his manifestations, Malak-Tāwūs appears at times as the demiurge or as his agent of creation. In the oral religious tradition (in the so-called *Qawl-ū-bayt*) there is only one song directly concerned with Malak-Tāwūs, *Qawlē Malakē tāwūs*. Textual references to him are also very few. That may be explained by a partial taboo upon his name (see below), for to call out his name in vain, particularly among the members of religious castes, is forbidden (cf. “Never mention my name or my features, lest you should commit a sin”; see immediately below “The Book of Revelation”, Pt. IV, No. 8).

This curious situation, of course, hardly facilitates the proper coverage of the image and the role of Malak-Tāwūs in the cult. It is fortunate, however, that the so-called “Book of Revelation” (*Kitēbā řalwa*), a brief treatise reflecting the Yezidi religious tradition, is devoted entirely to Malak-Tāwūs, and analysing this writing allows some account, albeit incomplete, of that divinity’s

role and place in the Yezidi pantheon. With regard to the significance of this “Book” as an important source, and its unique character, it is expedient to cite the complete text here in translation, based upon the Kurdish–Arabic edition by Maximilian Bittner and our Armenian translation.<sup>7</sup> “The Book of Revelation” is divided into six parts, including the Introduction, and consists of forty-four statements.

## THE BOOK OF REVELATION

### *Introduction*

0. The one who had existed before all creatures, Malak-Tāwūs.
1. It is he who has sent Abtavus to this world [lit. “slave of Tawus”, that is, “slave of Malak-Tāwūs”], so that [he may] identify his chosen people [that is, the Yezidis], endow [them] with knowledge and relieve [them] from fear and delusion.
2. The emergence of this matter [that is, the Scripture] [has been done] by word of mouth, face-to-face, and then through this Book called *Jalwa* [that is, “Revelation”].

### *Part I*

1. I have been and I am now, and I shall be forever. I rule over all creatures and arrange their matters.
2. I am ready. I am kind to those who believe in me and address me in need.
3. I am omnipresent. I participate in all events considered evil by the infidels for the reason that they do not match their wishes.
4. Each Time has its arranger, which is done by my advice. Each Time sends a certain ruler, and each of those rulers does his work at his time.
5. The creatures created are allowed by me to do [what they want].
6. Those who counter me are defeated.
7. Other deities do not interfere with my cause: whatever I wish, they never go against me.
8. The books held in the hands of infidels [that is, the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur’an] are untrue, have not been written by the prophets, [and] they are distorted and deformed. They all reiterate and negate one another.
9. The truth and error are defined by experience.
10. I rage against those who speak in my name. My discord is shown by the wise arrangers dispatched by me for a few days. Generally, I forbid [all that I hold to be wrong].
11. I show the way and instruct those following my disciples [in text: “those whom I taught”]. Those people shall be happy when they become my companions.

*Part II*

1. I award kindness to people as I hold to be true.
2. I rule all creatures above and underneath the earth.
3. I do not wish that people clash with one another.
4. In any case I do not begrudge good to those who belong to me and who obey me.
5. I engage in activities with those whom I have tested and who move at my wish.
6. I appear in some image to those people who have faith in me and who consult me.
7. Time and again I test people with trials [sufferings], [and] no one can forbid me to do so.
8. And no one can interfere.
9. The sufferings and afflictions that I bring are for those who resist me.
10. The one who walks in my steps [lit. "is headed towards me"] will not die like other people.
11. I will have none to live in this world beyond the time that has been set for him.
12. If I will, by rebirth, I will send someone to this or some other world once or twice.

*Part III*

1. With no book do I show the way to those who please me. I rule them invisibly; what I teach you [is achieved] easily.
2. Time and again I inflict injury upon those who are in another world [that is, perhaps those, who follow other religions] and shun my religion.
3. Those sons of Adam ignore the course [of laws] of [the true] religion and, therefore, often stray off course.
4. The beast of the land, the dove of the skies and the fish of the sea are all in my hands and under my eye.
5. I know of the subterranean treasures and I gradually cede them to people.
6. I show my miracles only to those who want [to see] them.
7. Those aliens who commit evil following not my words and not those of my followers in their actions will see harm, for they ignore the fact that both greatness and wealth are in my hands, and I give them to the best of the sons of Adam.
8. The creation of the world, succession of days and arranger of all arrangers at the very beginning are from me.

*Part IV*

1. I will never cede my right to any one of the gods [divinities].

2. The four elements, the four seasons and the four bases were presented by me so that creation would take place.
3. The books of infidels can be accepted if [they] match my law. The [book] that does not match my law has been distorted by them.<sup>8</sup>
4. My enemies count three in number, and my wrath is on three things.
5. Those who do not divulge my secret will prosper.
6. Those who suffer for me will receive kindness from me in some world.
7. When fighting against aliens I will stand at the side of those who join me.
8. O people, who perceive my truth with your ears, keep away from those things that come not from me! Never mention my name or my features, lest you should commit a sin, because you are unaware of what those people, who have lost their way, secretly do.<sup>9</sup>

*Part V*

1. Keep my essence and my image in your thoughts, for [it] will help you remember the part of my knowledge that you have forgotten.
2. Be guided by the speeches uttered by my servants, hear the divine science that [they] communicate to you in my name.

*End of "The Book of Revelation".*

In the text quoted above, Malak-Tāwūs is at first sight featured as the demiurge, creator, ruling the creatures in heaven, above the earth and underneath, adjusting their lives, awarding goodness to "his people" and severely punishing those who err. A deeper analysis, however, shows that while Malak-Tāwūs "existed before all creatures", he is not in actual fact the creator. We look here at the phenomenon, hardly unknown in the history of religions, when there is a complete transference of the features and functions of creator from one god to his chief representative.<sup>10</sup> Malak-Tāwūs, being as noted a manifestation of *xwadē*, claims, quite legitimately, the role of the demiurge, even if, in so being sidelined by a later triad, *xwadē* could not leave the cosmogonic void. Creation, amended by the prophetic mission of the characters of the triad, has explicitly become the merit of Malak-Tāwūs (implicitly remaining, of course, something done by the one god-demiurge). It is the prophetic mission of Malak-Tāwūs that indicates to us what stays the same – the manifestation of the demiurge, rather than the demiurge himself. Quite another matter is Malak-Tāwūs in the person of a preaching prophet. This is unambiguously his domain; he is more interested in the purity of religion and orthopraxy, in the aspirations of the followers and the endurance of faith, than in cosmogonic categories. He tries

to controvert the sanctity of aliens' writings, although he allows acceptance of them if they "match my law" (Pt. IV, §3).

There are individual shadowy spots. For example, it is not clear what is meant in Part IV, §4 by "three enemies" (perhaps the three world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam?) or by the wrath on the "three things" (the holy scriptures of the Jews, Christians and Muslims?), and who Abtavus is (Intro., §2). However, in all, despite such ambiguities, "The Book of Revelation" is ultimately a clear text, a manifestly apologetic one which aggrandizes Malak-Tāwūs as a symbol of the Yezidi religion. In the previously mentioned Yezidi text, "The Black Scripture", which was to all appearances compiled prior to "The Book of Revelation", Malak-Tāwūs poses in more genuine outlines and with more authentic attributes. "The Black Scripture" is a classical example of a Sufi treatise, with a mixture of various traditions, myths and cosmogonic details, with invented, possibly *ad hoc*, fabulous characters associated with the Near Eastern and the biblical traditions. In it Malak-Tāwūs is one of the attendant angels of God (beside those known in the Muslim tradition: Jabrail, Israfil, and so on), having taken part in creation, particularly in arranging the affairs of the forefather Adam. The following passages from the text of "The Black Scripture" (*Mash'afē řaş*.) mention Malak-Tāwūs (in Pt. I):

1. In the beginning god created the white pearl from his kind essence and a dove, calling him Anfar, and put that pearl on him that stayed there forty thousand years.
2. Sunday, day one of Creation. [God] has created an angel calling him Azrail; that was Malak-Tāwūs, who is the leader of all.
3. On Sunday [god] created the angel Dardail, who is Sheikh Hasan [relative and follower of Sheikh 'Adi bin Musafir].
4. On Tuesday he created the angel Israfil, who is Sheikh Shams [identified with the sun].
5. On Wednesday he created the angel Mikail, who is Sheikh Abu Bakr [Shekhobakr or Šēxōbakr].
6. On Thursday he created the angel Jabrail, who is Sijaddin.
7. On Friday he created the angel Shamnail, who is Nasraddin.
8. On Saturday he created the angel Turail [in the Arabic version, Nurail].
9. And he set Malak-Tāwūs as the head of all ...

Further on (§§10–13) there is a description of the act of the creation of the world: creation of the earth, plants, celestial bodies, natural phenomena, and so on; all creation originates from the pearl.<sup>11</sup> Then there follows:

14. Great god said to the angels: "I have created Adam and Eve, and I shall make them into people. The essence of Adam will cause Shahd bin Safar, who will start a nation on earth that will later



produce the nation of Azrail – in other words Malak-Tāwūs – that is, the Yezidi people.<sup>12</sup>

15. Later [he] sent Sheikh ‘Adi [the second character of the triad] from the country of Sham (Syria) to Lalish.

16. Later god came down to the Black Mountain [probably Mount Judi in Mesopotamia] and shouted, thus creating a throng of thirty thousand angels who worshipped him for forty years. Then [god] delivered [those angels] to Malak-Tāwūs and ascended to heaven along with them.

17. Then god came down to the holy land [and] commanded Jabrail to bring earth from all four corners of the world, [and] He created earth, and wind, and fire and water, and by virtue of His might planted soul [into earth and created Adam], and commanded Jabrail to carry him over to paradise, [and to allow] tasting [of the fruit] of all plants, except wheat.

18. A hundred years later Malak-Tāwūs said to god: “In what way should the progeny [*nasl*] of Adam grow?” God said: “I passed to you the arrangement [of this matter]”. [And Malak-Tāwūs] came to Adam and asked: “Have you eaten wheat?”<sup>13</sup> [Adam] said: “No, for god forbade it to me”. [Malak Tāwūs] said: “Eat, it is good for you”. After eating wheat Adam’s belly was swollen. Malak-Tāwūs expelled him from paradise, left him then and there and ascended to heaven.

19. Adam started to worry, since he did not have any back passage in his body. God sent a dove [in oral legends a raven] who made an opening with his beak [in the back part of his body, and] he became calm.

20. Jabrail was distant [from Adam] for a hundred years. For one hundred years he was sad.

21. God sent Jabrail [who] came and created Eve out of Adam’s left rib.

22. Then Malak-Tāwūs descended to earth for the sake of our people ...<sup>14</sup>

The cited fragments of “The Black Scripture”, at first glance a mixture of biblical, Muslim and local traditions, with sometimes controversial and awkward formulations along with a distinct explication of the role of Tāwūs in the universe and of his place within the divine hierarchy, also contain a clear allusion that the same character has features of the fallen angel expelled from heaven for violating the divine command and misleading Adam. The remaining §§ 23–9 of the “Scripture” contain food prohibitions and behavioural patterns (§24; see below) and various assortments again in the same vein. However, to all appearances, the details of the “fall” are left out of the “Scripture”, or perhaps removed from the text at a later time. In any case, it is easy to perceive a

parallel with the biblical serpent the tempter (Gen. 3) or with Adam's angelic deceivers of later Jewish thinking.<sup>15</sup> Essentially, Malak-Tāwūs, using god's trust, fraudulently coaxed the ignorant Adam to trespass the ban, after which he himself expelled him from paradise, and abandoned him in this improper situation.

A very archaic motif is attested in verse 16, telling the story of god creating a thirty thousand throng of angels by shouting. That is possibly a manifestation of the ritual or, so to say, a "creative" shout, having an unconditional connection with ritual laughter.<sup>16</sup>

As has already been mentioned, the oral religious tradition of the Yezidis devotes only one praising hymn (wrongly named the main Yezidi prayer) to Malak-Tāwūs, where again his name is not mentioned, even though the text is addressed to him. There exist several versions of this hymn. The first three versions were recorded and published by Solomon Egiazarov, an Armenian ethnographer, as far back as 1891,<sup>17</sup> and later published unchanged in 1900 by the Hungarian Orientalist Hugo Makas.<sup>18</sup> However, the most complete version was published by Khidir Sileman and Khalil Jindy in 1979,<sup>19</sup> and later republished in 1995 by Philip Kreyenbroek.<sup>20</sup> It is to be noted that this hymn is not used in religious practice; it may be a form of prayer having no institutional function, like a number of other pieces of religious folklore, although most such *qawls* of religious content, comprising the Yezidi liturgic corpus, are performed during the administration of the cult.

The hymn runs in rhyme and is named *Qawlē Tāwūsī Malak*, that is, "Song (or Hymn) to Malak-Tāwūs". This is a praise for the image, a description of Malak-Tāwūs's many virtues: his strength, kindness, limitless power, fame, and so on, making the Peacock Angel the stronghold of true faith. Consider the following pertinent extracts from the hymn:

2. *Yā, ʔabbī, tu malakē malikē jīhānī,  
Yā, ʔabbī, tu malakē malikē k'arīmī,  
Tu malakē a'ršē a'zmīnī,  
Yā, ʔabbī, ʔi a'nzalda har tuyī qadīmī.*

O my lord, you are angel-ruler of the world,  
O my lord, you are the generous angel-ruler,  
You are the angel of the heavenly firmament,  
O my lord, you are forever primordial [ancient].

3. *Tu tām ū k'ām ū ʔāyī,  
Yā, ʔabbī, har tu xudāyī;  
Har tu hāyī,  
Ū har tuyī lāyiqī madh' ū sanāyī.*

You are taste, and happiness, and prudence,  
O my lord, you are eternal god;

You are always awake,  
And you are forever worthy of honour and laudation.

4. *Yā, ṛabbī, tu malakē ins ū jīnsī,*  
*Yā, ṛabbī, tu malakē a'rš ū kursī,*  
*Yā, ṛabbī, tu malakē gāy ū māsī,*  
*Yā, ṛabbī, tu malakē ālam ū qudsī.*

O my lord, you are the angel of people and genies,  
O my lord, you are the angel of heaven and throne,  
O my lord, you are the angel of bull and fish,<sup>21</sup>  
O my lord, you are the angel of the world and sanctity.<sup>22</sup>

6. *Yā, ṛabbī, tu xudāwandē sap'ahrī,*  
*Yā, ṛabbī, tu xudānē mah ū mahri [should be nārī]*

O my lord, you are the master of firmament,  
O my lord, you are the lord of the moon and the sun [light].

16. *Yā, ṛabbī, tu ṛāh'imī, k'aramī, amīnī,*  
*Yā, ṛabbī, tuyī al-samadī, am čū nīnin.*

O my lord, you merciful, beneficent, faithful,  
O my lord, you are the eternal one, we are nothing.

21. *Yā, ṛabbī, tu xāliqī, am maxlūqin,*  
*Tu mirāzī, am dā xwāzīn.*

O my lord, you are the creator, we the creatures,  
You are the desired, we are the desire.

It is also appropriate here to cite fragments from Egiazarov's publication of the "Hymn to Malak-Tāwūs" (with scholarly transcription and some emendations with regard to his Russian translation), which in places gives very precise formulations:<sup>23</sup>

*Yā, ṛabbī, tu k'arīmī,*  
*Yā, ṛabbī, tu ṛāh'imī, tu xudāyī;*  
*Malak'ē mulk' ū jīyāyī,*  
*Malak'ē šawq ū safāyī,*  
*Malak'ē mulk'ē k'arīmī,*  
*Ži azaldā tu qadīmī.*  
*Tu ābādē k'ām ū ṛawāyī,*  
*Samadē lut'f ū nawāyī;*  
*Tu malakē jīnn va isnī [that is, insī],*

*Malak'ē ālamē qudsī,  
 Samadē hāyil ū maǰīdī,  
 Ābādē farz ū h'amdī,  
 Lāyiqē madh ū sanāyī.  
 Yā, ṛabbī, xudāwandē sap'arī,  
 Xudānē mah ū tāri,  
 Xudānē šams ū nārī,  
 Xudāne a'ršē a'zīmī [should be a'zmīnī],  
 Xudāwandē at'āyī.  
 Yā, ṛabbī, kas nizāna tu čāwāyī:  
 Ta na husna, ta na bilinda,  
 Ta na čūyīna, ta na čanda.  
 Yā, ṛabbī, h'ākīmē šāh ū gadānī,  
 H'ākīmē ĵimā'at ū ālamī;  
 Tu dāhir dikir t'ōbayē Ādam.  
 Yā, ṛabbī, ta na mālā, ta na p'arā [rather, p'arda],  
 Ta na hāsika, ta na čanga,  
 Ta na āwāza, ta na ranga.  
 Kas nizāna tu čawānī,  
 Ma dikirī k'ām ū safāya,  
 Ta dikirī Īsā ū Maryama.  
 Yā, ṛabbī, tu k'arīmī,  
 Ṛāh'īmī, amīnī;  
 Tu samadī, az t'u tištīm.  
 Az t'āwīma, k'atīma,  
 K'atīma, ži ta bīrim;  
 Ma dikirī ži tāri k'ifša.  
 Yā, ṛabbī, gunah ū sūjē min  
 Bigira ū baxša!  
 Wūlla, wūlla, wūlla, Āmīn!*

O lord, you are gracious,  
 O lord, you are merciful, you are god,  
 Angel of estates and countries [places],  
 Angel of joy and pleasure,  
 Angel of the realm of mercy;  
 Forever you are eternal.  
 You are the essence of happiness and existence,  
 Vessel of grace and wealth;  
 You are the angel of spirits [genies] and people,  
 Angel of the realm of sanctity,  
 Vessel of fear [?] and greatness,  
 Essence of fame and praise,  
 [You are] worthy of praise and glorification.

O lord, you are the master of the universe [firmament],  
 Lord of the moon and darkness,  
 Lord of the sun and light,  
 Lord of the throne of heaven,  
 Lord of grace.  
 O lord, no one knows what you are:  
 Neither your beauty, nor your height,  
 Nor your walk, nor your quantity.  
 O lord, you are the judge of kings and servants,  
 Judge of assemblies and all people;  
 You have exposed [arranged] the atonement of Adam.  
 O lord, you have neither home, nor curtain,  
 You have neither wings, nor claws,  
 You have neither voice, nor colour.  
 No one knows what you are,  
 You have created [for us] happiness and pleasure,  
 You have created Jesus and Mary.  
 O lord, you are gracious,  
 Merciful, faithful;  
 You need nothing, I am nothing,  
 I am lean [and] prostrate,  
 I am fallen, [but] you remember me;  
 You have withdrawn [revealed] us from darkness.  
 O lord, my sin and my guilt,  
 Take them and forgive!  
 O god, god, god, amen!

It is easy to see that the “Hymn to Malak-Tāwūs” has a striking resemblance with the “Praise to Xwadē” – *Madh’ē Xwadē* – cited above. Both in composition and in language texture (similar formulations, phrasings, formulas of address, and so on), these are nearly the same texts, all the more so in that neither one nor the other name is specified as the object of worship (xwadē or Malak-Tāwūs). That is, however, not too important – the crucial thing is the conventional status of the text, or the way it is perceived by the carriers of the religious tradition. As for them, both god and his incarnations, whether Malak-Tāwūs, Sheikh ‘Adi, and Sultan Ezid as we shall soon consider them, amount to the same deity. Despite their obvious distinctions in the cultic sense, these characters devolve into the same in their entirety.

Nevertheless, Malak-Tāwūs, even while he might seem to have a mere latent presence within the Yezidi dogmatics and beliefs, is an unambiguously key figure in the Yezidi religious domain. The religious tradition even describes Malak-Tāwūs as *bēširik-bēhavāl*, “having no companion or friend”,<sup>24</sup> or in other words “the only one”, which is undoubtedly the attribute of god transferred to his image.

According to Yezidi religious tradition, as is reflected in “The Black Scripture” (§1–8), Malak-Tāwūs is accompanied and assisted by seven of his “avatars”: the angels Azrail, Dardail, Israfil, Mikail, Jabrail, Shamnail and Turail, the attendant angels of god. Another angel, Azrail, the first in the list (§2) features as Malak-Tāwūs himself.<sup>25</sup> He spearheads the triad, although Sheikh ‘Adi (as we shall see) is often regarded as a character of the same rank, while all three figures are at times identified with one another in many cultic contexts. Each year, according to tradition, Malak-Tāwūs with his company of seven will determine the course and the fate of the subsequent year during the celebrations of Jamā‘at, the Festival of the Assembly, on September 23–30, when an offering is made of a bull at the shrine of Sheikh ‘Adi in Lalish, the Yezidis’ holiest place.<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that the concept of the supreme deity’s seven extensions or “avatars” is an element coming from later Muslim traditions. It is encountered nearly in the same form and with the same functional significance in the religious beliefs of the extreme Shi’a sects.<sup>27</sup> The concept of seven angels also existed in the ancient Iranian religion, as reflected in Zoroastrianism.<sup>28</sup>

## THE GENESIS OF THE PEACOCK IMAGE

Malak-Tāwūs is with no exaggeration one of the most exotic figures in the Near Eastern religious expanse. His non-ordinary character is manifested in everything: in the very image of a bird from foreign parts and with a controversial nature. What is more interesting is that among the neighbouring communities, despite admitting his ambivalent character, he is generally regarded as an incarnation of evil. They often regard him, the Yezidis’ “Peacock Angel”, as Satan himself,<sup>29</sup> even though the Yezidis themselves see the Peacock in quite another light.

The origin of this enigmatic “angelic figure” has captivated many people. However, until now there have been no unambiguous answers to a great deal of questions, including his emergence in the pantheon of a small ethnic group. As noted before, no similar cult has been seen in any other religion, either in Middle Eastern and Caucasus regions or outside, although the peacock comes up in certain Near Eastern doctrines in some other hypostases (see below).

It is because of this mysterious image that the Yezidis have acquired the attributes of devil worshippers, were considered a mystic tribe originating from the devil’s saliva, and so on. The intriguing peacock imagery, this mystic halo around the Yezidis and their “satanic” religion, inspired not only scientific investigators but also poets, writers, lovers of all kinds of exotic things, and plain adventurers. In his travel notes, the Russian officer Aleksandr Eliseev wrote about the nocturnal mysteries of the Yezidis, with torch-lit processions, dedicated to the spirit of evil, that he allegedly secretly observed in Afrin (Syria).<sup>30</sup> In actual fact, however, the Yezidis have no comparable mysteries. As

for the torch-lit processions described by the author, those are rather reminiscent of a nighttime turmoil in the midst of a festival, which the author took for an intrinsically important element of festive action. No mysteries of this kind have been noted, as far as we know, by any other observer or pundit of the Yezidi realities.

Beside the nocturnal mysteries, Eliseev mentions in his notes a legend of Malak-Tāwūs, which we can hardly vouch for as authentic,<sup>31</sup> but which we nonetheless consider it expedient to quote here in full, since it is very substantially indicative of the constitutive essence of Malak-Tāwūs. For the legend portrays his character as a fallen angel, an aspect alluded to by “The Black Scripture” as we saw above, although the details in that case seem immaterial to what follows:

A little star fell from heaven, said an ancient Yezidi legend, and hid in the depth of the then still dark earth. In that little star a bright beam of the nocturnal sun illuminating paradise fell on earth, and the earth became light, clear and warm; a particle of endless light illuminated it, inflamed life in it, gave it strength, reason and breath. That beam, that particle of endless light, was the great and glorious Melak-Tauz [sic!]; through love for the dark earth he exchanged the realm of endless light – the blue sky flooded with the sunbeams and thirty three thousand stars; along with endless light Melak-Tauz lost the grace of the great radiant god ruling in heaven but loathing the earth, which was always distant from him. The creator most high became angry at Melak-Tauz and cast him down from the height of the throne whereupon he had ruled the stars, the sun and the moon. The great and the incomparable, it took him [Melak-Tauz] a long time to fly down, with no place to stay and rest; there was not a star, or moon or sun to lend him support. Loyal to the will of the most high, they drove away the fallen spirit, being afraid to anger the one who cast Melak-Tauz down. Only earth did not deny shelter to the exile, accepting him with open arms. Having fallen on the green earth covered with sweet-smelling flowers, the incomparable Melak-Tauz lay motionless: battered, sick, dejected, he was alone in the world, for all disdained him ... Even people whom he loved so much, to whom he brought the bright hope and blazing fire, were so mean that they did not want to alleviate the heavy sufferings of the exile. Passing by and seeing him helpless, they jeered at him, beat him with sticks, spat in his face and cursed the one to whom they owed their life and their senses. All those insults were patiently born by Melak-Tauz in silence; he believed and hoped that a spark of the better light that had been brought by him would not be extinguished even among cruel and corrupt people, and the bright hope did not deceive Melak-Tauz.

There came about kind people, pure in heart, who had preserved the unextinguished spark of endless light falling on earth as a bright star of heaven; they recognized and welcomed Melak-Tauz, fearing not what other people would say or in what way Allah would view their kind deed. Gathering around the fallen angel, they washed his body with the water of pure springs, sprinkled him with the incense of the colourful mountain flowers covered him with the best garments woven by the hands of their beautiful daughters. Melak-Tauz then revived and woke up for the new life on earth; he raised his hands to heaven, as if to bid farewell to him, and the everlasting one rolled thrice in the roaring storm.

The creator of the world, the source of grace and limitless love, condemned not the kind people for what they did for the miserable Melak-Tauz, and showed his blessing with the sign of the rainbow. And the poor people of the mountains received that sky-sign as the command of the most high never to abandon the downcast and rejected Melak-Taus in distress or affliction.

Those people were the Yezidis; until now they go after Melak-Tauz, hated and cursed by the whole world.<sup>32</sup>

The two main components making up the image of Malak-Tāwūs are to be explicated: first, his depiction as a peacock, and second, his identification with the devil, the angel of darkness.

### *Malak-Tāwūs as peacock and as cosmically ambiguous*

It is to be noted that the homeland of the peacock (*pavo cristatus*) is India, whence the bird found its way to the West not earlier than the sixth century BC.<sup>33</sup> Several elements of the cult of this bird have featured in the beliefs and relics of the spiritual and material culture of the peoples of the Near East for a very long time. The peacock was a solar symbol in ancient India and Egypt: it symbolized immortality and rebirth, as marked on many ancient images of that bird with the tree of life or at the source of life.<sup>34</sup>

The major designations of the peacock in the languages of the Near Eastern region, including Iranian, go back to Arabic *tāwūs* (Armenian is clearly an exception). The Middle Iranian name of the peacock, *fraš(ē)murv*, attested in Middle Persian, points to Old Iranian *\*fraša-mrga-*, that is, “miraculous” (or according to Heinrich Junker, “überherrlich, herrlich, glänzend”<sup>35</sup>) bird, which would be in keeping with the hypothetical Armenian forms *\*hrašamarg*, *\*hrašahaw*, or *\*hrašatřčun*. Incidentally, a common designation of this bird in Armenian, *siramarg*, is also an Iranian (rather, Parthian) loan-word, going back, probably, to *\*sēr(a)marg*, which has its attested parallel, *sēnmurv*, in Middle Persian (New Pers. *simury*), both from Old Iranian *\*saina-(or saira-)mrga-*, that is, perhaps,



“colourful bird”. On this subject, it is this very word, *sīmiř* (Kurd.), that acts as a substitute of the tabooed name of Malak-Tāwūs as used by the Yezidis in requests and appeals: “*bīdī xātīrē tayrē sīmiř*”, that is, “do it for the sake of the bird *sīmurg* (=Malak-Tāwūs)”. The Arabic *ṭāwūs* must be, incidentally, a borrowing from Greek ταῦς,<sup>36</sup> and it is actually quite possible for (Malak-)Tawus to be a later adaptation of *Tammūz*, an ancient deity of Mesopotamian origin, with the Arabic *ṭāwūs* picking up both senses: this god and the “peacock”.

In Ancient Iran the peacock symbolized the vault of heaven, the heavenly light.<sup>37</sup> The peacock is featured in many Muslim sects.<sup>38</sup> In Sufi mystic symbolism the peacock is equivalent to passion or lust (*šahwat*). Deified by the extreme Shi’a circles, the fourth righteous Caliph, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, in one of his messages, “*Khuṭba*”, included in the *Nahj ul-balāya* (“The Way of Eloquence”) attributed to him, dedicated an entire encomium to the peacock, to this, in his words, “most wonderful (bird) – *min a’jābihā xalqan* – in creation”.<sup>39</sup> In this text ‘Ali describes all the beauties of the peacock, also ascribing to him some mythical qualities. Thus, for example, he says that the mating of peacocks occurs when the female gets pregnant by sucking in a teardrop shed by the male. The most interesting speculations, however, are dedicated to the peacock’s legs, attested also in a later tradition, both written and oral. Talking about the divine beauty of the peacock, its magnificence and colouration, and also of this bird’s self-admiration and conceit, ‘Ali notes that the peacock is greatly upset because of his ugly legs, and that causes him a lot of suffering. “And when his (peacock’s) gaze goes down to his legs, he utters a yell, as if weeping, it seems as if he is calling for help. That yell is the sign of his true anguish, for his legs are (indeed) lean and black”.<sup>40</sup>

Farid ad-din ‘Attar, a mediaeval Persian Sufi poet, writes, as if echoing ‘Ali:

*Tāwūs rā be rang-o-negāri ke hast*  
*Hame tahsīn konand, va ū*  
*Xejel az pāye zešt-e xiš.*

Everybody praises Tawus [peacock] for his beauty,  
 but he is ashamed of his ugly legs.

Thus, the ambivalence of this image is even showing in his exterior, combining magnificence and deformity, as well as in the antagonism between this exterior magnificence and the interior vices of pride and vanity.

For his links with the powers of evil the peacock is considered an ominous creature. In the Old Iranian beliefs highlighted by Eznik, an Armenian theologian of the fifth century, the peacock is presented as a creation of Ahriman, or the devil: *Orpēs ew zmiws ews asen, t’e Arhmnn asac’*: *Oč’ et’e č’karem ařnel bari inč, ayl č’kamim. Ew ař hastatun zban ařneloy, arar siramarg*, “For again they assert that Ahriman said: ‘It is not that I cannot do good, but I will not’. And as

substantiation of his words, he created the peacock".<sup>41</sup> That is another example of an interpretation of his dubious nature: the peacock is a creation of the devil, but possibly a good (or the only good?) creation of his for all that. From time immemorial in the East and even in the beliefs of the European nations, the permanently open "eye" on the peacock's plumage had been associated with the evil eye gazing from the bottomless pit, and hence with the extreme manifestations of bad luck. Moreover, according to the Muslim apocryphal tradition, it was the peacock that had facilitated the penetration of Iblis (perhaps, from Greek διάβολος), the devil, to paradise. According to this story, once upon a time, Iblis, presenting himself to the peacock as an angel, praised his beauty and asked him for help to get into paradise and to see Allah; in return he promised to teach the peacock three magic formulas pronounced so as to retain eternal youth, never to fall sick, and to stay in paradise forever. The peacock sent Iblis to the serpent, which helped him to get to paradise and to deceive Adam, escorting him to the prohibited wheat. For this act they were all expelled from paradise.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, the angel of death, Jabrail (Gabriel), is named *Tāwūs al-malā'ika*, "The Peacock of Angels", while Mahdi (the eschatological Director), the twelfth Imam of the Shi'as, who is located in a secret place and whose advent is expected, is called *Tāwūs ahli-l'janna* or "Peacock, the Dweller of Paradise".

Farid ad-din 'Attar quotes another version of the myth on the expulsion of the peacock, whereby Iblis and serpent are featured in a single character of a seven-headed serpent (*mār-e haft-sar*).<sup>43</sup> Curiously, painted on the wall in front of Sheikh 'Adi's tomb at the sacred site of Lalish is a huge black serpent.

What is actually very interesting here is the appearance of the peacock with the serpent, a chthonic entity, nearly always having ambiguous properties. In different traditions the serpent had an eschatological meaning, symbolizing the omens of destiny, posing as the symbol of the universe, identified with both life and death, with both night and day, embodying the World Mind and coming out as the Forefather of all life on earth.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand the serpent is the embodiment of evil, death and destruction, as in the ancient Iranian tradition,<sup>45</sup> and on the other it is a mystic animal possessing the wisdom of primordial nature as a typical representative of the otherworldly fauna, having direct links with the supernatural, the mysterious, in a word, with the non-profane. Perhaps mixing positive (Babylonian?) images of the serpent with the biblical story, ancient para-Christian Gnostic groups of the Near East such as the Ophites and Naassenes honoured the serpent as bearer of the knowledge of good and evil to humanity.<sup>46</sup> Yet the positive aspects in his image naturally also provide reasons for a wary attitude toward him. Actually, the most visible characteristic of the chthonic nature is the merging of life-creating and destructive functions within a single image.<sup>47</sup>

With the aforementioned two images, the serpent and the peacock, appearing together, Yezidism has inevitably been viewed within the orbit of Gnosticism, which is actually what has taken place.

The cult of the peacock in the Yezidi culture contains clear traces of cock worship noted in Old Iran<sup>48</sup> that had a wide following to date inside the region and outside.<sup>49</sup> In many Baluchi tribes the cock even now is considered a sacred bird, its meat being unusable for food.<sup>50</sup> Particularly worshipped is the white cock, which is considered to be a good angel exorcizing the evil spirits.<sup>51</sup> According to the Islamic beliefs, the Prophet Muhammad liked white cocks and even kept one at his home.

In Ancient Iran the cock was considered the bird of Sraosha.<sup>52</sup> In Avesta (Vendidad 18.14–19) it is named *parō-darəs-*, that is, “he who foresees (the coming dawn)”.<sup>53</sup> In late Judaic folklore, the cock symbolizes the saviour from the power of darkness, who rescues people from the sinful dream, announcing a working day.<sup>54</sup> In Muslim tradition, the voice of the cock is pleasing to Allah, while in paradise, a little below his throne, lives a huge cock-angel whose voice is actually reiterated in the mornings by the cocks of the whole world inviting the faithful to prayer.<sup>55</sup> In Sufi dogmatics, by comparison, the cock is at the same time a symbol of passion and lust and the peacock conceit, just as the duck is of greed and the raven tenacity.<sup>56</sup>

The elements of cock worship overlaying the image of Malak-Tāwūs can be traced primarily in the iconographic presentation of the deity by the Yezidis, featuring a cock effigy made of copper or brass, mounted on a pole with a broad-based pedestal like a large candlestick. That is an important object of the cult, called *sanjak*, to be carried by a special group of the Yezidi priests (*Qawwāl*) travelling through the Yezidi settlements and gathering religious tribute. A brief and, perhaps, the best-matching description of this object was given in the mid-nineteenth century by Henry Layard:

I was aware that on the occasion of these journeys the priests carry with them the celebrated Melek Taous (= Malak-Tāwūs), or brazen peacock, as a warrant for their mission. As this was a favourable opportunity, I asked and obtained a sight of this mysterious figure. A stand of bright copper, or brass, in shape like the candlesticks generally used in Mosul and Baghdad, was surmounted by the rude image of a bird in the same metal, and more like an Indian or Mexican idol than cock or peacock. Its peculiar workmanship indicated some antiquity, but I could see no traces of inscription upon it. Before it stood a copper bowl to receive contributions, and a bag to contain the bird and stand, which takes to pieces when carried from place to place. There are four such images, one for each district visited by the Cawwals (= Qawwāls). The Yezidis declare that, notwithstanding the frequent wars and massacres to which the sect has been exposed, and the plunder and murder of the priests during their journeys, no Melek Taous has ever fallen into the hands of Mussulmans.<sup>57</sup>

Importantly, furthermore, in the Yezidi religious views, as reflected in “The Black Scripture” (§24), Malak-Tāwūs is considered to resemble a cock, and therefore the members of the clerical castes are banned from tasting the meat of that bird: “And the Sheikh and his disciples shall by no means eat of the cock’s meat [for] Tawus is one of the mentioned seven deities, who looks like a cock”.<sup>58</sup>

In a word, individual elements of the cock cult, through indirect references rather than explicitly, have found their way into the image of Malak-Tāwūs, although it should be remembered that the peacock, as noted before, has always had an autonomous cultic significance. While admitting *en passant* that there are some legends with Malak-Tāwūs as a dove,<sup>59</sup> it is no wonder that it was none other than the peacock, symbolizing on the one hand grandeur and magnificence, and on the other pride and passion, attracting with the beauty of its luxurious plumage and simultaneously repelling with its ever-open and gazing eye, its ugly legs, its unpleasant voice so incompatible with its appearance, its voracity and both divine and infernal attributes, that could embody both god and demon at the same time.

As shown by the analysis above, this concept is largely rooted in the Islamic apocryphal tradition, although this conclusion cannot be viewed unambiguously. The peacock had been a symbol of immortality in the multiple manifestations of early Christendom, since it was widely held that the peacock’s meat is not subject to decay. Even more attractive in this aspect is the fact that among the Mandaean, one of the most significant syncretic sects, the peacock is featured as the messenger of god or of the Original Spirit.<sup>60</sup> That adjacency, however, is not necessarily demonstrative of a mutual influence, because the two groups have become absolutely closed in the course of centuries, with esoteric knowledge being disseminated only within each community, and even then imparted according to certain gradations. But a common Gnostic source is possible.

### *Malak-Tāwūs as fallen angel*

As for the second aspect of the nature of Malak-Tāwūs, the incorporated image of the fallen angel expelled from paradise for disobedience to the will of god, this mythological concept can most probably be traced to the Sufi views on Satan and the essence of evil in general. The apologia for Satan is one of the characteristic features of early Sufism.

According to the qur’anic tradition and the Hadith, the reason why Satan (Azazel) was alienated from the throng of angelic beings was that, in contrast to all other angels, he disobeyed Allah’s command to worship Adam (Man) (Qur. 2:34, 17:61, 18:50). In any case, according to the same sources, Satan, like the genies (*jinn*s), had been created out of fire, while the other angels were from light.

The same line is traced with the extreme Shi'as. "Satan was the head of the angels", wrote Nur-'Ali-Shah Elahi, a notable religious figure of the Ahl-i Haqq:

God created man (Adam) out of rotten earth [*gel-e gandide*] and commanded the angels to worship him. Satan disobeyed the command, saying "How can a higher creature [*xelqat-e 'ālī*] bow his head to man who has been created out of rotten earth? How can fire [*nār*] bow to rotten earth?" and for this reason god expelled Satan from paradise: *rānde šodī*, "you are expelled", he said.<sup>61</sup>

In this connection, it is interesting to find a curious explanation given for the word *dev*, "demon, devil" in one of the mediaeval Armenian lexicons. That is, *hreštak*, *kam apstambac*, "angel or rebel".<sup>62</sup> Actually, a piece of Armenian popular wisdom thinks that demons and devils are angels headed by Sadael, who have been expelled from Heaven for their conceit. They are characterized as *Astco eresic't'ap'vac*, *Astco irisanc' inkac*, that is, "Fallen from the face of God". The same view exists in the Yezidi popular tradition, whereby Satan is the head of all angels temporarily overthrown as a punishment, but in time becomes a recipient of mercy.<sup>63</sup>

The biblical story on the celestial origin of Satan and his subsequent expulsion from the divine presence has received an aetiological explication in the Yezidi mystic doctrines, so that he is eventually exonerated or his deed not regarded as sin in any way. Indeed, god himself desired that Azazel should disobey him and become Iblis (and the fall of Adam was essentially desired by god as well). Thus, Azazel becomes the executor of god's providence within the context of predestination, since he was only the executor of a decreed role, he should therefore be pardoned. An interesting version about Satan was told to Edward Soane, a British intelligence officer, by the Yezidis in Tiflis, whereby Satan "has, after weeping sufficient tears in seven vessels to quench the seven hells of his seven thousand years' exile, now been reinstated in Heaven".<sup>64</sup>

According to some Islamic Mystics (such as 'Ayn al-Quzat Hamadani) (1098–1131), Allah and Satan are in the relation of *coincidentia oppositorum*: Satan is presented as a black lock of hair emphasizing the whiteness of the face of the beloved (Allah). The explanation by Satan of his refusal to worship Man is that he bows to no one but Allah in order to underscore the greatness of the creator: "For Adam is nothing before you."<sup>65</sup> Satan is perceived by Mansur al-Hallaj, the outstanding Sufi (858–922), as "a greater monotheist than god himself",<sup>66</sup> because Satan, in contrast to the rest of the angels, realized that except Allah's purest substance there is nothing worthy of worship, and adopted this Truth as his stand. As a result, Hallaj recognizes only two real *muwaḥḥids* (monotheists): the Prophet Muhammad and Satan, their only difference being that the former is a treasury of divine grace, while the latter shows the wrath of the creator. "My disobedience is only for aggrandizing your substance!" cries Satan in desperation, which enables another outstanding Sufi, Ahmad al-Ghazali

(d. 1126), to state: “One who will not learn to worship one god (*tauḥīd*) from Satan is a heretic and infidel”.<sup>67</sup>

In his *Manṭeq at-Ṭayr* Farid ad-din ‘Attar dedicated an entire section to the story of Satan’s downfall: “Creation of Adam and Satan’s refusal to worship him”. ‘Attar, too, considers Satan to be a *muwaḥḥid*, as well as a self-renouncing lover of the way of truth, carrying Allah’s curse joyfully, as a mantle of honour. Moreover, Allah appointed Iblis guard of his gate, saying: “My beloved, because of the jealousy and love that you entertain for me, you do not allow aliens to approach me”.<sup>68</sup>

It was this Sufi concept, whereby Satan is an adherent absolutely devoted to the creator, moreover, ready for self-sacrifice and doomed to exile, the one who is tragically in love, without whom, however, there can be no recognition of the object of love, that has produced a powerful effect upon the concept of the fallen angel in Yezidism. This perception of Satan is so original and ambiguous that the word “Satan” (Arab. *šayṭān*) is taboo among the Yezidis, and even more interestingly this taboo has come to cover a number of similar-sounding words (for example, the words *šatt*, “estuary”, *qayṭān*, “rope” and so on) that are substituted by synonyms: “Neither is it permitted to us to pronounce the name of Satan (because it is the name of our God), nor any name resembling this, such as Kitan, Sharr, Shatt” (§23, “The Black Book”).

The Sufis, as well as the Yezidis, accept evil as one of the necessary principles of creation, “unjustifiably” condemned by the dogmatic religions, without which it is impossible to comprehend the source of energy *per se*.<sup>69</sup> The predetermination of the downfall and the complete subordination to the divine will, as perceived by the Sufis, is reflected in Yezidism, although in a slightly modified version.

In comparison with this comprehension, Armenian Church Father Eznik in his *Refutation of Heresies*, wrote on the Christian view of the predetermination, emphasizing the importance of free will: *Ayl mek’ asemk’; t’e mtaneloy i mard č’uni išxanut’iwn (devn) aṛanc’ Astuacoy t’ulac’uc’aneloy; ew aynr pēs pēs patčark’ en, orpēs ink’n miayn gitē* (“But we say that the devil cannot enter a man without permission from God. And there are many reasons for that, which only he knows”).<sup>70</sup> In defence Eznik cites Gospel stories (e.g. Mt. 8:30-33; Mk 5:11-13; Lk. 8:32-33), and in particular explains Judas’ treachery by Satan’s interference, which had God’s permission, yet was done by their free will.<sup>71</sup>

Evidently, the varieties of the image of Satan (devil, Ahriman) and the ambiguous interpretation of his nature are rooted in the Old Iranian religious tradition. The same dual appearance of Ahura Mazdā and Ahriman in Zoroastrianism and Zurvanism indicates some predetermined presence of the “dark” hypostases of the supreme god in wider Persian tradition. Meanwhile, the early stages of the positive perception of Satan can be perceived at least in the story of the creation of the peacock cited by Eznik.<sup>72</sup> One more similar story (about the demon Mahmi) has been attested both by Eznik and by one Manichaean Middle Persian fragment: *Na, ew t’e dewk’ bnut’eamb č’ark’ ēin, čēr*

*hnar Mahmeayn hangamanac' lusoyn aŕneloy gušak linel, orum c'ayžm paštawneak' aynr k'eši eric's yami zohs matuc'anen* ("And if the demons were evil in nature, it would have been impossible for [the demon] Mahmi to reveal the means of creating the light, to which until now the servants of this sect offer sacrifices thrice a year").<sup>73</sup> In a Manichaean text (M28 IRI, 5) we find stated *gwynd 'br 'whrmyzd kwš m'hmydyw hmwxt šhr rwšn kyrđn* ("They say about Ōhrmazd that the demon Mahmi has taught him [how] to illuminate the world").<sup>74</sup>

In any case, the mythological concept of the expelled deity, the fallen angel, having deep roots in the Near Eastern traditions, is particularly brightly manifested in Islamic mysticism. Although the latter is a crucial component of the religious outlook in the Yezidism-forming environment, it has been intricately contaminated with the controversial image of the peacock through the aforementioned reasons – the infernal features of this bird, its functional resemblance to the angel rejected by god, and so on.

After an intuitive discovery of a congenital symbol, the peacock, the synthesis of the fallen angel and an ambivalent creature, or, rather, the need to reflect the double nature of the character, whose glorification had become a crucial concept of the new religious ideology, resulted in the appearance of the character of Malak-Tāwūs as the supreme deity of the triad in the Yezidi religion. The material herein exposed and analysed has now hopefully enabled the emergence of that image to be traced and accounted for with sufficient clarity, while admitting various problems of explanation still need to be resolved.

### *Sharfadin*

The Yezidi Sheikhs of Armenia usually answer the question of their ethnic and religious affiliation in this way: *Milatē ma - Ēzīd, dīnē ma - Šarfadīn*, "Our nation – the Yezidis, our religion – *Sharfadin*". What or who is Sharfadin? One version of the Yezidi Symbol of Faith reads as follows:

*Ātqātā min Silt'ān Ēzīd,  
Dīnē min Šarfadīn*

My faith is Sultan Ezid,  
My religion is Sharfadin.

Or:

*Šarfadīna - dīnē minā.  
Sharfadin is my religion.*

However, the identification of the religion using the name of Sharfadin is "unmotivated", either historically or mythologically. Sharfadin is the name



of an insignificant figure from the prestigious 'Adawi family, or associates of Sheikh 'Adi bin Musafir (d. 1162).<sup>75</sup> This Shafadin has never been canonized, even informally, and he is left outside the seven "avatars" of Malak-Tāwūs, unlike his named uncles, Sheikh Shams (Šams ad-dīn) (see "The Black Scripture", §4) and Farxadīn (Faxr ad-dīn), and he has no cultic significance whatsoever. This enigma, that is, how the name of such an obscure figure has become the very title of the religion, with the character himself possessing not a single quality or attribute fit for a deity, even saint, requires explanation.

We suggest that Sharfadin as the title of the Yezidi religion should be regarded as an allegory substituting the tabooed name of Malak-Tāwūs, the supreme deity of the Yezidis. The Arabic name Sharfadin (*Šaraf ad-dīn*), that is, Sharfadin, means literally "the honour of religion", which had been more likely than not one of the main epithets of the principal deity, Malak-Tāwūs himself, who lies at the core of the Yezidi religious ideology. Quite naturally, as time went on, this epithet, having replaced the tabooed name, came to be used to denote the religion. Thus, Sharfadin as the name of a religion, needs in no way be correlated to the name of a specific historical person, although it is not to be excluded that later, by way of a secondary reference, the name became associated, even identified, in the folk tradition with the respective member of the 'Adawi family.

### *The Peacock Angel in other traditions*

As noted before, Malak-Tāwūs is a unique image in the treatment that it is given in the Yezidi religion, but the Peacock Angel nonetheless features elsewhere as a marginal image and in other interpretations, and is present in certain Near Eastern cults.

Some Ahl-i Haqq groups also regard Malak-Tāwūs as the embodiment of Satan,<sup>76</sup> yet of a Satan with an alternate set of attributes, one not completely identified with evil and having the features of the angel rejected by god.<sup>77</sup> Also noted in Ahl-i Haqq doctrine are the elements of Satan's apologia, and there is even a kind of taboo on the word "*šayṭān*" as well. For the extreme Shi'as, Satan is merely Azazel, the angel waved aside by god, whose name was changed to Iblis ("devil") after the downfall. He is feeble and infirm, limited in his movements, rather than the concentration of evil as presented in dogmatic doctrines. The Ahl-i Haqq think that except for Man there is no evil in nature; evil (or the devil) is just the means whereby the dominant Self is manifested in us.<sup>78</sup>

Among the Ahl-i Haqq, we note, Malak-Tāwūs is sometimes identified with Pir Dawud,<sup>79</sup> the second most important of the *Haft-tan*, the Seven Saints in the Ahl-i Haqq religion.<sup>80</sup> In one of the Ahl-i Haqq groups (in the region of Qalkhan, the Dalahu mountains), the figure of Malak-Tāwūs has such a particular significance that the rest of the Ahl-i Haqq sectarians call this very group



*Malak-Tāwūsihā*; that is, Malak-Tāwūsis or “the followers of Malak-Tāwūs”. The local tradition has it that the followers of Malak-Tāwūs have existed from times immemorial. When Soltān Sohāq, the fourth divine incarnation (among the seven successive incarnations of divinity that built up the basic ideas of the Ahl-i Haqq faith) came to this world, all the Malak-Tāwūsis became his devotees, and thus part of the People of Truth, that is, Ahl-i Haqq. Since that time they have preserved two cults, those of Ahl-i Haqq and Malak-Tāwūs together. Thus, while all the Ahl-i Haqq sectarians, who equally venerate Soltan Sohak as god’s main incarnation, the Malak-Tāwūsis believe that Allah created the universe and appointed Malak-Tāwūs as the supervisor over the world. One of his main functions is to do god’s will, particularly to punish people for their sins. At the same time, no one is allowed to allude to Malak-Tāwūs’s own sin as that of the Fallen Angel, since god had already forgiven him. Malak-Tāwūs is even approached as Malak-e Amin (the Trusted Angel), who had proved his monotheistic view to Allah by his action.

In this group Malak-Tāwūs acquires new characteristics also in the light of the veneration of ‘Ali that is typical of most of heterodox Shi’a doctrines.<sup>81</sup> Malak-Tāwūsis believe that ‘Ali had existed before the Creation as Perfect (Absolute) Light (*nūr-ē mutlaq*). Four servitor Angels were created from ‘Ali’s pure essence (*az jesm-e pāk-ē ‘Ali*). Jibrail was created from ‘Ali’s right hand, Michail from his left, Israil from his tongue, and Malak-Amin (i.e. Malak-Tāwūs) as the reincarnation of ‘Ali (*dūn-ē ‘Ali*). As ‘Ali’s reincarnation, Malak-Tāwūs therefore rules over the world.

So much more interesting against this background is the Mandaean Tāwūs Melka. In the Mandaean legend narrating the creation of Man, the following story, *inter alia*, is recounted:

The Jews were of the children of Ruha and Adam. Their great men were the children of Ruha ... They travelled and travelled until they came to ‘Urshalam [Jerusalem] ... They wanted books, and Melka d Anhura [King of Light, the supreme being] said, “A book must be written that does not make trouble for the Mandai,” and they sent one of the melki – Tāwūs Melka to write the Torat.<sup>82</sup>

*Malkia* (*Melki*) are semi-divinities among the Mandaeans, executing the will of Great Life. They obey the creator, being at the same time his initial incarnations. As seen, the Mandaeans interpret *malka* in the compound name Tāwūs Melka as “king”, rather than “angel”. Although the functions of *malkia*, as noted by Lady Stefana Drower, are akin to the functions of messengers, angels (Heb. *malāk*, Arab. *malak*), the Mandaeans used the word *malax* (equivalent of the aforementioned Heb. and Arab. forms) also to designate the evil spirit. The entities that are completely beneficial are referred to by the Mandaeans as ‘*uthria* (sing. ‘*uthra*). In the colloquial Iraqi dialect an evil spirit or a *jinn* is also sometimes named by using a related word *melek*.<sup>83</sup>

As for the peacock (Ṭāwūs), it is the name given in the Mandaean tradition to the very *malka* who was distressed about his having rebelled against the Great Life and allowed his pride to push him into rebellion. Thus, we are looking again at an ambivalent figure of the fallen angel, the term contained in his name being of a dubious interpretation integrating both the good and the evil origins.

## NOTES

1. C. S. Dewrēš, *Du'a ū družgē ēzdīya* (Yerevan: Parberakan, 1993), 11.
2. See p. 3.
3. Interestingly, in the early twentieth century a certain Syrian established a secret society in England entitled the "Order of the Peacock Angel". Multiple circles embraced fully respectable folks infatuated by peculiar Eastern exotics, worshipping two powers, the "Augmentation" and the "Construction", known under the code names "Peacock" and "Serpent". The members of the order regarded one another as brothers, took part in common rituals, facilitating, in their opinion, an establishment of close association among the cult followers. Similar societies must have been established on the American continent as well (for details, see A. Darol, *Tajnye obsčestva* (Moscow: Kron-press, 1998), 165–84). The concept of the Peacock Angel cult of this order was, of course, borrowed from the Yezidis. This attempt at an artificial recreation of the esoteric knowledge in an alien environment among the people of an alternate mentality is evidence of nothing more than a general interest of the Europeans in diverse systems of clandestine knowledge, so typical for the Europe of the early twentieth century. For longer term background, see archaeologist Henry Layard's "conversion" to the Yezidis in the 1840s in T. S. Larsen, "Austen Henry Layard's Nineveh: The Bible and Archaeology in Victorian Britain", *Journal of Religious History* 33 (2009): 76–7.
4. Bittner, *Die heilige Bücher der Jeziden oder Teufelsanbeter*, 24, 28; G. Asatrian & A. Poladian "Ezdineri davanank'a: Himnakan astvacut'yunnera ev surb grk'era", *Patma-banasirakan handes* 4 : 144–5.
5. See A. Mingana, *The Yezidis: Devil Worshipers of the Middle East: Their Beliefs and Sacred Books* (London: Holmes, 1993); cf. R. Ebied, "Devil-worshippers: The Yazidis", in *Mehregan in Sydney*, Proceedings of the Seminar in Persian Studies during the Mehregan Persian Cultural Festival, Sydney, Australia, 28 October–6 November 1994, G. W. Trompf & M. Honari (eds), 93–8. (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1998).
6. M. M. Bayazîdî, *Rusûmat' nameyê ek'radîye* (Kurdish) M. B. Rudenko (ed., Russian trans., and comment.), 74 (Kurdish text), 64 (Russian trans.) (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1963).
7. See Bittner, *Die heilige Bücher der Jeziden oder Teufelsanbeter*, 24–39; Asatrian & Poladian, "Ezdineri davanank'a", 140–44.
8. In the Kurdish original *gwiryw'nh/gōrīwayāna*/, lit. "has been changed by them"; the verb *gōrīn* or *guhērīn* "to change, alter", New Persian *guharīdan*, "id", from Old Iranian \*wi-tar-.
9. In the Kurdish original *ēwa nāzānīn awānī bi-rē čūna darē čī dīkin*, lit. "you do not know what those led astray (who lost their way) do in the outside (darē)"; the respective locus in the Arabic version sounds *li'ānakum lastam tadrūna mā yafulūna al-aḡanība*, "because you may not know what aliens do".
10. Following M. Eliade, *Patterns on Comparative Religion*, R. Sheed (trans.) (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), 14ff.
11. In the oral version of the Yezidi cosmogony, *Qawlê āfrīnā dinyāyê* (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 182–92), there is also a pearl present (*diř*, Arab. *durr*) as the basis of the universe. The oral

text does not mention Malak-Tāwūs, but this meets the standards of religious practice, because of the taboo on his name. The pearl is a polyvalent symbol noted in the Gnostic teachings (e.g. “Hymn of the Pearl” in Syriac *Acta Thom.*, 108–13) and in a number of Near Eastern syncretic doctrines (those of the Ahl-i Haqq, and so on). But that is primarily the symbol of the universe. The fact that the pearl is located in a shell, as stated by Eliade (*Patterns on Comparative Religion*, 398–405), indicates how it can be transformed into a “cosmological centre”. The Yezidi cosmogony regards the pearl in the same hypostasis: the essence of the universe, existing with the divinity in pre-eternity, prior to anything else.

12. This verse is interesting because it features the concept of the Yezidis having originated from Adam directly, rather than from his union with Eve, as is the case with all the rest of mankind. That tradition, based perhaps upon the apocryphal Gnostic legend, narrates the dispute between Adam and Eve as to the main role in the reproduction of children. To prove the irrelevance of the woman’s claim to this role, Adam suggests placing his seed and Eve’s seed in two separate jars to see what fruit they will bear. The result was that Eve’s jar contained worms, scorpions and different vermins, while the jar with Adam’s seed contained a moon-faced boy who was named Šahid bin Jarr (Arab. “Witness, son of the Jar”) (see in more detail Spät, “Shahid bin Jarr, Forefather of the Yezidis”). Both the Kurdish and the Arabic versions of “The Black Scripture” give Šahr bin Safar, to be regarded as the distorted Šahid bin Safar (i.e. Re instead of Dāl). The patronymic Safar (lit. Arab. “yellow”), may be an allusion to *jarr* “jar, jug”, since a clay jar is mostly yellow. Later the marriage of Adam’s son and a *houri* produced the tribe of Yezidis. Adam, being a true Yezidi, delivers his religion to Shahid, the latter passing it to his successors (see N. Siouffi, “Notice sur la secte des Yézidis”, *Journal Asiatique* 7(20) (1882): 259–60; R. Lescot, *Enquête sur les yézidis de Syrie et du Djebel Sinjar* (Beirut: Institut française de Damas, 1938), 59. For a comparable Gnostic representation of a paradisiacal Adam as father of such a select people and “knowers”, see the (Nasoraian) Mandaean: cf. B. Nasoraia & G. W. Trompf, “Mandaean Macrohistory”, *Aram* 22 (2010–11), 398–400.
13. For sidelight, note the well-known debate about the “Gnostic” Mani’s breaking of the Elchasaite prohibition against wheat; for clues, see Cologne Mani Codex, 87: 19–88; 89: 15–90; 91: 11–14; e.g. J. C. Reeves, “The ‘Elchasaite’ Sanhedrin of the CMC in the Light of 2nd Temple Sources”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42 (1991): 68–91.
14. Bittner, *Die heilige Bücher der Jeziden oder Teufelsanbeter*, 2–28; Asatrian & Poladian, “Ezdineri davanank’ə”, 144–6.
15. Most commonly Sammael, as in 3 Baruch 4:8; 9:7; [Pseudo]-Jonathan ben Uzziel, *Targ. Pales.: Gen. iii*; cf. 1 Enoch 86–87.
16. See, for example, G. S. Asatrian, “*Risus Ritualis: An Old Reminiscence (Iranian Miscellanea)*”, *Iran and the Caucasus* 3–4 (1999–2000), 203–8.
17. See S. A. Egiazarov, “Kratkij etnografičeskij očerk kurdov Erivanskoj gubernii”, in his *Zapiski Kavkazskogo otdela Imperatorskogo russkogo geografičeskogo obsčestva* (Tiflis, 1891), 221–7.
18. H. Makas, *Kurdische Studien: Eine Probe des Dialekt von Diabekir, ein Gedicht aus Gauwar, Jezidengebete* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1900), 37–48.
19. See K. Silêman & K. Jindy, *Êzdiyatî: Liber Rošnaya hindek Têkstêd a’îne Êzdiyan* (Baghdad: Kurdish Academic Institute, 1979).
20. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 244–9.
21. It is an allusion to a known cosmogonic myth, wherein the earth rests on the back of the primeval bull, standing in turn on a great fish.
22. Rather, “world of sanctity”, since the relevant place in the original was probably *ālami qudsî*, i.e. an *izāfe* construction.
23. See Egiazarov, “Kratkij etnografičeskij očerk kurdov Erivanskoj gubernii”, 221–4.
24. See Amine Avdal, “Ezdineri kronakan havatalik’nerə”, typescript in Armenian, 1960 (kept in the Archive of the Caucasian Centre for Iranian Studies, Yerevan), fol. 81.

25. These six angels, plus Malak-Tāwūs (=Azrail), see further, in §32 of “The Black Scripture”: [God] “From his essence and light created six angels, whose creation was as one lighteth a lamp from another lamp”. In the next section, these angels, in their turn, similarly to the above six, become involved in the act of Creation: they created heaven, the sun, moon, horizon, morning star and atmosphere. In fact, these two subjects are different variants of the same scenario, with six angels (*malaks*), headed by Malak-Tāwūs and taking part in the act of Creation. These seven assistant-angels of god, including Azrail/Malak-Tāwūs, at least nominally, reflect the Muslim apocryphic tradition, and in almost the same succession, are also attested in the beliefs of some extreme Shi’a sects (see Chapter 6 for the relevant literature). And see also below the section on “Malak Tawus in Other Traditions”.
26. See C. J. Edmonds, *A Pilgrimage to Lalish* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1967), 4.
27. For Judaism, start with Test. Patr. Levi 8:2–12; 1 Enoch 20: 1–8. On parallel Muslim angelology and relevant currents, see V. F. Minorskij, *Materialy dlya izučeniya persidskoj sekty “Lyudi istiny” ili Ali-ilax* (Moscow: Lazarevskij institute vostočnyx yazykov, 1911), pt. 1, 62, 64, 81; Nūr ‘Alī Shah Elāhī, *L’ésoterisme kurde: Aperçus sur le secret gnostique des Fidèles de Vérité*, M. Mokri (trans. and commentary) (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck, 1966), 22–6; M. Mokri, *Cycle des Fidèles Compagnons à l’époque de Buhlul: Études d’hérésiologie islamique et de thèmes mythico-religieux iraniens* (Contributions scientifique aux études iraniennes, 5(4); Paris: Klincksieck, 1974), 29–30.
28. That is, six *Amesha Spentas*, becoming seven when Ahura Mazda (as Spenta Mainyu) joins them (as “lords of the seven creations”); see esp. *Yasht* 19:16–18; cf. M. Boyce, *The Zoroastrians*, Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 21–2; cf. Abu Hatim Razi, *Kitāb Ālam al Ubuwwat* (tenth century), discussed in G. W. Trompf, “Macrohistory”, in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, vol. 2, W. Hanegraaff (ed.), (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 706a.
29. Cf. the Kurdish curse formula *Bi tawûsê haşa* – “Go to hell” (lit. “Go to Satan [peacock]”).
30. A. V. Eliseev, “Sredi poklonnikov dyavola (Ocherki verovaniya ezidov)”, *Severnyj vestnik* 2(1) (1888): 59–74.
31. It could in some way remind the reader of “The Demon” by Russian poet and writer Mikhail Lermontov, rather than an original story taken directly from the Yezidi milieu.
32. Eliseev, “Sredi poklonnikov dyavola (Ocherki verovaniya ezidov)”: 67–8.
33. See K. E. Müller, *Kulturhistorische Studien zur Genese pseudo-islamischer Sektengebilde in Vorderasien* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1967), 368.
34. On the peacock cult see in detail J. J. Meyer, *Trilogie altindischer Mächte und Feste der Vegetation: Ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Religions- und Kulturgeschichte, Fest- und Volkskunde* (Leipzig: Max Niehans, 1937), 33; Müller, *Kulturhistorische Studien zur Genese pseudo-islamischer Sektengebilde in Vorderasien*, 388–90; B. Brentjes, “The Mittanians and the Peacock”, in *Ethnic Problems of the History of Central Asia in the Early Period*, M. S. Asimov et al. (eds), 145–51 (Moscow: Nauka, 1981); S. P. Maie, “Pavlin i kubok v ornamentacii drevnearmyanskix rukopisej”, in *IV meždunarodnyj simpozium po armyanskomu iskusstvu, Tezisy dokladov*, (Yerevan: n. pub., 1985), 190–91; R. Amirbekian, “Contribution à la question des symboles zoomorphes dans l’art de l’Orient (le serpent et le paon)”, *Iran and the Caucasus* 1 (1997): 147–58.
35. H. F. J. Junker, “Mittelpers. *Frašēmurv* ‘Pfau’”, *Wörter und Sachen: Kulturhistorische Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Sachforschung* 12 (1929): 158.
36. Cf. H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2 (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1973), 862; s.v., τᾱώς: “samt lat. *pāvō*, *pāvus* aus unbekannter orientalischer Quelle (vgl. Tamil *toghai*)”. The same view on the etymology of Greek τᾱώς has been recently expressed by Robert Beekes in his *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1457.
37. See Junker, “Mittelpers. *Frašēmurv* ‘Pfau’”, 136.
38. See B. Nikitine, *Les Kurdes: Étude sociologique et historique* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1956), 227.

39. Sharif Radi (compiler), *Nahj ul-balāya* (Tehran, [1372] 1994), 169–72, no. 265.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Eznik Kolbac'i, *Čark' anddem alandoc'*, M. Minasean (ed.) (Geneva: Slatkine Repr., 1992), 56; cf. also Junker, "Mittelpers. *Frašēmurv* 'Pfau'", 135; R. R. Štaket'berg, "Ob iranskom vliyanii na religioznye verovaniya drevnix armyan", *Drevnosti vostochnye* 2(2) (1900): 9–10; R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1972), 120, 438.
42. M.-J. Yāhaqqī, *Farhang-e asāfir va ešārāt-e dāstāni dar adabiyyāt-e fārsi* (Tehran, Farhang Mucasar, [1369] 1991), 292–3.
43. Šeyx Farīd ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nišābūrī, *Manṭiq at-ṭayr* (Tehran, 1975), 41.
44. Cf. M. M. Makovskij, *Sravnitel'nyj slovar' mifologicheskoy simvoliki v indoevropskix yazykax* (Moscow: Blados, 1996), 175–6.
45. Cf. K. A. Inostrancev, *Sasanidskie etyudy* (St Petersburg: V. Kirshbaum, 1909), 97–8.
46. For discussion of the relevant texts, start with J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity: The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea*, 1, J. A. Baker (trans.) (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 76–83. The Ophites, significantly, honoured seven angels or archons (hebdomad), the last being "the son of fallen wisdom"; see Origen, *Contr. Cels.* 6: 24–38.
47. Cf. G. S. Asatrian, "The Lord of Cattle in Gilan", *Iran and the Caucasus* 6(1–2) (2002): 82.
48. W. Geiger, *Ostiranische Kultur im Altertum* (Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1882), 365–8.
49. See, for example, J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (Russian edn) (Moscow: Politizdat, 1983), 921–3.
50. I. Afšār Sīstānī, *Balūčestān va tamaddon-e dirīne-ye ān* (Tehran: n. pub., 1993), 378.
51. See, for example, S. Hedayat, *Neyrangestān, Farhang-e āmyāne-ye mardom-e Irān* (Tehran: Ketabkhaneh va Matba' e Danesh, [1379] 2001), 109; F. Meier, "Nizāmī und die mythologie des Hahns", in *Colloquio sul Poeta Persiano Nizāmī e la Leggenda Iranica di Alessandro Magno*, 55–115 (Rome: Accademia nazionale de Lincei, 1977); T. Bois, *The Kurds* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), 100; 'A. 'Abdolī, *Tālešihā kistand?* (Tehran: Qoqnus, 1991), 202; Yāhaqqī, *Farhang-e asāfir va ešārāt-e dāstāni dar adabiyyāt-e fārsi*, 179–80. On the adventures of one of these effigies of Malak-Tāwūs in the Caucasus, see P. Nicolaus, "The Lost Sanjaq", *Iran and the Caucasus* 12(2) (2008): 58–91.
52. H. S. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1938), 66–7.
53. F. Max Müller (ed.), *The Zend-Avesta*, Pt 1: *The Vendidad*, J. Darmesteter (trans.), *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1887), 193; cf. also C. Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* (Strasburg: Karl Trübner, 1904), 859: ("der zuvor erblickt [näml. die Ankunft des Tages]").
54. Müller, *The Zend-Avesta*, Pt 1: *The Vendidad*, 372.
55. M. A. Palacios, *La Escatologia musulmana en la "Divina Commedia"* (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1919), 50–60.
56. See Jalāl-ad-dīn Rūmī, *Dāstānhā-ye Mathnavī*, vol. 3, N. M. Este'lāmī (ed.) (Tehran: Bonyad-e Neyshabur, [1370] 1992), 110–11.
57. A. H. Layard, *Discoveries among the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon, with Travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and the Desert: Being the Result of a Second Expedition undertaken for the Trustees of the British Museum* (abridged edn.) (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853), 46.
58. Asatrian & Poladian, "Ezdineri davanank'ə", 146.
59. See Avdal, "Ezdineri kronakan havatalik'nerə", fol., 74.
60. R. Reitzenstein, *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium: Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Bonn: A. Marcus & E. Weber, 1921), 227.
61. N. 'A. Š. Ēlāhī, *Āṭār al-haqq* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Safi 'Ali-Shah, 1995), 456–7.
62. N. Amalian, *Baṛgirk' hayoc'* (Yerevan: Hayastani gitutyunneri akademiya, 1975), 77.
63. See E. B. Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise* (London: John Murray, 1926), 100.
64. *Ibid.*, n. 2.
65. Mansour al-Hallaj, *Kitab at-Tawasin*, in L. Massignon, *La passion d' al-Hosayn Ibn Mansour*

- al-Hallaj, Martyr mystique de l'Islam* (Paris: Geuthner, 1922), vol. 2, 869.
66. Based on H. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele: God, Welt and Mensch in den Geschichten Farīduddin 'Attārs* (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 538.
67. M. L. Swartz, *Ibn al-Jawzi's Kitāb al-quṣṣāṣ wa'l-mudhakkirin* (Beirut: Institut de Lettres Orientales, 1971), 211.
68. P. L. Wilson, "Iblis, the Black Light", *Gnosis* 14 (1989–90): 45.
69. V. Arakelova, "Healing Practices among the Yezidi Sheikhs of Armenia", *Asian Folklore Studies* (Nagoya) 60(2) (2001): 321–2.
70. Koľbac'i, *Čark' ənddem əlandoc'*, 36.
71. *Ibid.*
72. See above with n. 46.
73. *Ibid.*, 56.
74. W. B. Henning, "A Sogdian God", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 28(2) (1965): 50.
75. See Guest, *The Yezidis*, esp. 22, 'Adi's tomb being a Yezidi site of pilgrimage at Lalish.
76. See N. Čahārdehī, *Asrār-e feraq-e xāksār* (Tehran: n. pub., [1369] 1991), 179.
77. Cf. M. Sūrī, *Sorūdhā-ye dīnī-ye yāresān* (Tehran: n. pub., [1344] 1966), 174–5.
78. Wilson, "Iblis, the Black Light", 42.
79. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 52.
80. Nūr 'Alī-Šāh Elāhī, *L'ésotérisme kurde, passim*.
81. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the son-in law of the Prophet Mohammad, the fourth rightful Caliph and the first Shi'a Imam, whose virtual deification marks most of the heterodox Shi'a sects.
82. E. S. Drower, *Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran: Their Cults, Customs, Magic, Legends, and Folklore* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 257–8.
83. *Ibid.*, 73–94.

## CHAPTER 2

### SHEIKH 'ADI

Unlike Malak-Tāwūs, whose character, no matter how ambivalent and contradictory it is, still remains “uni-plane” in its essence, being exclusively a religious phenomenon, the two other representatives of the Yezidi triad represent a quite different phenomenon, that of deified historical personalities. We shall deal with them – Sheikh 'Adi and Sultan Ezid – in turn.

#### SHEIKH 'ADI, A HISTORICAL PERSONALITY

Sheikh 'Adi (Šeyx 'Adī) was born around 1075 in the village Beyt Far (present-day Xirbet Qanafar), Lebanon. Also well known as 'Adī bin Musafir, his full name was Šaraf ad-Dīn Abū l-fadā'il 'Adī bin Musāfir bin Ismā'il bīn Mūsā bīn Marwān bin al-Hakam (or al-Hasan) bin Marwān. The family of his father, Musafir bin Ismail, goes back to the Umayyad Caliph Merwan bin al-Hakam; his mother's name was Yezda.

In Baghdad, where he moved as a young man, 'Adī bin Musafir became a disciple of the prominent Sufi philosopher Ahmad al-Ghazali. Among his fellow-students was 'Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani (Arab. Jīlī), later the founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi order. At the end of eleventh century, 'Adi bin Musafir left Baghdad, and in 1111 finally settled in Lalish in the Hakkari region, thirty-six miles northeast of Mosul. Lalish became his abode until the very end of his life; he left it only once, in 1116, in order to make a pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Lalish was predestined to become the centre of a new syncretic religion, having almost nothing in common with the ideology preached by 'Adī bin Musafir himself, yet with the great mystic appearing to be the dominant figure in its bizarre dogma.

With years, 'Adī bin Musafir became famous for his piety, asceticism and mystical power. He was said to recite the whole Qur'an twice on one night, to eat fruits only from trees cultivated by himself and to wear clothes made of



cotton from his own field. “If one would attain the gift of prophecy through striving, Sheikh ‘Adi would certainly have attained it.”<sup>2</sup> His fame attracted multiple pilgrims and disciples, which resulted in the foundation of the ‘Adawiyya Sufi order.

Sheikh ‘Adi’s religious ideas were marked by adherence to traditional doctrine, as presented in his Arabic works *How to Improve the Soul* and *The Creed of the [Orthodox] Sunni*. In his treatises *Admonitions to the Caliph* and *Admonitions to Sheikh Qaid and Other Disciples*, he exhorts his audience to live in chastity and follow the dogmas of Islam. He appealed for an asceticism among his followers, apparently alluding to Jesus “Oh ye disciples, let your bellies hunger and your livers thirst and cast away your raiment, that ye may see Allah on high; for fasting is the key to scorn of worldly things, and through fasting the soul and body are humbled and the heart becomes whole.”<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to Sheikh ‘Adi’s sober theological prose, however, his poetry is full of life, exultancy, and mystical inebriety with the wine of love. Some pieces of self-praise demonstrate the characteristic Sufi approach to conveying the particular status of a Master. The marked suggestions of his own role attitude as that of a Sufi Master found emphasized in his poetry,<sup>4</sup> coupled with the general trend of veneration of Sufi Masters, resulted in his followers approaching him as the *qibla*, taking him as the centre of their afterlife when as Master he was alive,<sup>5</sup> and equating him to god after his death (see below).

Significantly, he was among the Sufis exculpating Iblis, a fact that later dramatically influenced the whole Yezidi doctrine. Re-voicing the mystics, who asserted that evil was also created by Allah, Sheikh ‘Adi argued that “If Evil existed without the will of Allah most high, then Allah would be powerless, and a powerless one cannot be God, since it is impossible for anything to exist in his house that he does not will, just as nothing can exist in it that he does not know.”<sup>6</sup> Sheikh ‘Adi died in January 1162, in Lalish. His shrine became the main sanctuary and centre of pilgrimage for all the Yezidis. There are several manuscripts of his Sufi writings – in the State Library of West Berlin, the British Library and the Library of Congress.<sup>7</sup>

## SHEIKH ‘ADI DEIFIED

The cult of Sheikh ‘Adi looks absolutely logical in the “tide-way” of the Sufi tradition to venerate Sufi masters, particularly the founders of orders, who are supposed to possess some specific mystic power – *baraka* – which disciples can obtain not only directly from their master, but also after his death from his tomb.<sup>8</sup> Sheikh ‘Adi’s shrine is more than illustrative here – it became the centre of the Yezidis’ spiritual life.

Sheikh ‘Adi’s legendary fame as a Sufi saint with supernatural powers was widely blazed, adorned with new details, and steadily transformed the biography of the Sufi master into that of Sheikh ‘Adi as the incarnation of *xwadē*.



He made Mam Rašān (see below, Chapter 4) ride a rock, he transferred objects from remote places, he released prisoners from jail, the beat of his stick made a spring of Zam-zam gush out from a rock, and so on.<sup>9</sup> His identification with *xwadē* endues him with the functions of the creator: the creation of the fourteen spheres of Heaven and Earth is attributed to Sheikh 'Adi, and in the Doomsday all believers will be called together for his council of final accounting (*dīvān*).

In the Yezidi pantheon, Sheikh 'Adi appears as *Šīxādī*, *Šēxādī*, *Šīxāndī* or *Šēx(ē) A'dī* (*Ādī*), sometimes bearing the titles of *Sultan* (*Silt'an*), King (*P'ādšā*), and Angel (*Malak*). The variety of his titles, functions and characteristics demonstrates the diversity of perceptions about him in the Yezidi tradition – from a saint to an incarnation of an angel and the divine incarnation.

Although an unambiguous determination of Sheikh 'Adi's concrete place in the Yezidi triad is impossible, there is one point attributed exclusively to this character: he is the head of the Yezidi sacred *dīvān* (council). He is *P'ādšā Sult'an Šīxādīyā* – *dīvānbağē Šamsē ēzdīna*, or King Sultan Shikhadi, that is to say, the head of the Council of the Sun of the Yezidis.<sup>10</sup>

Otherwise, all the three divine incarnations, the so-called triad, often interchange each other in the same or similar religious contexts, and generally, in the whole religious oral tradition. Their functions are often superposed and intertwined with each other in the sacred space, so that all three appear either as creator, or as credo, articles of faith, or as eponym, or as Yezidi saint, and so on. Despite certain personal characteristics, they can act in tri-unity, as, for instance, in the following variant of the Yezidi credo:

*Tāwūsī malak imānā minā,  
Ēzdi(d) ātqātā minā,  
Šīxādī a'rkānē minā.*<sup>11</sup>

Malak-Tāwūs is my faith,  
Ezid is my belief,  
Shikhadi is the essence of my religion.

In another context, Sheikh 'Adi is approached as “faith” instead of Malak-Tāwūs. Cf., in the “Hymn of Faith” (*Qawlē imānē*):

*Řangē imānē ži čīya?  
K'ilāma a'nzalīya,  
Nāvē Šēxē A'dīya.*<sup>12</sup>

What is the colour of the faith [made of]?  
[It is made of] the eternal word,  
[and] the name of Sheikh 'Adi.

Such a “unification” of the characters is evinced in the use of such common epithets as *Silt'an Ēzid* and *Silt'an Šīxādī*, or *Malak Tāwūs* and *Malak Ādī*.<sup>13</sup>

As for Sheikh ‘Adi, he also appears as the lord of the fourteen spheres of Heaven and Earth:

*Šēxakī min haya H’akārīya,  
Zarg ū kawānē qudratē p’āra wīya,  
Čārda tavak a’rd ū a’zmān k’afā dastē Siltān Šīxādīya.*<sup>14</sup>

I have a Sheikh who is from Hakkari,  
He has a powerful sling and a bow;  
The fourteen spheres of Earth and Heaven are on Sultan Shikhadi’s  
palm.

The sling and bow point to Sheikh ‘Adi’s cosmic abilities: the sling symbolizes the earth, and the bow the sky. The same domination over the fourteen spheres is attributed to Sultan Ezid (see below).

Sheikh ‘Adi is also described as the Master of the Path and of the pillars of faith (*ark’ān*):

*P’ādšā awa Sult’ān Šīxādī – xudānē yōlē ū ark’ānē.*<sup>15</sup>

That King, Shikhadi is the Master of the Path and the pillars of faith.

Here *yōl* or “path” is definitely the term coming from the legacy of Sufism, which is based on the doctrine of the mystic path to god (see also the relevant formula characterizing Sultan Ezid in Chapter 4).

It is just Sheikh ‘Adi, however, who judges souls – both right after death, at the *Salāt* bridge (Kurd. *Salāt*, Arab. *Širāt*), and on the Day of Doom. That is why in some texts, Sheikh ‘Adi is called “the lord of the hereafter”, as in the declaration: *P’ādšāyē min Silt’ān Šīxādīya dinē āxiratē*, “My king Sultan Shikhadi is the lord of the hereafter”.<sup>16</sup> At the *Salāt* bridge, the “brother/sister of the Next World” intercedes for the mercy of Sheikh ‘Adi to the soul of his/her disciple:

*Šīxādī, tu šahidā bī,  
Šīxādī, tu p’ādšāyī,  
P’ādšāyē qadīmīyēyī arhadayī,  
Aw silāmata, bēlak’aya!  
Birā ha’a jinatē.*

Shikhadi, be an attestor,  
Shikhadi, you are the king,  
The ancient and primeval king,  
He/she is perfect, irreproachable!  
Let it go to paradise.<sup>17</sup>

That is why they say: *Bē farwāra Šīxādī jizratā řuh' nahāta bara*,<sup>18</sup> "Without Shikhadi's will, a soul cannot get retribution."

There is an interesting detail in the Yezidi religious lore, that Sheikh 'Adi appears as a horseman riding the legendary Dundul (Duldul or Dādul). In the Shi'a tradition, Dundul is the name of the steed of 'Ali, the fourth righteous caliph and the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. 'Ali is said to ride Dandul in all his battles against infidels. The grey horse of the Prophet Muhammad himself bore the same name, as Muslim tradition has it, the word deriving from the Arabic *dundul* – "porcupine". Denoting such a legendary horse, the name is widespread in the folklores of Central Asian and North Caucasian peoples (Tartars, Uzbeks, Pamirians, Adyghes, Kabardinians, etc.). Thus:

*Šīxādī mi habū A'rabistānē,  
Xudānē Dādul ū dāna.*<sup>19</sup>

I had a sheikh in the land of Arabs [i.e. Sheikh 'Adi],  
[Who is] the owner of Dundul and dān [?].

Another owner of Dundul is Malak-Tāwūs himself, but of course in his allegoric representation – as Sharfadin (see above) – since his own name is tabooed. So:

*Šarfadinō, xarzē gulē,  
A'māmata [a'lāmat (?)]<sup>20</sup> dastē gulē,  
Šarfadin siyārē Dundulē.  
Šarfadīna – dīnē minā,  
Šarfadīna – dīnē minā.*<sup>21</sup>

Sharfadin [i.e. Malak-Tāwūs], [you are] – the green of a flower,  
The manifestation of a bouquet of flowers,  
Sharfadin is the horseman upon Dundul,  
Sharfadin is my religion,  
Sharfadin is my religion.

Incidentally, Dundul is another Shi'a element, alongside 'Ali, Fatima (Pīrā Fāt) (see below, Chapter 4), which has penetrated Yezidism and which so far finds no unambiguous explanation.<sup>22</sup> 'Ali himself figures in the Yezidi lore as a legendary hero fighting with infidels for the Yezidi faith. In the Yezidi tradition he bears the same epithet of god's lion – *Šērē xwadē* (Arab. *Asad ullāh*) – as in the Shi'a tradition, and, like Sheikh 'Adi and Sharfadin (Malak-Tāwūs), he rides Dundul. There is a Yezidi story about 'Ali's journey to the Hereafter – *A'lī Šērē xwadē āxiratēdā* ("Ali, god's Lion in the Hereafter") – where he is involved in ascertaining the retributions for sins, particularly for offending against Yezidi religious law.<sup>23</sup> Another text rich in Shi'a motifs adopted in Yezidi tradition is *Bayt'ā A'lī Šērē xwadē*, the "Hymn to 'Ali, god's Lion". This text *inter*

*alia* mentions Fatima (Fāt, as well as *Fātima dēm šalāla*, “Fatima with beaming face”), the sons of Ali and Fatima – Hasan and Husayn (H’asan, H’usayn) and Zeynab (Zīn) – and also Aysha, Prophet Muhammad’s wife.<sup>24</sup> The Prophet of Islam and his son-in-law are also named in one of the most sacred and significant hymns, the Yezidi requiem *Qawlē Saramargē*:

*Řūh’ čū, mā qadībī qālib,*  
*Řāwāstiya sar ma dastakī tālib;*  
*Avā k’āsā vaxwāriya navī Mah’madē bin A’vdila,*  
*A’liyə bin A’būt’ālib.*<sup>25</sup>

The soul has gone, the empty form remained  
 The spear-hand taking away [souls] is hung over us;  
 This cup was drained [even] Prophet Muhammad, the son of  
 Abdullah,  
 [And] ‘Ali, the son of Abutalib.

Much as this fact seems amazing, in the religion, now totally dissociated from Islam and even approaching the Muslim milieu as hostile, the death of the Prophet of Islam and the first Shi’a imam is represented as *terminus comparationis* in the context of a personal grief, a loss of a kinsman, or, rather, the inevitability of death for any human being – even for Allah’s messenger and his close kin. Shi’a elements constitute one of the most enigmatic problems of the Yezidi tradition. These features probably entered the “belief repertory” of this syncretic sect from the heterodox Shi’a milieu, for in its dogmatic form “mainstream” Shi’ism holds views hostile to Yezidism, primarily and often specifically towards the contradictory figure of Sultan Yezid (see below). Besides, the penetration of the mentioned elements into the orbit of Yezidism could hardly go back to the twelfth-century ‘Adawiyya period, since ‘Adi bin Musafir himself was a faithful Sunni. The fact is that most of the syncretic teachings of the region have been shaped out of the same “heretical field” and are often marked with common motifs, although many such peripheral elements shared by these various sects are curiously enough not the result of mutual influences.<sup>26</sup>

In keeping with common Shi’a speculative concepts concerning emanations from the divine, moreover, the Yezidis consider Sheikh ‘Adi a personification of light and a divine extension: *Yā Sult’ān Šixādī, mērā gōtin ma rōnkāyī nāv dik’re ta hava*,<sup>27</sup> “O Sultan Šixādī, the saints told us that light appears only in mentioning you”. The fulfilment of peoples’ desires totally depends on Šixādī’s will: *Šixādī mirāzē hāsīl dika*, “Šixādī complies with [our] wishes”, as the Yezidi proverb says. *Qawlē imānē*, “The Hymn of Faith”, points to this directly:

*Harčē kasē xwa dastē xwa dāminā xarqē Šixādī mālā Ādiyā bigra,*  
*Sult’ān Šixādīyē mirāzē wānā jam xwa hāsīl bika.*<sup>28</sup>

Those, who catch the edge of the gown of Šixādī from the house  
of 'Adi,  
Sultan Šixādī will comply with their wishes.

The Yezidis believe that, after the realization of his mission in this world, that is, having founded the Yezidi community, Šixādī ascended to heaven (*ži a'rda firī a'zmīn*) and is now ruling over the world, together with Malak-Tāwūs. Sheikh 'Adi features in most of the religious texts as "Patriarch" of the Yezidi folk pantheon.

## NOTES

1. Guest, *The Yezidis*, 15–16.
2. Al-Gilani, based on Guest, *The Yezidis*, 17.
3. Based on Guest, *The Yezidis*, 17. Cf. Mt. 6:16–17, 25–28; 17:21.
4. See those pieces cited by Guest, *The Yezidis*, 17–18, and by Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 47.
5. Ibn Khallikan, based on R. Frank, *Scheich 'Adī, der grosse Heilige der Yezīdīs*, Türkische Bibliothek, 14 (Berlin: Kirchhain, 1911), 51–2.
6. Based on Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 47.
7. For the details, see Guest, *The Yezidis*, 18.
8. See in detail J. C. Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 26–7, 34.
9. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 96–7. Among other details of his now legendary biography within the Yezidi tradition, Sheikh 'Adi acquires the "justification" of his "prophetic mission" in the following legend. At the age of twenty, when "he was riding by moonlight across a plain, the summons came to him. In front of an old tomb an apparition rose out of the ground – two camels with legs eight foot long, heads like water buffaloes, long bristly hair, big round ox-like eyes glowing green and a jet black skin, yet otherwise resembling a man. Meanwhile the tomb grew larger until it touched the clouds, taking the shape of a minaret which then began to shake. In his terror Adi knocked over a jug of water that stood nearby. The apparition now turned into a handsome boy with a peacock's tail, who said to him: Fear not; the minaret may well fall and destroy the world, but you and those that hearken to you will be unharmed and will rule over the ruins. I am Melek Taus and have chosen you to proclaim the religion of truth to the world" (Guest, *The Yezidis*, 31).
10. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 319.
11. Authors' field materials; informant Sheikh Hasane Mamud.
12. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, vol. 2, 49–50.
13. *Ibid.*, 320.
14. *Ibid.*, 319.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 320. On the Yezidi concept of the afterlife see also V. Arakelova & T. Amrian, "The Hereafter in the Yezidi Beliefs", *Iran and the Caucasus* 16(3) (2012): 309–18.
17. G. Asatrian, "The Holy Brotherhood: The Yezidi Religious Institution of the 'Brother' and the 'Sister' of the 'Next World'", *Iran and the Caucasus* 3–4 (1999–2000): 80.
18. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 318–19.
19. *Ibid.*, 319.
20. Our preferred reading; meaning "sign, symbol, manifestation".
21. Authors' field materials; informant Sheikh Hasane Mamud.

22. On this problem, see, for example, V. Arakelova, "Again on the Formation of the Yezidi Community: A Shi'a Portion in Yezidism", paper presented at the International Conference on Iran and the Caucasus: Unity and Diversity, Yerevan, 6–8 June 2008.
23. Asatrian, *The Yezidi Divina Commedia: A'li Šērē xwadē āxiratēdā* (forthcoming).
24. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 403–12.
25. H'esenē Šēx K'elešē, *Řē-řizma miletē ēzdī angori qirarē dīn* (Yerevan: n. pub., 1995), 16.
26. See Arakelova, "On Some Essential Markers of the Near Eastern 'Heretic' Milieu", paper presented at the 7th European Conference of Iranian Studies (ECIS 7), Krakow, 7–10 September 2011 (publication of proceedings forthcoming).
27. Šēx K'elešē, *Řē-řizma miletē ēzdī angori qirarē dīn*, 16.
28. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 419.

## CHAPTER 3

### SULTAN EZID

In the Yezidi triad of Malak Tawus, Sheikh ‘Adi and Sultan Ezid (Si/ult’ān Ēzīd), the last is probably the least significant figure, although sometimes the tradition identifies him even with Malak Tawus himself.<sup>1</sup> Sultan Ezid is the lord of people and their wordly life, the essence of the Yezidi faith,<sup>2</sup> though the latter characteristic is usually applied to the other members of the triad as well. We find the image of Sultan Ezid generally features in the triad with Malak Tawus and Sheikh ‘Adi.

Like Sheikh ‘Adi, Sultan Ezid is considered the master of the fourteen spheres of the Earth and heavens. Thus:

*Āqā-yē min Ēzīda,  
Bayraqā sōr ū spī p’ida;  
Čārda tavak ard ū a’zmān k’afa dastē Sultan Ēzīda.*<sup>3</sup>

My lord is Ezid,  
In his hand is a red-and-white flag,  
The fourteen spheres of Earth and Heaven are on his palm.

Sultan Ezid is sometimes called “red” (*Silt’ān Ēzīdē sōr*), though the same epithet is applied to one of the minor figures of the Yezidi folk pantheon, for instance Šēkh Mūsē sōr (the lord of the wind and air, as we shall see in Chapter 4).<sup>4</sup>

Sultan Ezid is the only deity whose name is used in the important praying formula with *hōl* (yōl), “[mystical] Path”, signifying the religion itself, which again points at the Sufi roots of Yezidism. Thus: *Hōla, hōla, hōla, Silt’an Ēzīdē sōra!* “The red Sultan Ezid is our mystical way”, or, in fact, “Sultan Ezid is our religion”, which most probably used to be the *zēkr* formula (a text recited during the major Yezidi *samā’* ceremony, with its specific ecstatic practices typical of esoteric groups). Very often, the purity of the faith is confirmed by the formula *barxē Silt’ān Ēzīd*, “the lamb of Sultan Ezid”. Loud addresses to

Sultan Ezid can be heard during the *samā'* rites and on the Sultan's birthday (*Āzā Ēzidē*) on the first of December, which involves a grand religious celebration preceded by three days of fasting. Sultan Ezid has his own shrine, a legendary grave in Lalish. Although his so-called *mazār* (shrine) does not look as impressive as those of other legendary personalities and Yezidi deities, it is always overcrowded with pilgrims during religious feasts.

Despite the fact that his name is more often used in religious hymns than that of Sheikh 'Adi (with the name of Malak Tawus almost absolutely tabooed), Sultan Ezid's secondary role in the triad is obvious. Yet who has become the main eponym of the Yezidi community but Sultan Ezid? This plain datum has given birth to a number of hypotheses concerning the genesis of both his personage and name. According to the most common error, the name Ezid is connected with the Persian *īzad* "deity, god", going back to the Avestan *yazata* "worthy of sacrifice", and thus to a defined class of worshipped deities (Old Iranian \**yaz-* "to sacrifice"). Again, the name of the character and the name of the community as a result have also connected with the name of Yazd, a city in southeast Iran, where a relatively large Zoroastrian community thrives.<sup>5</sup> And even in the Yezidi tradition itself the person of Sultan Ezid is sometimes identified with Yazid bin Mu'awiya, the second Umayyad caliph involved in the death in battle of Hussayn, 'Ali's second son in AD 680. All the above-mentioned theories, however, are mere *ad hoc* assumptions, except for the last, that is, the identification of Sultan Ezid with Yazid bin Mu'awiya. No matter how strange such an identification may seem from a historical point of view, since it concerns a caliph who ruled only for three years (680–83) and who did not demonstrate any outstanding characteristics or moral merits, this Ezid/Yazid connection can be substantiated as the result of a secondary development.

According to the Yezidi tradition, Sultan Ezid once broke away from Islam and adopted the religion of Shahid bin Jarr, the son of Adam,<sup>6</sup> and spread it everywhere in Syria till the time of Shaikh 'Adi, the founder of the first Yezidi community according to Yezidi tradition.<sup>7</sup> In Yezidi lore, moreover, a number of legendary and mythological events (such as the conquest of Constantinople) are also connected with the name of Ezid.<sup>8</sup> As for the historical Yazid bin Mu'awiya, his reputation even in Muslim traditions carries a dual nature. According to a legend, Yazid was predestined to play one of the most dramatic roles in Islam: his father, Mu'awiya bin Sufiyan once accidentally cut the Prophet Mohammad while he was shaving him, which caused Mohammad to bleed. The Prophet of Islam said that Mu'awiya's descendants would fight against his followers and would even win. Mu'awiya swore never to marry; but Allah sent him a disease that could be cured only if he married. He married an eighty-year-old virgin, Mahusa; on the first night after the wedding, she appeared to be a young girl (a very important element of legendary birth), and later gave birth to Yazid! The legend has a vivid allusion to the tragedy at the battle of Karbala in 680, when Hussain and his infant son were killed, an event



which took place in the short period of Yazid's caliphate, and made the caliph one of the marked figures in the history of Islam.<sup>9</sup>

Yet how could a historical personality become the prefigurement of a deity with whom he had nothing in common? The genesis of this complex phenomenon can be effectively traced back. Most probably, the image of Yazid, having already been venerated as an Umayyad offspring, was incorporated into the newly forming Yezidi tradition together with a religious-political movement of the supporters of the Umayyad dynasty. Even in that period, some groups venerating the Umayyads called themselves Yezidis, meaning that they held exclusive adherence to Yazid bin Mu'awiya, and kept up that allegiance after those sensitive turbulences of transference from the first (Rashidun/Rightly Guided) Caliphs to the Umayyad Caliphate and the split between Sunni and Shi'a. We could conditionally define this group as the proto-Yezidis, or one of the proto-Yezidi sects, probably along with honourers of the third Umayyad Caliph Marwan ibn al-Hakam (ruling 684–5). It is because such continuing groups later came to join the so-called 'Adawiyyas, those inspired by Sheikh 'Adi's piety in the early twelfth century, and because Yazid's followers were already influential, that they took part in the formation of the Yezidi tradition. The 'Adawiyya Sufis themselves have paid special deference to the Umayyads, since Sheikh 'Adi bin Musafer himself – the Sheikh 'Adi now incorporated into the Yezidi triad – belonged to the same dynasty, as descendant of Caliph Marwan ibn al-Hakam.<sup>10</sup> Apparently, the atmosphere in the newly formed community of the 'Adawiyyas, later developing into the Yezidi ethnic-religious group, was quite tolerant. The absence of dogmatic views and beliefs at the early stage, and the prevalence of mystical-emotional knowledge produced a rather flexible structure, which finally resulted in a unique syncretism. The whole 'Adawiyya community, as an obligatory course of any Sufi order's affairs, stressed the deification of Sheikh 'Adi as the founder of the order back in the 1110s, while the particular Ummayyad supporters within the same order venerated Caliph Yazid.

Eventually and finally, other elements joining the community would bring their own cults, which further either disappeared under the onrush of more significant figures or left some nuances in the colourful palette of the movement's syncretic teaching. At an early stage of its formation, the community experienced a "non-dogmatic" period, when it absorbed many ideas, though naturally ignoring absolutely strange elements. Anyway, the deification of Sheikh 'Adi to the level of Malak Tawus himself did not exclude the same process involving Sultan Ezid, particularly in light of the fact that the head of the triad was definitely Malak Tawus, and above all the three there was the over-looking *xwadē* balancing the situation and unifying all around the common idea of monotheism.

It is quite clear that the tragic event of Karbala marked this rather ordinary personality. That is why even the followers of the Umayyad members, whether honouring Mu'āwiya bin Sufyān or Marwan bin Hakam,<sup>11</sup> finally came

to be considered the venerators of Yazid and were called by his name. It was at Shughnan (in the Pamirs region) where the Marvanids, who recognized Muhammad Marwan, taken as secretary of the Prophet Mohammad as the fourth rightful caliph, were also called Yezidis. This was undoubtedly because of the marked figure of Yazid bin Mu'āwiya, because in folk tradition the whole rule of the Umayyads was heavily associated with the battle of Karbalā. It is also worth mentioning that Mu'āwiya, in the form of Māwī, occurs in the Yezidi religious hymns (for example, in *Qawlē Ēzīd*) and is a clear reference to Sultan Yazid.<sup>12</sup>

It is obvious, however, that Sultan Ezid *qua* deity and member of the Yezidi triad, is not the real equivalent of Caliph Yazid, even if he has actually been shaped on the basis of this character. Still, the question remains how his name, that of the least significant member of the triad, became the main eponym of the Yezidi community. First of all, *Ēzdī* (< \**ēzīdī*) is not the only name of the whole group. Previously, there existed other definitions of the community which later became colloquially obsolete but were preserved in Yezidi religious texts. One of them *A'dabi*, goes back to Arab. *'adawī*, meaning "the follower of Shaikh 'Adī" or rather "a member of the 'Adawiyya order"). Another one is *Šarqī*, (lit. "eastern"), most probably from *'Adawiyyē Šarqī*, "the Eastern 'Adawiyya,"<sup>13</sup> and finally *Dāsinī*, from the name of one of the Yezidi tribes. To all appearances, there was a time when all these terms, including *ēz(i)dī*, were used simultaneously, and the dominating one (also as the group's self-definition) was most likely *a'dabi* or *'adawī*. The term *ēz(i)dī* is the heritage of the Umayyad supporters in the community, either from those having joined the community with a "cult" of Yazid or as the result of his deification within the 'Adawiyyas themselves.

Later, by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the definition *ēz(i)dī* had displaced other names, which will have been bolstered by the following circumstances. After the Karbala tragedy, in which the Prophet Mohammad's grandson was killed, the personality of Caliph Yazid assumed an evil look, and that was not a view limited to the Shi'as. Thus, the term *ēzīd*, being already an endo-ethnonym, could also be fixed as a pejorative exo-ethnonym applied mainly by the Shi'as to the people venerating the cursed enemy.

Slowly, the name became, to a certain extent, a synonym of a renegade in the Muslim milieu as well as elsewhere. In the Armenian late mediaeval love poetry, and, in particular, with Sayat'-Nova,<sup>14</sup> we come across *Šat mart' k'u ēšxemen ku dārna ezid* ("Many will become the Yezidis because of love to you" [i.e. renegades, infidels]), or *Ēšxemet dāril im ezid/ Halvec'a, mašvec'a k'zid* ("My love to you made me a Yezidi, I am pining away ...").<sup>15</sup> The same occurs in Turkish poems by the same author: *Yigilsun y[e]zidler, cama tolansun/Namardün gögsinā qama talansun*, "Let the *yezidi* [here 'infidels'] come all together, let them put the knife to the bosom of the unrighteous one."<sup>16</sup> The last example reflects the later tradition of the metaphoric use of the term "Yezidi", that is, the perception of the Yezidis as unbelievers or devil-worshippers.

In the modern Yezidi tradition, the connection between Sultan Ezid and Yazid (b. Mu'awiya) is sometimes categorically negated,<sup>17</sup> and this should be recognized as an attempt to separate the Yezidi tradition from Islam and from any personage attested in the history of Islam. The same concerns Shaikh 'Adi, who would never be recognized in the modern Yezidi tradition as the founder of the 'Adawiyya Sufi order, for otherwise that would in effect be admitting that he once was a righteous *surmān* (a contemptuous term denoting Muslims).

## NOTES

1. G. Asatrian & V. Arakelova, "Malak-Tāwūs: The Peacock Angel of the Yezidis", *Iran and the Caucasus* 7(1-2) (2003): 1-36.
2. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 95-6.
3. Authors' field materials; informant Sheikh Hasane Mamud.
4. G. Asatrian & V. Arakelova, "The Yezidi Pantheon", *Iran and the Caucasus* 8(2) (2004): 231-80.
5. G. R. Driver, "The Religion of the Kurds", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 2 (1922): 197-213; A. A. Semenov, "Poklonenie satane u peredneaziatskix kurdov-ezidov", *Bulletin of the Central Asian State University (Tashkent)* 16 (1927): 59-80.
6. E. Spät, "Shahid bin Jarr, Forefather of the Yezidis", 27-56.
7. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 37.
8. R. Lescot, *Enquête sur les yézidis*, 61-2.
9. See M. ibn J. al-Tabari, *History of the Prophets and Kings*, I. K. A. Howard (trans.) (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991).
10. P. G. Kreyenbroek & K. Jindy Rashow, *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect: Sacred Poems and Religious Narratives from the Yezidi Tradition*, Iranica 9 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005). Note that Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, the female Sufi saint connected with the foundations of Sufism (F. M. Pareja *et al.*, *Islamologie* [Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1957], 746-7), and with an obviously significant name for the discussion here, will be discussed in the next chapter.
11. V. V. Bartold, "Musul'manskaya sekta mervanitov", in his *Sobranie sochinenij*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1966), 462-7.
12. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 26-9.
13. *Ibid.*, 321.
14. Sayat' Nova, *Daftar* [Armenian poems] (Yerevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1963), 112.
15. *Ibid.*, 118.
16. *Ibid.*, 96.
17. Shaukeddin Issa, "Yezid ibn Mu'awiya und die Yeziden: Eine religionswissenschaftliche Untersuchung", *Dengê Êzdiyan*, 6-7 (1997): 17-22.

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## PART II

# THE YEZIDIS' PANTHEON AND THE SYNCRETIC FEATURES OF THEIR RELIGION

### INTRODUCTION

Besides the triad that constitutes the so-called dogmatic base of the Yezidis' religion, and stands out distinctly in their cult and beliefs, there is a pantheon of many deities and spirit guardians in Yezidism. The origins and nature of its members are not too easy to determine because of the scarcity or sparseness of available material, but the task must be undertaken to give a proper accounting of the religion. Identifying the *denotata* of the Yezidi nomenclature of divine beings is obstructed by the multiplicity and heterogeneity of revered historical personalities. These include Sheikh 'Adi's kinsmen and ambience, locally significant characters with restricted spheres of influence, the Sufi saints (Mansur al-Hallaj, Rabi'a 'Adawiyya), biblical and qur'anic characters (Ibrahim, Musa, 'Isa, 'Ali, etc.), as well as some sheikhs and pirs regarded as saints by the Yezidis. At the same time, many mythical and semi-mythical figures, often even historical characters, having retained their cults in various Near Eastern religious traditions (especially in the so-called heretical environment of Islam), gained popularity with the Yezidis, who worship them along with their genuine deities. Specific regional deities form a recognizable category within the additional collectivity of Yezidi divine beings, these being deeply implanted in the popular mind and adapted to the religious tradition – Ibrahim-khalil and Khidir-nabi most notable among them.

Apropos any folk pantheon, it is virtually impossible to identify the unambiguous attributes of sanctity for a given figure. The problem gets worse among religions where deification or canonization occurs informally, and popular tradition has a freer hand. Despite such informality among Yezidis, two basic criteria suffice to allocate the plethora of various personages into a "pantheon", the first being that they are all represented in the oral religious tradition (*Qawl-ū-bayt*'), and second that in most cases, they have been rested in a legendary burial place in Lalish.<sup>1</sup> "Canonization" (basically deification) can in

most cases also be substantiated by a genealogy going back to the relatives and subordinates of Sheikh 'Adi (as for instance with Sheikh Hasan, Fakhr-ad-din, and Sheikh Shams).

In the next chapter we concentrate on the pantheon of "personal" beings. Following that, Chapter 5 will deal with Yezidi approaches to animal and plant life and to celestial bodies, and Chapter 6 will move towards a conclusion about the religion by assessing Yezidism's obviously syncretistic properties. In consolidating Part I, what follows will be the first scholarly attempt to complete a rounded account of the Yezidi range of beliefs in spiritual beings. While proceeding to sort out the complexities, attention will be paid to the character and likely sources of the tradition's syncretic and eclectic "leftovers", to "pantheistic" tendencies (or elements of "nature worship"), and most importantly Gnostic elements, or various signs that "gnosticizing" thought has been a past and persisting force in Yezidism.

In the case of an animal cult in Yezidi folk beliefs, we find certain examples having parallels with Old Iranian religious tradition, albeit without us being able to draw any direct genetic lines between them. This phenomenon can be rather explained as a result both of the religious "mosaicizing" typical of the heretical milieu of Mesopotamia and the forwarding of its more ancient elements, often in their marginal shape, to newly crystallizing traditions. As for the Yezidi plant cult, its main elements (onion and mandrake) are quite universal, being characteristics of multiple traditions.

In the analysis of approaches to some "natural phenomena" in the tradition we will touch upon the folk interpretation of lunar eclipses, earthquakes, the rainbow, thunder and lightning, which rather reflects ideas common for the whole Near Eastern region than representing any original approach. The Yezidi celestial map is restricted to such phenomena as the Milky Way, Venus and Sirius, as well as the constellations of Libra, Aries and the Pleiades.

All these "pantheistic" views, which are, in fact, part of any folk tradition (including those coexisting with dogmatic religions), just intensify the syncretic quality of Yezidism.

#### NOTE

1. On the valley of Lalish, and the shrine of Sheikh 'Adi and sanctuaries of other holy beings there, see Guest, *The Yezidis*, 16–17; Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 77–80; B. Açıkyıldız, *The Yezidis: The History of a Community, Culture and Religion* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), ch. 4.

## CHAPTER 4

# THE YEZIDI MINOR DEITIES, SAINTS AND HOLY MEN

In this chapter's analysis, the figures identified as deities are those who patronize diverse spheres of human activities or personify "natural phenomena".<sup>1</sup> This list does not include the avatars of Malak-Tāwūs: 'Azrail, Dardail, Israfil, Mikail, Jabrail, Shamnail and Turail (of which 'Azrail, the alleged head of the Seven, is usually identified with Malak-Tāwūs, with the Seven all in all still being the emanations of the latter). The category of deity also excludes most figures within the system of saints – such as historical personalities of the 'Adawiyya order, viz. Sheikh Abu Bakr (Šēxōbakr), Sajjad ad-din (Sijdīn, being characterized as *qāsidē ruhē miriyā* or psychopomp, who is responsible for escorting the souls of the dead to the underworld), and Nasr ad-din (identified with the angel of death, a divinized person who used to be the executor under Sheikh 'Adi and who killed everyone who countered him). The exceptions whereby saints are conceived as deities, though, are Sheikh Shams and Fakhr Addin, identified with and symbolizing the sun and moon respectively.

With regard to the deities controlling the natural phenomena, most are believed to heal the diseases caused by the corresponding spheres under their command. It is to be noted that the effects of healing are typically ascribed to the sanctuaries, shrines, and certain sheikh-connected clans, these believed to be important elements for miraculous outcomes.<sup>2</sup> The names of deities, spirit guardians and saints are commonly featured with the caste-related titles sheikh (šēx), pir (p'ir), as well as dervish (*dawrēš*). The latter term means, as a rule, a saint, a righteous, errant hermit, a mystic, perhaps even "the lord, the master". This word, as shown by its Old Iranian proto-form *\*driguška-* (< *\*adari-gauša-*), originally meant "listener, (spiritual) disciple", being attested also in the Middle Iranian texts (for example, cf. Sogdian *zywšk*, *δρυwšk/žyušk*, "disciple"). Socially and semantically, dervish is comparable with the Indian *bhikṣu* (literally "mendicant"), being simultaneously the designation of a monastic class. In some respect, the synonym of dervish among the Extreme Shi'a sectarians is the title *bābā* (cf. *Bābā Yādegār*, *Bābā Tāhir*, etc.), which is spread

all the way to India. More often than not, used as epithets with the names of saints, spirits and deities, are the terms *malak* (Arab. *malak*), “angel”, *xās* (from Arab. *xāṣṣ*), “chosen, noble”, *xudān*, “master, protector, patron”, *mēr* (lit. “man”), “holy man”, *aʿziz* (Arab. ‘*azīz*, “dear, respected”), “holy”, *walī* (Arab. *walī*, “friend, beloved, close [to god]”), “holy”, *qanj*, “good, handsome” or “holy, saint” (cf. *qanjē xwadē*, “god’s saint”), and so on.

The throng of gods, goddesses, patron deities, and guardian spirits of the Yezidis are, in fact, predominantly performative entities deprived of a constant dogmatic basis. They seem to exist mostly in ritual, being invoked in particular cultic events related to their domains of competence. Thus, counted among the gods and/or deities of the Yezidi pantheon, in addition to the triad, there are the following figures: the thunder-god<sup>3</sup> (with a number of equivalent figures); the lord of the wind and the air; the foremother of the Yezidis and the patroness of women in labour; the mistress of pregnant women and of infants; the deity of the phallus; the dual deities of cattle; the lord of the earth (underworld); the patron of wayfarers; the spirit of the furrow, the spirit of the household; the spirit of bedding; the lord of the graves; the universal deity (Khidir-nabi); the friend of god (Ibrahim-khalil); the ruler of the genies; the builder-spirit; the deities of the sun and the moon; and the deity of the garment. Traditionally, a good few of the Yezidi deities, including the classical angels ʿAzrail and Jabrail, have been buried in Lalish – the existence of a legendary burial place of a saint and all the more so of a deity, with a mausoleum, shrine or sanctuary at the principal centre of Yezidi devotional life, being one key indication of their canonization.

## THE THUNDER-GOD: THE DEITY OF LIGHTNING AND WIND

Māma-(Mam-)rašān, or Mahmad-rašān, lit. “pouring, darting Mahmad (Muhammad)”, is the god of the thunder and the lightning. The second part of this name, -rašān, may be a *nomen agentis* from the verb *rašāndin*, “to pour down, to spread”, going back to Old Iranian \**fra-šān*-.<sup>4</sup> The epithet of Māma-rašān is “lion” (Šēr Mahmadē rašān, or Šēr Mahmad rašān). The published specimens of the Yezidi religious folklore only once refer directly to the lord of the lightning under another name: Šēx Aʿbrūs.<sup>5</sup> In one of the prayers (*Dirōzga*) mention is made of a certain saint named Malak-Birūs, that is, “Angel Birūs”,<sup>6</sup> which may be one more denomination of this deity. It is highly improbable that it is a name of another formerly existing character. Perhaps the form Aʿbrūs (Šēx being the title) has originated from the combination \**awr-birūsk*, “cloud-lightning”, so that in its entirety it means the “(Sheikh) of the clouds and the lightning”. As for Birūs, as in combination with Malak, “angel”, it is the appellative *birūsk* “lightning” (with the loss of the final -k). Thus, Malak-Birūs means “lightning angel”. That, however, is not the last figure in the inventory of the Yezidi celestials controlling the thunder and related phenomena. At the turn



of the last century the Armenian Yezidis featured another image named Ābā-birūsk, as Amine Avdal reports,<sup>7</sup> which is now completely forgotten (or at any rate no one of the queried pundits of Yezidi folklore amid the spiritual castes in Armenia is able to recollect this name). If this deity is the same as A'brūs (which seems very likely to be the case), then the name can be etymologized in another way, with a good degree of authenticity, namely from \*āpē-Birūsk, that is, “uncle Lightning”, as a “pleasing” name, a sort of *captatio benevolentiae*, for this destructive and formidable force of nature.<sup>8</sup> In all, Mama-řařān, Ābā-birūsk (A'brūs), and Bā-rař, “Spirit of the hurricane” (lit. “Black Wind”, another figure mentioned by Avdal) are the names of the same deity, but with his differing characteristics. However, Mama-řařān, as the most generic indication (“pouring [rain, lightning, hail] Mahmad”), has sponged most of the thunderer's nature, while Ābā-birūsk and Bā-rař are actually featured as emotional characteristics and labels for his individual functional manifestations. All these designations have only one *denotatum*: thunderer, though the bearers of these names are often presented as individual characters and sometimes even quarrel with one another. What has been noted is by no means a negation of gods or deities of the wind and hurricane as individual figures of the pantheon as a whole. We know the bright images of Vayu and Vāta, the Old Iranian gods of the hurricane (death, and destiny) and the wind, which are full-fledged cultic figures,<sup>9</sup> while Bār-ař is no more than a personification of the wind. The same is true of Āba-birūsk (Malak-birūs) and Šēx A'brūs as mere personifications of lightning.

Another indication of the god of thunder and lightning is perhaps A'bdi řařō (or A'bd řař), who is regarded as Sheikh 'Adi's servant and has obvious connections with the idea and quality of stone.<sup>10</sup> The epithet řař(ō) (cf. Kurd. řař) means “black”, the colour often used to define the names of supernatural beings.<sup>11</sup> The designation of the Yezidi spirit of the wind, Bā-rař, also has the formant řař, “black”, as an attribute to bā, “wind”, meaning “Black wind”, signifying also “whirlwind, hurricane”. The Yezidis believe the wind to be the breath of Bā-rař, and the whirlwind and the hurricane to result from a dispute among Mama-řařān, Ābā-birūsk and Bā-rař.<sup>12</sup> The mentioned formant (-řař) might be thought traceable to the same Old Iranian proto-form, \*fra-řān-, meaning “Blowing (overtaking) wind”, but the Armenian dialectal designation of a hurricane or whirlwind – *sev k'ami* (lit. “black wind”) – provides an unambiguous indication that Bā-rař should be understood as “black wind”. It is possible, by the way, that the second component of the Mama-řařān's name, -řařān, also includes řař (“black”), with the patronymic suffix -ān simply meaning “Mahmad, or Mām, from the clan of the Blacks (i.e. divine beings)”, for the colour black is in Yezidi lore a definite symbol of the transcendental world, masculinity and chthonism.<sup>13</sup>

Mama-řařān is controller of both reaping and harvest. His feast is celebrated in spring. In a drought, rain was to be summoned, using the formula: *Yā Mama-řařān* (or *Mahmad-řařānō*), *biřařina*, *bārānē bi jārīka bārīna*,<sup>14</sup> meaning

“Oh Mama-rašān, sprinkle (moisture), make rain fall copiously”.<sup>15</sup> Traditionally each village owned a special ritual cup carrying the name of Mama-rašān inscribed inside in Arabic letters. It used to be named “Mama-rašān’s cup” (*K’āsā Mama-rašānē*) and was employed in the ceremony of calling the rain. One of the sheikhs held it in both his hands standing on the roof of his house, chanting:

*Mama-rašō, Mama-rašō!*  
*Mama-rašō, tu xāybī.*  
*Am gunana, Mama-rašō,*  
*Bārānē bida, Mama-rašō!*

Oh Mama-rašān, oh Mama-rašān!  
 Mama-rašān, reveal<sup>16</sup> yourself.  
 We are pitiful, Mama-rašān,  
 Give us rain, Mama-rašān!

Mama-rašān is seen as a rider, usually on a lion, holding a snake as a whip:

*Mama-rašān mērakī siyāra,*  
*Qāmčiyē wī ma’ra.*<sup>17</sup>

Māma-rašān is a [lion-]rider,  
 His whip is a snake.

According to the legend referred to in the hymn of “Sheikh ‘Adi and the holy men”, Sheikh ‘Adi arrived in Lalish from Beyt Far, his native village, and appointed Mama-rašān head of the holy men. Soon the rumour of Sheikh ‘Adi was spread everywhere. When meeting a group of righteous men (*sayyids*) who wished to see evidence of his sanctity and miracle-working, Sheikh ‘Adi seated his comrade-in-arms Mama-rašān upon a rock, and the latter started prancing around, sitting astride on the stone:

*Šēxādī kiribū firwāra,*  
*Šēr Mahmād-rašān li barakī kir siwāra,*  
*Gō: galī mērā wa čī haya li bāla?*  
*Yā Mahmād-rašān, siwār ba li barakī,*  
*Awān mērā hēwir namā li darakī,*  
*Ži wān bipirsa xabarakī ...*  
*Čandī sayyidīna*  
*Dang dīkin bi nihīna,*  
*Av bara ruh’ tē nīna.*  
*We dibēžit šēxī sayyidā,*  
*Gāvā Mahmād-rašān dīta:*

*Tu šēxī anī mirīdī?*  
*Az Mahmadē řāšīma,*  
*Siwārē barīma,*  
*Az bixō mirīdē Šēxādīma.*

Sheikh 'Adi gave a command:  
 He made the Lion Mahmad Rashan mount a piece of rock.  
 He said, "Oh holy men, what is in your minds?"  
 "Oh Mahmad Rashan, mount a piece of rock,  
 Those holy men [will] have no place of refuge left anywhere,  
 [Then] ask them to comment!" ...  
 All the *sayyids*  
 Exclaimed secretly,  
 "There [can be] no life in that piece of rock".  
 The leader of the *sayyids* said,  
 When he saw Mahmud Rashan,  
 "Are you the Sheikh or a disciple?"  
 I am Mahmad Rashi,<sup>18</sup>  
 I am the rider of the rock,  
 I am Sheikh 'Adi's disciple".<sup>19</sup>

Upon seeing this, the sheikhs, who were also depicted in the legend as miracle-workers and among other feats could even tame lions, recognized the superiority of Sheikh 'Adi and welcomed him. Incidentally, in some legends Sheikh 'Adi himself also rides a rock.

The motif of a saint riding a rock, a wall (or a lion, which is Allah's hound, by a Muslim legend), is attested also in the Sufi and the extreme Shi'a traditions (the Chishtiyya, the Bektashis, the Zazas, Ahl-i Haqq). According to a Bektashi legend, once a righteous man, Sayyid Mahmud Hayrani from the city of Akshehir (central Anatolia), set out to visit Haji Bektash Veli, the founder of the Bektashi order, riding a lion, a snake in his hand as a whip, and escorted by three hundred Mevlevi dervishes (members of the *Mawlana ʿarīqat* [Sufi order], founded by the followers of Jalal ad-din Balkhi or Rumi). Having received the news of the visitors coming, Haji Bektash said: "Those men are coming on living creatures, while we shall straddle a non-living object". Not too far, close to Kizilca Havlet, there was a red rock, as high as a wall. Haji Bektash straddled it and commanded it to move. The rock assumed the shape of a bird at once and set out on the road. Since that time the rock is rumoured to have retained the shape of a bird.<sup>20</sup> There are also other versions of this story with different religious figures of Asia Minor and Albania posing as opponents of Haji Bektash, such as Karaca Ahmed, Haci Bayram and Ahmad Rifa'i.<sup>21</sup> Similar stories are being told about Sary Saltik, another religious figure of the Extreme Shi'a movement in Asia Minor, featured as a saint also in the religious beliefs of the Zazas (of southeastern Turkey);<sup>22</sup> and early in the twentieth century a similar

legend was recorded from among the Zazas (Qizilbashis) by an English traveller. As the author reports:

On reaching the western end of Dujik Baba Dagħ, we leave the stream, which continues south-west round the base of the mountain to join the Muzur Su near Surb Karapet monastery<sup>23</sup> and clamber up a rugged ravine to the right, striking Dujuk Baba's northern edge. Not far from here one passes a high rock split in two, the upper portion of which bears a striking resemblance to a head surmounted by a *fez*. This, the Kezelbash say, was the head of a hated Turk cleft in two, and the rock on which he stood with it, by a blow from the mighty sword of Hazreti Ali.<sup>24</sup> At a village hard by, called Kardéré, there is a stone wall much venerated by the Kezelbash for the part it played in the miraculous demonstration of the superior sanctity of one Seïd over another. In the old days, much rivalry existed between the various Seïds as regards their respective degrees of sanctity, and as humility was not one of the virtues that counted, they did not hesitate to parade their miracle-working powers ... The Seïd of the Gureshan tribe one day mounted a lion and went to visit his neighbour, the Seïd of the Bamasurli tribe, with the intention of thus displaying his sanctity. The latter, seeing from afar his brother Seïd approaching on a lion, felt himself challenged; so he mounted the abovementioned wall, took in his hand a snake, which he brandished as a whip, and thus equipped went forth to meet his guest. At this sight, the Seïd Gureshan was compelled to avow that his sanctity was as nothing compared to that of Seïd Bamasurly, and dismounting from the lion he kissed the latter Seïd's hand.<sup>25</sup>

Sultān Ishāq (or Sohāq), one of the founders of the Ahl-i Haqq, regarded to be the fourth manifestation of the divine essence,<sup>26</sup> features prominently in similar legends, one being recorded by Vasilij Žukovskij. According to this story, Sultān Ishāq commanded his servant Dawud to build a wall on the land owned by a certain Pīr Mikāil. When the latter knew about that, he mounted a lion, grabbed a horrible serpent and set out to defend his property. Dawud informed his master about the approaching threat. Without confusion, Sultān commanded Dawud to mount the partially erected wall and go ahead to meet the threat, warning that he, Sultān, was to be found at a certain place. Following the instructions, Dawud hit the road and joined Pīr Mikail along the way; later they got to the river, the present-day Sorevan,<sup>27</sup> with Sultān Ishāq waiting for them on the opposite bank. The tumultuous mountain river gave forth a terrible roar so that the two parties could not hear each other, this nuisance being noted by Mikail. Sultān then tamed the outrush by throwing a little rug on it. In the ensuing stillness Sultān and Mikail sat down on the mat and entered

into negotiations. To make a long story short, Mikail started to feel fits of hunger and told of it to Sultān. At that very moment there was a splash, and a fish came out of the water, then it rose up at a sign or a word by Ishāq, to lie down at his feet on the rug. After a blessing, Sultān offered it to Mikail; the latter refused, thinking that the fish was raw, then, at Ishāq's request he made sure that the fish was well cooked. The meal was started, and then Sultān gathered the bones left and suggested his recent opponent to do the same. When the meal was over, Sultān read the "word" over the remaining bones: the fish came to life and plunged into the river with a wave of Ishāq's hand. What was happening was quite enough for Mikail to acknowledge the outstanding power and the superhuman nature of Ishāq. No further claims were relevant.<sup>28</sup>

Stories involving the mystics riding lions with a serpent-whip abound also in Sufi literature.<sup>29</sup> This elaborate motif, having undoubtedly ancient roots, is a product of the so-called heretical milieu of Asia Minor; it is introduced into the image of Mama-řaşān (and Sheikh 'Adi) as a secondary element, linking Yezidism with non-orthodox Islam, with extreme Shi'ism in particular. It may be not an accident that in the entire New Iranian continuum, besides the Yezidis, the god of thunder and lightning has been retained in the "underground" Shi'a community of the Zazas.<sup>30</sup> Dūzgin (Dūzgin-bābā or Dūžik-bābā), the supreme deity of the Zaza folk pantheon, the Master of the universe, the Ruler of the thunder and lightning, of clouds and hurricane, is even more "authentically indigenous" than Mama-řaşān of the Yezidis. The Zazas believe that Dūzgin protects the people from natural disasters, as well as from alien invasions, and that he is ready to come to the aid of anyone or to punish anyone guilty of trespassing the moral and humane standards. He is imagined as a lightsome bearded (sometimes bald) man riding a gallant steed in the mountains. This god has a number of other names: *Siltān Dūzgin*, *Dūzginē kamarī* (the Dūzgin of gorges and mountains), *Bimbārak*,<sup>31</sup> *Aspārē astōrē kimatī* (the Blue Steed Rider), *Aspārō yāxiz* (the Black Steed Rider), *Wāyir* (Master), and so on.

Dūzgin is not alone; he has a massive army of similar gallant riders ready to commit any deed at his command. His messenger is an eagle (*Halīyō Siltān Dūzginī*, "Sultan Dūzgin's Eagle"); it is considered a holy bird, the killing of which is a great sin. The Zazas have many invocations for addressing Dūzgin. To illustrate:

*Dūzgin, Dūzgin, Dūzgin!*  
*Xō vīra maka ...*  
*Dāl ū būdāe mi tīya, ādire mi waka.*  
*Sātā tangada, bāwō, xō vōra maka!*

Duzgin, Duzgin, Duzgin!  
 Do not forget [us] ...  
 You are from our branch; open our fire.<sup>32</sup>  
 Do not forget us in need, oh Father!

And:

*Bērē varō jārīma,  
Hawār sērō kamarē Dūzgin,  
Jāyē tō rindō, barzō.  
Aspārē rāmanō yalgar ū larzō;  
Birā varō jārē tanga varā,  
Dast rā gōvānē čatini var arzō.  
Hay dilō, hay dilō!  
Wāyirō, Wāyirō, Wāyirō, Wāyirō!*

Come, please!  
Our cry, let it reach the gorges of Dūzgin [mountain].  
Your place is beautiful and high.  
The rider is as fast as wind;  
Brothers, pray to him,  
Relief from trouble comes from him.  
Oh heart, oh heart!  
Oh lord, oh lord, oh lord, oh lord!

In a difficult situation it is customary to call for Dūzgin: *Yā Haqq, Yā Dūzgin!* “Oh god,<sup>33</sup> Oh Dūzgin!” And Dūzgin, it is believed, is sure to come to help, provided the thoughts of the caller are clean, and he is a righteous man.<sup>34</sup>

The etymology of the name Dūzgin remains unclear. It may be a variant of Dūžik(-bābā) attested in the Armenian sources as an alternative name both for the supreme deity of the Zazas and the highest mountain in Dersim.<sup>35</sup> By all appearances, this theonym (Dūzgin/Dūžik) is of non-Iranian origin. It is very likely that we look here at a (regional) substrate name of a god/mountain. Incidentally, both Māma-řařān and Dūzgin, as well as Khidir-nabi (among the Yezidis, see below), and Khizir (by the Zazas) in many ways have assimilated the elements of the cult of Surb Sargis (St Sergius), the popular saint of the Armenian Apostolic Church, in charge *inter alia* of the natural elements.

Coming back to the Yezidis' Māma-řařān, let us consider his attribute “thunderer”, which may seem too “toothless” for a deity, albeit not a centrally important one. At a closer scrutiny of the image, however, this characteristic looks more justifiable. For in this now syncretic character, whereby the thunder-god becomes a “saint prancing on a lion”, the essential thing is the archetype, and it is just the archetype that possesses the necessary and sufficient attributes of a thunderer. At any rate, all that we know about such deities in other traditions (storm-gods, thunder-gods) – above all controlling the thunderstorm, rain, lightning, the obvious links with the stone, the snake, the tree, and the like – is on the whole quite adequate for the features of Māma-řařān. Let us, for instance, look at his title “strewing (rain), darting (lightning)”,<sup>36</sup> to say nothing of his other manifestations (A'brūs or Ābā-birūs, Bā-řař). Meanwhile, an

important attribute of the thunderer in the Indo-European tradition is actually the snake symbolizing the thunder (lightning, storm) unambiguously: a rider brandishing a snake is a classical symbol of a thunder-god or a storm-god. As for the motif of riding a lion or a rock, although related to the Sufi tradition it may have had very early origins, only to be later absorbed into the mystical interpretation in Islam (signifying control over the elements of nature obtained by mystics through austerity, righteousness, forbearance, etc.).

Thus, Māma-řařān, with his functional variations, reflects the ancient religious concept of the thunder-god. For the Hittites, the older name for such was Tahu. In the Old Iranian pantheon, Māma-řařān and Dūzgin (of the Zazas) would probably have as their counterpart Vayu, the god of hurricanes and death, or the combined image of Vayu and Vāta, the god of the wind, which acquired the additional attributes on the Islamic mystical background. As would be expected, Māma-řařān's legendary tomb is in Lalish.

#### ŠĚX MŪSĚ-SŌR (ŠĚXMŪS), THE LORD OF THE WIND AND AIR

ŠĚx Mŭsĕ-sŏr, the Red Sheikh Mŭs (Moses) is a Yezidi atmospheric deity controlling the winds and the air. He is addressed, therefore, during work on the threshing-floor for winnowing when what is needed is wind in fair weather to screen and clean the grain from hay. Thus:

*Yā ŠĚx Mŭsĕ Sŏr,  
Biday bāyaki zŏr,  
Dĕ bŏ ta pĕžin sawkĕd sŏr.*

O Red ŠĚxmŭs,  
Give a great deal of wind,  
Then we shall prepare for you baked red loaves.<sup>37</sup>

At harvesting and winnowing time, or during other field works, ŠĚxmŭs receives offerings of flapcakes and pies left, as a rule, near the field or close to the threshing-floor. ŠĚx Mŭsĕ-sŏr is regarded as the companion of 'Abdi Rařŏ, and through him is possibly linked with Māma-řařān, which is natural, for they are in charge of closely related elements.

The sheikhy families traditionally derived their origin from this deity (Ōjāxā Sŏrĕ Sŏrān, the branch of the sheikhy clan Adani), are known for their ability to cure the diseases of lungs, joints, rheumatism, etc.<sup>38</sup> The sanctuary of Mŭsĕ-sŏr, his alleged *mazār* is in the village of Bahzané in the Lalish Valley and, as described by Ethel Drower, looks like a slab with shattered crockery around.<sup>39</sup> The ground around the slab is thought to have a healing action against skin diseases. The shrine is frequented by pilgrims, who each carry a vessel to water the ground and who apply the wet clay on patches of affected

skin. Before leaving, the pitcher is smashed to pieces. It is also believed that if someone would walk by the *mazār* without offering his respect to it (by kissing its wall), he would be punished – his eyes would swell up and hurt.<sup>40</sup>

Šēx Mūsē-sōr is usually glorified by the title Sōrē Sōrān, meaning “the Red of the Reds”. The attribute *sōr* (“red”) may be here intended to underscore sanctity, the colour red being directly opposite to blue, the latter being considered by the Yezidis as the colour of apostasy. Sultan Ezid quite properly holds this attribute as well, as Silt’ān Ēzīdē sōr, “Sultan Ezid the Red”. According to different legends,<sup>41</sup> the control over the “white” wind belongs also to Šēxisin (Sheikh Hasan), who is simultaneously considered to be the lord of the Tablet and the Pen and that is why only his posterity amid the Yezidis have the right to possess literacy.<sup>42</sup> However, Šēx Mūsē-sōr is the most suitable figure for the role of the lord of the Tablet and the Pen, which is just the case with his counterpart among the Ahl-i Haqq, the Archangel Pīr Mūsī, with the whole motif reminiscent of the Biblical story of Moses having received the Tablets of the Law from God. The displacement of functions from Šēxmūs to Sheikh Hasan has apparently occurred through the contamination of images, causing also the entanglement of power controlling the wind and the air. Sheikh Hasan, having a historical archetype, is a marginal figure among the Yezidi saints, actually possessing no attributes of a deity. He exhibits a somewhat dummy character, taking on the functions of other gods from time to time. For instance, he is often associated with the moon, although that is unambiguously the domain of Farxadīn,<sup>43</sup> and so on.

The image of Moses in the Yezidi tradition must have had a double penetration, perhaps a parallel one: one as Šēxmūs, as a god, and one as a folkloric character, Mūsā P’ēxambar, that is, the Prophet Moses. There is even a hymn dedicated to the latter called “Qawlē Mūsā P’ēxambar”.<sup>44</sup> In the religious concepts of the Iranian cattle breeding communities, the Prophet Moses is a popular figure who has replaced many local characters of primitive worship.<sup>45</sup> For comparison, note that the Ahl-i Haqq regard Pīr Mūsī as an incarnation of Angel Israfil (Raphael), and so on.<sup>46</sup>

## THE SUN AND THE MOON, SHEIKHS SHAMS AND FAXR AD-DIN

Sheikh Shams (Šēx Šams, Šēx Šims, Šēšims, Šēšim) and Faxr ad-Din (Farxadīn, Faxradīn) are deified historical personalities, brothers, the sons of ‘Adi II, who was the third to lead the ‘Adawiyya community.<sup>47</sup> Except for the fact that the former, Sheikh Shams, became the head of the community after his father’s death, we can hardly find any significant event in their real biographies. The tradition has preserved neither scriptures nor even any oral testaments attributed to them.

Still, with both informally canonized, they passed the limits of mere Yezidi saints and penetrated into the folk pantheon, having become associated with



the lords of the sun and the moon. Generally, the deification process, if it does not have a traceable genesis as it does in the case of Sheikh ‘Adi, for example,<sup>48</sup> belongs among the most enigmatic though widely represented phenomena known in many syncretic religious systems, and in Yezidism in particular. Sometimes it has nothing to do with the real contribution of the deified personage to the history of a given religious movement, nor with their deeds, nor even with thaumaturgy. The “required” mythological details hide a hero’s realistic characteristics and together with them the probable derivation of the process itself. This occurs all the more so when doctrines are deprived of any centralized religious institution, orthodoxy being entirely left to the spiritual masters’ interpretations, and the orthopraxy’s fate left to a tradition built up and preserved by spiritual castes. In such cases it is sometimes useless to search for the roots of phenomena, which are lost, as a rule, in divarications at the early stages of a teaching’s formation.

The case of Sheikh Shams, however, does not seem to be so problematic: the secondary reference of his name to the sun, Šams ad-dīn, or Šēx Šams, the personification of the sun (Šams, Arab. “the sun”) determined his identification with the god of the Diurnal Star. Sheikh Shams is the third manifestation of Malak-Tāwūs, corresponding to the Angel Israfil (Raphael).<sup>49</sup> Although mainly the sun’s personification, Sheikh Shams is sometimes endowed with the characteristics of the godhead: one of his epithets is *bīnāyā čavā*, “the eyes’ light”, a metaphor used of god among the Yezidis. And sometimes he is identified with Isa (even while ‘Isā or Jesus, is only nominally represented in the Yezidi liturgy).<sup>50</sup>

Sheikh Shams is considered the *wazīr* of Sheikh ‘Adi, that is, his deputy, and the head of the Yezidi spiritual council (*dīvān*). Kreyenbroek’s suggestion<sup>51</sup> that Sheikh Shams should be also regarded as the lord of the moon (although traditionally this is his brother Farxadin’s domain) seems to be unwarranted, as it is based on an erroneous interpretation of the hymn to which the author refers. The line *Šēšimsē min xudānē māngā*, translated as “My Sheikh Shams is the lord of the moon”,<sup>52</sup> should in fact be interpreted as “My Sheikh Shams is the lord of the disc (disc of the sun)”. The word *māng* in similar contexts, mainly occurring in religious hymns, has two meanings – “moon” and “disc, circle” (either that of the sun or of the moon; “moon” itself being *hīv* or *hayv* in Kurmanji). Consider, for instance, the following passage from the hymn to Sheikh Shams (*Baytā Šēx Šims*):

*Wē kim, řo hiltēya,  
Māngā zara p’ēya,  
Šēx Šims dīvānbagē xwadēya.*<sup>53</sup>

I testify, the sun has risen,  
The golden disc [of course, that of the sun, not of the moon] has  
ascended,  
Sheikh Shams – the head of god’s council.

And:

*Řō hātiya a'ršāna,  
Hilātiya māngā girāna,  
Nūr, nadara  
Šēx Šims dāya ma'sīyā binī ba'rāna.*<sup>54</sup>

The Sun has ascended to the sky,  
The heavy disc has risen,  
The light [and] the look of Sheikh Shams penetrated [even]  
to the fish under the sea.

Sheikh Shams is taken as the essence of the Yezidi religion, as in *Šēx Šims masabē mina*, “Sheikh Shams is the essence [literally ‘confession, doctrine’] of my religion”. He is the light of the faith, *ĉirā dīnī*; the focal-point of worship or *qibla* (“pivot”), the power of the faith, *qawatā dīn*; the master of spiritual knowledge, *xudanē ma'rīfatē ū ark'ān ū nāsīna*; the owner of the seal, *mōrā Šēx Šims*; the torch of the Yezidi community, *ĉirā bar sunatē*; and most importantly god's eye; *ĉavē xwadē*.

The tradition attributed Sheikh Shams with the power over hell and the *Sirāt* bridge. Thus:

*Wē kim, řō hilāta,  
Mizgīna walāta,  
Daste Šēx Šims dāya p'ira dōža-salāta.*

*Wē kim, hiltē řōža,  
Šēxē nūrī biškōža,  
Dastē Šēx Šims dāya p'ira Salāt ū dōža.*<sup>55</sup>

I testify, the sun has risen,  
The good news to the world,  
The bridge of hell – Sirat – is given into the hands of Sheikh  
Shams.

I testify, the sun is ascending,  
Sheikh Shams is in the button,<sup>56</sup>  
The Sirat bridge and hell are given into the hands of Sheikh  
Shams.

According to the tradition, Sheikh Shams has twelve children (in accordance with the twelve months). Nine of them are sons: Xidir (Xidir-nabi), Šēx 'Alī Šams, Āmādīn ('Imād ad-dīn), Bābādīn, H'asan, Āvdal (A'vdāl), Bāvik (Bābik), Tōqīn and Hāvīnd.<sup>57</sup> Another version of this list<sup>58</sup> runs as follows: Āmādīn,

Xidir, Bābik, ‘Alī, Āvdal, Bābādīn, Hāwind, H’asan<sup>59</sup> and Tōqil (or Tōqal).<sup>60</sup> With the exception of Sheikh ‘Ali Shams and Xidir, all of them are represented in the tradition nominally, exclusively as Sheikh Shams’s sons (although there are separate allusions to some of them).<sup>61</sup> As for the daughters of Sheikh Shams, we know nothing about them but their names: Sti Sti (Stī Stī), Sti Gulan (Stī Gulān) and Sti Nisrat (Stī Nisrat) (*stī* is a honourable title, going back to the Arabic *saidatī*, “my lady”). Thus see the following:

*Tu bāvē Stīyēyī, ...*  
*Tu bāvē Stī Nisratē, ...*  
*Tu bāvē Stī Gulānē.*<sup>62</sup>

You (Sheikh Shams) are the father of Sti Sti,  
 You are the father of Sti Nisrat,  
 You are the father of Sti Gulan.

In the praying code “Dirōzga” all the children of Sheikh Shams are mentioned:

<i>Yā rabī xatirā</i>	Oh god, glory to
<i>Šēx Xidirē Šamsā</i>	Sheikh Xidir Shams (Xidir-nabi, the
	son of Shams),
<i>Šēx A’vdalē Šamsā,</i>	Sheikh Avdal Shams,
<i>Šēx Āmādē Šamsā,</i>	Sheikh Amadin Shams,
<i>Šēx Bābādīnē Šamsā,</i>	Sheikh Babadin Shams,
<i>Šēx Bābikē Šamsā,</i>	Sheikh Babik Shams,
<i>Šēx Tōqilē Šamsā,</i>	Sheikh Toqil Shams,
<i>Šēx Hāwindē Šamsā,</i>	Sheikh Havind Shams,
<i>Šēx H’asanē Šamsā,</i>	Sheikh Hasan Shams,
<i>Šēx A’lē Šamsākī.</i>	Sheikh ‘Ali Shams.
<i>Yā rabī, xatirā Istīēkī,</i>	O god, glory to Sti Sti,
<i>Xatirā Istī Gulānkī ...</i>	Glory to Sti Gulan,
<i>(Xatirā Istī Nisratkī)</i> <sup>63</sup>	Glory to Sti Nisrat.

Sheikh Shams is probably the most frequently mentioned name in prayers and incantations. The hymns dedicated to him are read at the funerals of especially honoured members of the Yezidi community.

The sun’s polyvalence allows Sheikh Shams to interfere in the other deities’ domains, and sometimes even to acquire the Demiurge’s features. See, for example, the following:

*Yā Šēšims, tuyī řah’manī,*  
*Xāliqē minē řānī,*  
*Li h’amū dardā tuyī darmānī,*  
*Li h’amū muxliqā tuyī řah’manī.*

*Yā Šēšims, tu mafarī,  
Xāliqē minē har ū harī;  
Rizgā diday ū rizgā dibarī ...*

*Ži darqjē h'atā darqjē,  
Šēšims xudāne farqjē,  
Dast ū dāmanēd Šēšims dē t'iwaf kayn  
Šūnā Ka'bat-illāhē ū h'ajē.*

O Sheikh Shams, you are compassionate,  
You are my dear creator,  
For all ills you are the remedy,  
To all creatures you are merciful.

O Sheikh Shams, you are a refuge,  
You are my creator for ever and ever;  
[You] give sustenance and you take it away.

From stage to stage  
Sheikh Shams is the lord of dawn.  
We shall kiss the hand of Sheikh Shams and the hem of his  
clothes,  
The place of god's Ka'aba and [the object] of pilgrimage.<sup>64</sup>

To be more precise, the last two lines should be translated as follows:

We shall make the *tawāf* [sacred procession] around the hand  
Of Sheikh Shams and the hem [of his toga],  
Instead of the *tawāf* around the Ka'aba and the pilgrimage to  
Mecca.

See also further:

*Ži sarī h'atā p'ēyā,  
Yā Šēšims, ta am naqšāndin dānāyina sarēd rēya,  
Am, Šēšims, nābiřin ži hīvīya.*

From head to feet,  
O Sheikh Shams, you designed us and set us upon our paths,  
We shall not give up our hopes of Sheikh Shams.<sup>65</sup>

The Yezidi folk beliefs maintain that Sheikh Shams is also venerated by Jews and Christians, a phenomenon difficult to explain. The Yezidi deities are extremely esoteric, and their attribution to other religious traditions (even

those who have vivid analogues) is strictly prohibited by the tradition. Sheikh Shams has become an exception, probably due to the omnitude and universality of the sun. Contemplate, for example, the following:

*ĵihū ku di ĵihūna,  
Salafxōrin di Bōtānē būna,  
Aw žik (ži ku) li pē šēšim dičūna.*

*Falah ku falāna,  
Yē bi k'ašiš ū ābūnana,  
Aw žik li pē šēšim dihařina.*

The Jews, who are Jews,  
Were usurers in Bohtan,  
They too have gone in search of Sheikh Shams.

The Christians, who are Christians,  
Who have priests and monks,  
They too are going in search of Sheikh Shams.<sup>66</sup>

It is intriguing that Islam is not mentioned among the alien confessions, which, at first sight, looks strange, taking into consideration the present-day emphasis on the Yezidis' past separation from the latter. The most probable explanation here could be only that the text of the *qawl*'s in which one expects this was created at an early stage of the formation of the Yezidi community, when the memory of its 'Adawiyya genesis was still alive and the complete rupture with Islam had not yet taken place: that is, when the community still identified itself as a derivative of mystical Islam.

In some contexts Sheikh Shams has the title Tatar, or Šēx Šimsē T'atar, as in the following:

*Či ark'ānaka nadar!  
Nāv mērādā bū badal  
Xarqa hāt xalātē Šamsē T'atar.*

What a visible cornerstone,  
Took his turn among the good men:  
The *khirqe* ["robe"] came to Shems the Tatar.<sup>67</sup>

Kreyenbroek argues for an interpretation of this that Shams-e Tabrizi, the dervish who inspired Jajal al-Din Rumi, being an inhabitant of Tabriz, and thus a Turkic speaker, can be referred to as "Tartar".<sup>68</sup> Admittedly this kind of overlap, or juxtaposition of two characters, Sheikh Shams and Shams-e Tabrizi, does in fact occur in the tradition. Yet the weakness of this explanation seems

obvious. For a start, for the Yezidis, the Turkic-speaking world has never been “the back of beyond”, or some remote reality, for the greater part of their history eventually took place within the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the Turkic milieu has for long existed in the Yezidi oecumene, and had an unambiguous definition: *t'irk*, “Turk”, *walatē t'irkē* (or *Rōmē*), “Turkey, the country of Turks”. Would it not be strange, then, for the epithet Tabrizi in Shamsi-e Tabrizi to refer to a Turkish city? The Yezidis (as well as other Near Eastern peoples) could hardly have considered Tabriz to be a Turkic town, as it had always had for them a definite Iranian attribution. Thus, the problem should be introduced as follows: by the time of the creation of this piece of folklore (and this was most probably the early stage of Yezidism, as noted above), had Tabriz been Turkicized at all? And if so, was it Turkicised enough to gain the character of a Turkic town *par excellence*? The travellers from the tenth to the fourteenth century (Naser Khosrow, Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta) chronicled mainly the Iranian ethnic element in the northern Iranian provinces; the wide-ranging transition from the Iranian dialects of the area to the Turkic dialects took place only after the fifteenth century.<sup>69</sup>

Besides, Shams-e Tabrizi, a renowned Persian poet, could hardly be associated with the Turks, far much less with Tartars: Turks were never called “Tartars” in the Near East. The term “Tartar” has been applied to “Turks” in the European tradition, and in particular by Russians, with “the Caucasian Tartars”, for example, being applied to the Turkic-speaking population of the historical Arran and Shirvan provinces (the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan). Sheikh Shams's title *t'atar* is, apparently, a corrupted form of the Persian *takfūr* (which is attested in the same form in Kurdish dialects) meaning “king”, probably “lord, god”. The exceptional phonetic development is explained by the secondary reference of the word *t'atar*, “Tartar”. The Persian *takfūr*, in its turn, is borrowed from the Armenian dialectal *t'āk'fūr* (Classical Armenian *t'agawor*), “king”, which has penetrated into many languages of the region – apart from Persian and Kurdish, also into Arabic, some Turkic dialects, and so on.

An interesting detail – the motif of the sacrifice of a bull – has prompted some authors to draw certain parallels between Sheikh Shams and the Old Iranian Mithra, in later tradition mainly identified with the sun.<sup>70</sup> In the Yezidi tradition the bull-sacrifice takes place on the fifth day of *Jažnē jamā'īyya* (Arab. *'ayd al jamā'īyya*) – the feast of popular gathering annually celebrated during the week following 23 September at Sheikh Shams's shrine in Lalish and a feast connected to Sheikh Shams as the sun. True, tauroctony is one of Mithra's main characteristics: he is over and again depicted as bull-slayer.<sup>71</sup> But we can hardly trace the Yezidi rite of the bull-sacrifice back to the Mithraic mysteries, or to the Old Iranian religious *Weltanschauung* in general. The analogy in such a multi-cultural ethnic-religious area as Northern Mesopotamia could be attributed to any indirect influence: the idea of the bull-sacrifice could have various roots, including, of course, the Old Iranian ones. A bull as a cultic animal could have become the object of various rites in many traditions; this requires a very

fastidious approach while interpreting the given cases. Moreover, the myth about the sacrifice of a bull, carried over from one tradition to another, can acquire a new content with new principal importance.

It is not the mere “iconography” of the bull-slaying idea that must come first here, but the *idea* of sacrifice itself. Because if the “icon”, the scene, the visual rite itself, can pass unchanged from one tradition to another, it will be typically filled with another content as many social changes go by, which is closer and clearer to the mentality of any new culture. The “original” idea will thus be transformed when it transcends the scope of the authentic or primary culture. A shining example of such a transformation can be provided precisely by Mithraism itself, which migrated from the Old Iranian pantheon to the Roman one, and thus the authentic Iranian idea of bull-slaying in the act of cosmogony was transformed in order to become meaningful for the Roman devotee. In this regard John Hinnells states: “the Roman Mithraic reliefs depict the divine sacrifice which gives life to a man, a concept which ultimately derived from Iran but which was expressed in terms meaningful to people living in the Graeco-Roman world”.<sup>72</sup> Thus, even if the parallel between the sacrifice of a bull to the Yezidi sun-deity and Mithra’s taurochtony seems to be obvious, still the interpretations of the ideas of these rites in both traditions may have practically no points of contact.

Due to the special attitude of the Yezidis to the sun, Sheikh Shams is one of the most venerated religious characters in the tradition: *Šēx Šams čirāya*, “Sheikh Shams is our light”, they say.<sup>73</sup> At dawn a righteous Yezidi should kiss the place where the first rays of the sun fall, and neither Muslim, Christian nor Jew should see him at that moment.<sup>74</sup> Still, this is not an adequate reason to consider Yezidis to be sun-worshippers, as they are often characterized to be in the literature. In the phrase of Sheikh Hasane Mamud, interviewed in field research, Sheikh Shams is *xāčē maya*, “our cross”, and only one of the Yezidis’ symbols. The sunworshipping among the Yezidis does not have any special resonance or relevance beyond the scope of the typical religious attention to the sun, or the ubiquitous solar cult.<sup>75</sup>

The situation with Farxadin, that is, Faxr ad-din (Faxradīn, Farxadīn), the personification of the moon, is more enigmatic. There is no way to relate his name to the moon, and the information about his historical prototype gives no grounds for the similar development of the mythological personage. Farxadin acquired his lunar character, most likely, as a result of his sibling relationship with Sheikh Shams, who was transmogrified into the solar deity due to his name. Such a cliché is quite typical for the Near Eastern religious mentality, according to which the sun and the moon are male deities, neighbouring each other in the sky.<sup>76</sup> Thus, it is no wonder that the full blood-brother of Sheikh Shams, the personification of the sun, could come to be approached as his celestial brother as well. This does not come into conflict with the fact that the Yezidi folk tradition considers the sun and the moon to be brother and sister.

In any case, the elusive concept of this personage is also evidential of the secondary character of Farxadin as that of the lunar deity. It is enough to mention that a prolix hymn dedicated to Farxadin, the *Qawlê Malak Farxadîn*,<sup>77</sup> does not even allude to his connection with the moon. And according to “The Black Scripture”,<sup>78</sup> Malak Faxradîn (Farxadîn) or A’zîz Malak Faxradîn, that is, (Saint) Angel Farxadin is identified with Turail (or Nurail), the seventh avatar of Malak-Tāwūs. Thus, actually, the only reference to his lunar character is the fact that in folk tradition the moon is called *Māngā Malak Farxadîn* or “The disc of the Angel Farxadin”. Another, rather indirect, reference to the celestial nature of Farxadin can be found, probably, in the following passage of the *qawl* below:

*Či bāziyaki bi-nūrîna,  
Fiřî, ču a’zmîna,  
Min nadizānî ku suřā Faxradîna.*

What a luminous falcon it is!  
It flew away, it went to heaven,  
I was unaware that it was a mystery of Faxradin.<sup>79</sup>

The lunar nature of Farxadin is also revealed from the ability to heal from the “lunar disease”, *kēma hayvî* or *hivê lēxistî* (literally “the [state of being] moon-struck”), ascribed to him. Still, our field materials about the healing procedure, collected among the Yezidis of Armenia and characterized by numerous archaic elements preserved both in everyday life and rituals, contain neither any appeal to Farxadin nor any sacrifice to him. He is not even mentioned in the rite, while the role of the moon itself is obvious. One of the elements of the rite presupposes that a crescent-shaped pendant cut from a coin should be worn around the patient’s neck for three years, “until the moon is completely changed”. Mothers used to carry their sick children outside to the new moon, repeating *Yā hivā nu, tu dāykā zārēyî, az dāmārî, wî zārê xilāzka ži vî āgîrî*, “Oh new moon, you are the [real] mother of the child, and I am [his] stepmother; rid this child from the malady [literally ‘fire’]”.<sup>80</sup>

Malak Farxadin is also believed to be a creator of the Yezidi religious lore or *Qawl-û-bayt*.<sup>81</sup> That is why the *qawwals* – the reciters – are considered *Jēšê Malak Faxradîn*, *qawālê Šēxadi*, “the armies of Malak Farxadin, the *qawwals* of Sheikh ‘Adi”.<sup>82</sup> They should ask for Farxadin’s permission before reciting hymns. Hence the invocation of legitimacy: *Haka ži bā Malak Faxradîn bētin dastûre* (or *ījāzatē*): “If authorization comes from dear Malak Farxadin”.<sup>83</sup> The deliquescence and ambivalence of the moon’s nature (and correspondingly that of Malak Faxradin) is determined, above all, by the fact that in the folk tradition, the moon is apprehended as something mystical and even inauspicious. The Yezidis believe that the moon (Farxadin) is able to bring misfortunes and calamities to people and livestock, as well as natural disasters – floods, earthquakes, and so on.



Despite the fact that in many cultures the moon has always been a worshipped figure, folk traditions never approach it so unambiguously: its declining from the full disc and complete waning through the crescent and its waxing again to the appearance of the disc have always been fearsome for the human mind, which has preserved a number of negative characteristics of this celestial body as of something mutable, inconstant, connected with the powers of darkness, and bringing disease and destruction. It is no wonder that the moon has always been the object of magic, and the patron of witches and magicians.<sup>84</sup> The most infernal is considered, of course, the phase of the full moon, when, according to various folk beliefs – Armenian, Iranian and Slavic (as well as various Western European) – the gates of hell are open and the earth is overrun with devilry. Clapping eyes on the full moon, a Yezidi passes his hand across his face and turns to Farxadin: *Yā māngā Farxadīn, tu ma bēi řah'mē*, “Oh Farxadin’s disc, have mercy for us”.

A Yezidi should meet a new moon by touching his face with his hands while watching the young crescent. In former times the procedure included also singing and dancing, which was called *līstikē hīvē* or “the moon-dance”. People also let livestock outside and asked Farxadin for fertility. Among the Yezidi sheikhs of Armenia there is a rather marginal belief, that the moon is also the domain of Sheikh Sin (Malak Šēx Sīn), that is, Sheikh Hasan, one of the ‘Adawiyya’s esteemed leaders. This fact conveys the suggestion of the secondary reference (as in the case of Sheikh Shams) to the Assyrian-Babylonian lord of the sun, Sīn. However, Sin as the lord of the moon exists in the more decisively Gnostic Mandaean tradition, and the described development could exclusively be the result of Mandaean influence. Other variants can hardly be proposed, no matter how strange this may seem at first sight (as both Yezidis and Mandaeans have been closed esoteric societies, which considerably reduces the possibility of mutual influences). In the Mandaean folk tradition the moon is one of the seven planets – the creatures of god, each having a spirit in it: Shamish, Sin or Sera, Nirigh, Bel, Enwo, Liwet and Kiwan.<sup>85</sup> The Mandaean Sin is also an ambivalent personage: he can appear either black or white. His sinister influence manifests itself in men’s behaviour, as he inclines people to commit crimes.<sup>86</sup>

The face of Sin, the Moon, is like a cat, animal-like and black ...  
With Sin in the moon-ship is the King of Darkness also. He ... pulls  
men towards the earthly and gross, towards the dark and evil. He  
does this because he must, though he was created by and serves  
God, for there must be darkness and light and day and night. He is  
ordered to this by the Lord of Greatness ...<sup>87</sup>

The Mandaean Sin, responsible also for abortions and deformities, is a malformed figure.<sup>88</sup>

## PĪRĀ-FĀT, FOREMOTHER OF THE YEZIDIS

The Yezidī sheikhy tradition says that, unlike all other peoples who originated from Adam and Eve, the Yezidis had only a primeval father, Adam. Eve played no role in their genesis. Once, the Yezidi legend tells us, Eve claimed that children were produced by her alone and that Adam had no part in creating them. In order to test her claim they put their seeds in separate jars and closed them. When, nine months later, they opened Eve's jar, they found serpents, scorpions and poisonous insects, while in Adam's jar there was a beautiful moon-faced child. They called the boy Šahīd bin-ġarr (Arab. "Šahīd, the son of the pot"). He later married a hūrī and became Forefather of the Yezidis.<sup>89</sup> This account of the origin of the Yezidis is also confirmed in one of the Yezidis' so-called Holy Books, "The Black Scripture" (§14):

*Xwadāyī gawra bimalāyikaī gōt, min Ādam wa Hawā xalq dikim wa diyānkim bi bašar. Li siṛī Ādam Šahr ibn-Safar dibē wa liawīš milatī li sar arz p'aydā dibē lipāštir milatī 'Azrayīl ya'nī Malak Tāwus kī yazīdīyā p'aydā dibē.*<sup>90</sup>

The great god said to the angels: I create Adam and Eve, and make them human beings. From Adam's essence Šahr ibn-Safar<sup>91</sup> will appear, and from him will originate on Earth a people, who will later give birth to the people of 'Azrayīl, i.e. Malak Tāwūs, who are the Yezidis.

Another version of the same legend mentions two children in Adam's jar.<sup>92</sup> However, this Semitic legend with its non-orthodox, probably Gnostic interpretation is not the only popular myth that exists in this syncretic tradition.

We were recently able to record some extremely interesting details among the Yezidis of Armenia that point to the existence of another legend concerning Yezidi origins, one that has Iranian roots and which is probably more authentic than the story of Adam and the jar. According to these materials, there is a female deity called Pīrā-Fāt and she is the daughter of Farxadīn.<sup>93</sup> Hitherto, nothing had been known of this character: scholarly works on Yezidism make no mention of her existence at all. Philip Kreyenbroek does refer to a mythical character, Pīr Āfāt, allegedly associated with hail and damage to crops, inundations and storms.<sup>94</sup> However, it appears that this author, or rather his informant,<sup>95</sup> arrived at this name by misinterpreting the *izāfa* construction, that is, the feminine *izāfa* formant *-ā* in *pīrā* (probably from *pīrikā*) was understood as a part of the deity's name itself, which resulted in the form Āfāt (pl. of Arab. *āfat*), meaning "damage, harm". The presence of the *izāfa* formant in the deity's name (formally it should be *Pīr* or *Pīrik Fāt*) supposedly emphasizes her female nature.<sup>96</sup>

In the Yezidi tradition Pîrā-Fāt is the patroness of women in labour, as well as of newborn babies, who protects them from the evil demoness Āl.<sup>97</sup> A parturient woman asks for Pîrā-Fāt's help: *Yā Pîrā-Fāt, ālî min bika!* "Oh Pîrā-Fāt, help me!" Those present traditionally express their hope for the deity's assistance: *Čārā Pîrā-Fāt bē hawārā ta!* "May the seed of Pîrā-Fāt help you!"<sup>98</sup> The word *čār* in this formula means "seed", which developed from "means, possibility" via the interim stage of "liquid, medicine" (cf. Middle Pers. *čarak*, New Pers. *čāra*, also Armen. dial. *čār*, "medicine, means"). This phrase specifically expresses the wish that the woman will give birth to a pure Yezidi from the original seed of the Yezidi people, since Pîrā-Fāt is traditional preserver of this seed. Similarly, they invoke this seed when embarking on a journey: *Yā Pîrā-Fāt, čārā ta sar ma*, "Oh Pîrā-Fāt, let your assistance (seed) be with us". Pîrā-Fāt actually appears here as the foremother of the Yezidis, who has saved from annihilation the seed from which this people originated.

The legend says that the seed was given to Pîrā-Fāt for safekeeping by Sheikh Abū Bakr (Šēxōbakr), the incarnation of the angel Michael (Mikail), one of the avatars of Malak-Tāwūs. Pîrā-Fāt then preserved it for seven hundred years, or, according to another version, for seven thousand. Unfortunately, no further details of this myth are to be found. One of the religious hymns (*qawl*) merely alludes to the story, and this appears to be the only trace of this legend in the Yezidi oral tradition.

*P'ādšāyē min vē yakē dīlšāya,  
Faqīrak šāndiya tavakā harharē, āvak ānyīya;  
Nāvē wē dāniya šarāv, ti'ūn, a'ynil-bayzāya;  
Aw rōša, av rōža mijlisā mērē ēzdī pē būya āvāya.*<sup>99</sup>

My god [lit. "king"] is happy because  
[He] sent once a *faqīr* [probably Šēxōbakr] to the seventh sphere of  
heavens; [he] brought a liquid [lit. "water"];  
They called it wine, flour, yolk and egg white;<sup>100</sup>  
That day, this day, the community of Yezidis appeared.

This "liquid" (*āv*), according to our informant Faqir Tayar (Armavir, Armenia), consisted of four elements: fire, water, earth and air. It is directly indicated further in the same hymn:

*P'ādšāyē mine jabāra,  
Ži duřē farq [rather xalq] kirna čāra:  
Bāyā, āva, āxa ū nāra.*<sup>101</sup>

My god [lit. king] is powerful,  
[He] created a liquid from a pearl:  
It is wind [air], water, earth and fire.

Here the legend of origin is combined with the symbol of cosmogony, the pearl (*duř*): the liquid, seed of the Yezidi people, represents actually the artefact of the primordial pearl, thus becoming an element of cosmogony.<sup>102</sup>

The existence of two popular legends of genesis in one and same tradition is fascinating *per se*, providing clear evidence of the tradition's syncretic roots. As mentioned above, the basic legend, which has been perfectly preserved, is most probably a Gnostic hangover of Yezidism. The second myth, which has been preserved only partially, mainly in its secondary and indirect references to the deity Pīrā-Fāt, is, no doubt, more typical for the Iranian world. Another indirect reflection of this myth can be found in the following passage from a hymn by Sheikh Arabagī Antūzī, an example of the genre of hymns involving theological polemics with the representatives of other confessions. In fact, the whole contradiction between two anthropogonic myths is reflected in the following lines:

*Nawērim bik'ēlimīm;  
Wakī az bēžim, sunata barī Ādama,  
Azē biřijīmīm.  
Sunata barī Ādama,  
Aw ma'nika mazina ...*<sup>103</sup>

I cannot speak;  
If I say that [the people of the] *sunna* [here, the Yezidis]  
had existed before Adam,  
I will be accursed.  
[But] in the precedence of Adam,  
The great meaning [is hidden] ...

The name of the deity, Pīrā-Fāt, literally means “old woman Fāt”, and apparently goes back to the name of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Fātima. This character absorbed many of the features of pre-Islamic patron deities of fertility and family, and she is worshipped all over the Muslim world, especially among the Shi'as. The Virgin Mary (Mariam) has almost the same function in Islam, and women in labour appeal, as a rule, to both of them.<sup>104</sup> Fāt is shown to be a variant of Fātima by the fact that in certain contexts both forms of the name are used for the Prophet Muhammad's daughter. The Yezidi hymn dedicated to 'Alī, the lion of god (Bayt'ā A'lī šērē Xwadē), offers clear evidence of this:<sup>105</sup>

*Či sibaka nahīna!  
Digrī A'yš, Fāt ū Zīna  
Savā hard kurē A'līna.  
A'lī dihāta māla,*

*Fātimē pēřā sařū qāla;  
Gōta: “Ta girtī kirina zīndānē”,  
Aw Fātima dēm šalāla.*

What a horrible morning!  
Aysha, Fātima [Fāt in the text] and Zaynab [Zīn] were weeping  
For the two sons of ‘Alī [i.e. Hasan and Hussain].

‘Alī was coming home,  
Fātima was arguing,  
[She] said [to him]: “You jailed the prisoners!”  
That Fātima with a shining face!

The shortening of the name Fātima, or, to be more precise, the omission of the end syllables, obviously results from the Kurdish interpretation of the name: Fātima (or Fātīma) was understood as an *izāfa* construction *Fātī ma* (*Fātā ma*): “our Fāt”.

“The palm of Fātima”, the symbol of the five main characters in Shi’ism, the Prophet Muhammad, ‘Alī, Fātima, Hasan and Hussain, is an essential element of the talismans and amulets that offer protection from evil spirits and demons.<sup>106</sup> A metal representation of “the palm of Fātima” is a significant accessory of any god-fearing Shi’a house, alongside a portrait of ‘Alī, whose image has also accumulated certain characteristics of Old Iranian mythical personages – from Verethragna to Rustam.

Fātima’s many features in the popular Shi’a interpretation are strikingly similar to those of Anahita (Anāhitā), the Old Iranian goddess (*yazata*-) of fecundity and procreation, who is directly connected with water. Pīrā-Fāt’s role as the preserver of the first seed in the Yezidi religion associates her still more with her archetype Anahita.<sup>107</sup> What is especially important here is that Anahita is in charge of the man’s seed, as well as childbirth: she is the purifier of all men’s seed and all women’s wombs.

*Yā vīspanam aršnam xšudrū yaoždađāiti,  
Yā vīspanam hāirišinam zdai garəuuan yaoždađāiti,  
Yā vīspā hāirišš huzamitō dađāiti,  
Yā vīspanam hāirišinam dāitim rađuim paēma auua-baraiti.*<sup>108</sup>

In James Darmesteter’s translation this passage is rendered as follows:

Who [Anahita] makes the seed of all males pure,  
Who makes the womb of all females pure for bringing forth [so  
that]  
it may conceive again,  
Who makes all females bring forth in safety,

Who puts milk into breasts of all females in the right measure and the right quality.<sup>109</sup>

Moreover, Pīrā-Fāt's function as the original seed-keeper also matches that of Armatī-Spandārmāt in preserving the seed of the First man (Gayōmart) and thereby ensuring the procreation of the first human couple: Mašyak (Martiyak) and Mašyānak (Martiyānak). In the *Bundahishn*, this myth reads as follows:

When Gayōmart was dying and dropped his seed, a part [of it] was imbibed by Spandarmāt [Earth]. For forty years it remained in the earth. In forty years, Mašyak and Mašyānak grew up as rhubarb plants out of the earth ... Then [they] turned into humans, and *xwarr* – their soul – entered into them.<sup>110</sup>

Preservation of the primordial seed in various environments is in general a common mythologeme in the Iranian tradition (as with the story of Zoroaster's seed, which was kept for 99,999 years in lake Kansaoya-Hāmūn; the story of Satana and a shepherd in the Ossetic Nart epic; and so on). The examples given above confirm the authenticity of the myth about Pīrā-Fāt, the seed-keeper in the Yezidi tradition. Although this is not explicitly stated in the extant materials, it was most probably Pīrā-Fāt who produced the first Yezidi from the primordial seed.<sup>111</sup>

#### XATŪNĀ-FARXĀ, PATRONESS OF PREGNANT WOMEN AND INFANTS

Xatūnā-farxā literally means "The Dame of Children" (Arab. *farx*, "chicken", meaning "infant"). Incidentally, a similar attribute used to be given also to evil creatures: consider how the well-known demoness Āl (Armen. *Alk'*), the enemy of infants and women in labour, is named 'umm uṣṣibyān, "mother of children". This latter type of definition, however, is an attribute of a demonized deity,<sup>112</sup> whereas on the Yezidi understanding Xātūnā-farxā mostly cares about a woman during pregnancy. It is likely that both labour and the postnatal periods fall under the cognizance of Pīrā-Fāt. The name of Xātūnā-farxā does nonetheless unambiguously indicate the function of protectress of infants during the initial forty days of life in particular. It is believed that she stays in the house, side-by-side with the woman in labour and with the newborn child, protecting them in every way from the encroachments by Āl. It is strictly prohibited to bath the baby during the *čilla* – the initial forty days – for it is believed that the baby will be invaded by evil spirits, but they will lose their malignant power when this term expires with the first bathing of the baby at the *čilla*'s end. Before bathing they pour seven times forty spoons of water on baby's head, reiterating the following formula:

Čilla čū xwařā,  
Zāřōk mā mařā.

Chilla has left all alone,  
[And] the child will stay with us.

In fact, Xātūna-farxā is a frail duplicate of Pīrā-Fāt with a reduced scope of activities and yet with many features in their images being similar. Xātūna-farxā, like Pīrā-Fāt, is a daughter of Malak Fakhr ad-Din (Farxadīn); she is addressed for help in childbirth (when seeing a pregnant woman, they say: *Xatūnā-farxā bē hawāra ta!* “May Xatūnā-farxā help you!”); like Pīrā-Fāt, Xātūna-farxā protects the newly born from Āl and other evil creatures.

Although Xātūna-farxā has her own (rather controversial) genealogy, has kin (brother, husband), a legendary tomb in Lalish, and is even the eponym of the sheikhy clan Shekhe-Khatune (Šēxē Xātūnē),<sup>113</sup> she is nevertheless a secondary figure, budding from the image of Pīrā-Fāt, her kinship and genealogical links probably resulting from secondary developments. The existence of two goddesses with nearly similar functions, almost identical origin and activities cannot be logically explained. Perhaps the epithet Xātūna-farxā (i.e. “the mistress of infants”) had been primarily an attribute of Pīrā-Fāt, yet with the overall name of the goddess being *Pīrā-Fāt – xātūna-farxā* (i.e. “Pīrā-Fāt – the lady of infants”). Later, probably, the attribute may have been recognized as an individual entity with restricted functions and a self-sustained life within the popular mind, overgrowing with personal features and popularly imaged elements.

## ŠĒX-KIRĀS, THE SPIRIT OF THE GARMENT

Šēx-kirās is an almost forgotten personage now. He is mentioned only by Giuseppe Furlani.<sup>114</sup> His name – Šēx-kirās – can be literally translated as the Sheikh of the garment (rather, “the Sheikh of the robe”) (Kurdish *kirās* < Old Iranian \**kṛpa-pāθra-*, “protecting a body”). Probably, he was responsible for the process of death, transmigration of a soul, maybe even reincarnation – the exchange of bodies like that of clothes. In modern Yezidism the concept of reincarnation exists only implicitly (and this idea coexists with the traditional concept of paradise and hell, left to the Yezidi doctrine by the Islamic derivation). There is an allusion to it in the Yezidi “Book of Revelation” (part II, §12; see Chapter 2 above). Still, *tanāsux* (reincarnation) is one of the basic ideas of some esoteric teachings in Islam,<sup>115</sup> including heterodox Shi’a sects, which have much in common with Yezidism, and could in turn have been acquired from prior Gnostic and “mystical” roots.<sup>116</sup> The absence of any centralized religious institution, meaning the absence of any official doctrine, very often allows two opposite notions to coexist in the Yezidis’ world outlook, elements

sometimes being without adequate representation in the tradition. Šēx-kirās could be also an epithet to the name of Nasr ad-din, a psychopomp and the angel of death, one of the manifestations of Malak-Tāwūs. Then later Šēx-kirās could have been transformed from an epithet to a separate personage with certain functions.

The garment and clothes in general often symbolize the body and physical existence; “to take a garment off” is a metaphor for death, and to change it is a metaphor for reincarnation. The phrase *kirās guhērīn* – lit. “to change clothes” – is the denotation of death among the Yezidis. The Ahl-i Haqq followers, speaking about incarnation, use the Turkish word *dun* or Persian *jāme* (“dressing”); the Persian *be lebās āmadan*, lit. “to put on clothes” and meaning “to be made flesh”.<sup>117</sup> The reference to the body as a garment is a well-known Gnostic concept.<sup>118</sup> It is worthy of note that in one of the Parthian Manichaean mourning hymns, the dramatic description of Mani’s death is represented with the same metaphor: *frāmōxtiš tanβār padmōžan aβδēn* (M5, 63–66), “And he (the Prophet Mani) shed his beautiful bodily garment (= he died)”. Still, even this turns out to be the most conventional metaphor when there are deeper insights to be found. In Gnosticism the robe can symbolize the primordial self of a person, his initial idea, his *alter ego* in the heavens, preserved in the upper world, while the person himself lives below, in the material world: “His image (garment) was kept untouched in its place”, says the Mandaean text.<sup>119</sup> One of the emanations in the Coptic Manichaean genealogy of gods is the Image of Light or the Angel with the Garments of Light, who comes to a dying man. The Angel meeting a dying man, delivers to him his true clothes – “the Garment of Light” – thus giving him back his real, original essence, or his heavenly *ego*.<sup>120</sup> The fact that Šēx-kirās is in charge of the process of death suggests a comparably assignable role to him.

A very illustrative piece *ad locum* is “The Hymn of the Pearl” from the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*. The narrative text, which, actually, can hardly be called a “hymn”, is about Judas Thomas, who has to leave his “splendid robe” in his Father’s home and to set out in search of the Pearl (the Gnostic metaphor for a soul, in particular, the lost soul). Having come home after long wanderings, the son again acquires his robe, realizing suddenly that it is like his reflection in the mirror:

... my splendid robe which I had taken off,  
And my toga with which it was wrapped about,  
From the heights of Hyrcania  
My parents sent thither  
By the hand of their treasurers,  
Who for their faithfulness were trusted therewith.  
Indeed, I remember no more its dignity,  
For I had left it in my childhood in my father’s house,  
But suddenly, when I saw it over against me,



The splendid robe became like me, as my reflection in the mirror;  
 I saw it wholly in me,  
 And in it I saw myself quite apart from myself,  
 So that we were two in distinction  
 And again one in a single form.

...

And my toga of brilliant colours  
 I drew completely over myself.  
 I clothed myself with it and mounted up  
 To the court of greeting and homage.  
 I bowed my head and worshipped  
 The splendour of the father who had sent it to me,  
 Whose command I had accomplished,  
 As he also had done what he promised.

...

And I was with him in his kingdom.

...

And he promised me that to the court  
 Of the king of kings I should journey with him again  
 And with my offering and my pearl  
 With him appear before our king.<sup>121</sup>

Thus, regaining the heavenly robe means the return to the eternal home, to the Father's kingdom.

We would, of course, refrain from drawing a direct genetic parallel between this Gnostic *sujet* here and the functions of the Yezidi Šêx-kirās. Nonetheless, the fact that Sheikh of the robe is in charge of the burial rite, and he meets a soul right after a person has just passed the way of all things and is ready to enter the Hereafter, may actually reflect the same concept, which once existed in Yezidism, but was later lost together with the memory of its mystical roots.

There is also another character dealing with clothes in the Yezidi beliefs – Hazmamān (Hasan Mamān, Hazmamān, Hazil Mamān), who is also venerated among the Yezidis of Armenia. Almost nothing is known about him either. Hazmamān is as the distributor of caps and dervishes' robes (*k'ulik* and *xarqa*). He is also called *P'irē xarqa ū k'uluk*, the Pir (i.e. "saint") of *xarqa* and *k'ulik*. Being the head of all pirs, he bears the title *P'irē čil p'irā(n)* or *čil mēra(n)* – "The pir of forty pirs". "Forty saints", as well as four, seven or eleven ones, popular clichés in folk Islam, has exclusively nominal representation in Yezidi doctrine, without any names or details. Yet apart from Hazmamān, leadership over forty saints is ascribed to Mama Rasha<sup>122</sup> or to Pir Dawud (P'ir Dāwūdē Darmān).<sup>123</sup> The latter, considered to be Sheikh 'Adi's servant, is sometimes mentioned in *qawls* in parallel with Hazmamān. Consider the following:

*Dāwūdē bin Darmāna,  
Hazmamān p'irē čil p'irāna.*<sup>124</sup>

This is Dawud, the son of Darman,  
Hazmaman, the Pir of forty pirs.

As likely as not, Hazmamān could once have been either the same figure as Šēx-kirās, or just another personification of the same concept.

#### MAMĒ-ŠIVĀN AND GĀVĀNĒ ZARZĀN, THE LORDS OF CATTLE

In the pantheons of the peoples who are overwhelmingly cattle farmers in their traditional lifestyle, usually the most venerated figures are deities patronizing livestock. Ancient Graeco-Roman mythology has retained for us a very colourful image of Old Greek Pan and his Roman counterpart Faunus. The playful Pan, patron of herds, forests and fields and a great judge and fan of the shepherd's pipe, is ambivalent, like any chthonic image. For, at the same time, he patronizes the destructive elements of earth, one of his favourite games being to spread panic. In the customs and beliefs of the Iranian peoples, despite their deeply rooted Muslim outlook, a close scrutiny will reveal an array of pagan images patronizing domestic and wild animals, certainly going back to very early layers of religious thinking. In many cattle-breeding Iranian communities, ancient gods of cattle were converted into guardian spirits of animals, being generally featured under a polysemantic term *pīr* and having no institutional manifestations.<sup>125</sup> However, the Yezidis, the Zazas and the peoples of Caspian coastal areas known for archaic lifestyle and adherence to traditions, as well as the highlanders of southwestern Iran, have retained to date the gods or lords of livestock in their authentic images, with the relevant characteristics and original names.

Among the Yezidis it is Mamē-Šivān, the “shepherd (for small cattle) Mam”, and Gāvānē Zarzān, “herdsman (for neat cattle) Zarzan”.<sup>126</sup> They protect livestock from the wolves, from misfortune and disease. Mamē-Šivān patronizes small cattle, while Gāvānē Zarzān protects the heavy beasts. Meanwhile, the cultic value of the former is distinctly more visible in the prayers of popular usage, perhaps by virtue of the prevailing role of small cattle breeding in the agricultural activities of the Yezidis. Hence the ejaculative sayings: *Mamē-Šivān puštivānē ta ba*, “Let Mamē-Šivān be your protector”, or *Du'ae Mamē-Šivān sar mālē ta ba*, “Let the blessing by Mamē-Šivān be upon your home”, and so on. The Yezidi shepherds rely upon these gods, calling on them when putting cattle to pasture:

*Am pišti ta, Mamē-Šivān, dičin bar vī pazī; pišti ta, Gāvānē Zarzān, dičin bar vī dawārī; am pišti ta, Mamē-Šivān, paz xway dikin, am pišti ta Gāvānē Zarzān, dēwēr xway dikin.*

Relying on you, Mamē-Šivān, we follow that flock (of sheep); relying on you, Gāvānē Zarzān, we follow the herd (of cows); relying on you, Mamē-Šivān, we go after the small cattle; relying on you, Gāvānē Zarzān we go after neat cattle.<sup>127</sup>

The young shepherds about to start work address them with hope for help: *Gumānā ma hūnīn; gumāna ma tuī, yā Mamē-Šivān; gumāna mā tuī, Gāvānē Zarzān*, “You are our hope; you are our hope, Oh Mamē-Šivān; you are our hope, Oh Gāvānē Zarzān!”<sup>128</sup>

The cultic significance of Mamē-Šivān and Gāvānē Zarzān is vividly traced during the celebration of the Yezidi New Year or *ʿĀyḏā sarsālē*, celebrated on the first Wednesday in April (Old Style), or (according to other sources) on March 8 (*hayštē ādarē*). Put into a big New Year pie, called *kulučē sarā sālē* (*tōtkē sarē sālē*) is a bead, a blue one according to some sources (which is remarkable, since the colour blue is a taboo in Yezidism), or a coin. The pie is cut into pieces marked out for different gods and guardian spirits, as well as for the family members, except infants who cannot discern virtue from sin (*xēr ū guna*). The pie is divided between Mamē-Šivān and Gāvānē Zarzān, the Spirit of the Household (*Xudānē-mālē*) augmenting welfare, the Spirit of the furrow (*Xatā-jōt*) patronizing land farming, and then further among the family: master of the house (*malxwē mālē*), the mistress (*kavānīyā mālē*), and so on. Depending on who is going to get the bead, any one of these gods is going to be particularly benevolent to the family in the new year, or one of the family members is going to be particularly fortunate.<sup>129</sup>

Mamē-Šivān used to be addressed by a special incantation within a particular rite during the Barān-bardān festival. The protector of small cattle was propitiated by mixing sheep wool with ram wool, spreading it on the ground and letting children wallow on it chanting the song, appealing to the deity for more cattle yield:

*Barān-bardān, jān, Barān-bardān!*  
*Barakʿat ba Barān-bardān;*  
*Birā hāzir ba Mamē-Šivān,*  
*Pazē ma xwayka ži yadā-balā.*

Baran-Bardan, glory to you!  
 Let there be abundance [prosperity];  
 Let Mamē-Šivān attend [the holiday],  
 Let [him] protect our cattle from misfortune.

By some sources, the wool from the rams and sheep was plucked by an old man, sitting on the back of his old wife.<sup>130</sup> Mamē-Šivān is considered, among other things, an earthly twin representative of the constellation of the Ram.<sup>131</sup>

An interesting legend has been preserved about Gāvānē Zarzān: Sheikh 'Adi was entertaining members of his community at his home; each came with a due gift and obtained a blessing and the proper empowerment. Gāvānē Zarzān, being a poor shepherd of neat cattle, brought a barley loaf to the Patriarch, the only thing that he had found. However, when approaching the chamber of Sheikh 'Adi, he became shy and stood in a humble posture with the loaf under his dress. The all-seeing Sheikh addressed him with the following words: "Take courage, your modest gift is worth more for me than a whole cow"; then he blessed the shepherd: "Go, and be the protector of the cows! Let your patronage over the herds of my people remain for ages and ages!"<sup>132</sup>

Healing the small cattle is a special procedure whereby the representatives of clergy (a sheikh or a pīr) wash the diseased sheep with water from the miracle-working bowl of Mamē-Šivān (*t'āsā Mamē-Šivān*). Such bowls (made commonly of copper, ornamented inside in Arabic writing-style) were kept in wealthy families in the home bedding (*stēr*), which was regarded as holy (see below). The bowl is removed when needed only by spiritual persons or unmarried girls or young men. A certain offering is due to the bowl annually. It is provided also for the treatment of sheep of other families who have paid a tribute to the host (with a length of cloth, butter or cheese) or made an offering.<sup>133</sup> Making part of the shrine of Mamē-Šivān in Lalish, in a cave-like recess with the so-called "Wishing Pillar" (*stūnā mirāza*), visitors put their palms to the column, believing that it will help fulfil desires. The name of Mamē-Šivān has become the eponym of a family of pīrs at a village in Sheikhan, called Mamē-Šivān, which is also known as "Little Lalish".<sup>134</sup>

Interestingly, the cults of cattle guardians in a dual form and linguistically resembling the Yezidi patrons of cattle have been registered in Central Anatolia, in Dersim (now Tunceli) among the Zazas, in our view originating from Daylam (south Caspian area) and confessing predominantly a particular type of extreme Shi'ism.<sup>135</sup> Meanwhile, the Kurds, a linguistically proximate people to the Yezidis, have only an indiscriminate spirit of domestic animals – P'ir. The god-protectors of cattle amid the Zazas are Sārikō-šuān and Mamō-gāvān (or Wāyirō xēr, i.e. "Master of Prosperity"). The Zazas have also the evil spirit, enemy of the cattle, Wāyirō xirāv (i.e. "Master of Evil and Destruction"), the persecutor, the torturer of animals, who smothers them by mounting them, causing them to run wild screaming in despair. Therefore, when the cattle return from the field in the afternoon, after closing the door on them, the Zaza custom prescribes to mention Sārikō-šuān and Mamō-gāvān, at the same time defaming Wāyirō xirāv.<sup>136</sup>

## THE HOLY ANGEL, DEITY OF THE PHALLUS

It seems to be that the Yezidi Milyāk'atē-qanj (i.e. the Holy Angel),<sup>137</sup> is the only example of the *Deus Phalli* in all New Iranian folk pantheons. Moreover,

similar personages have never been attested in Iran, neither in ancient nor in the mediaeval periods. As far as we know, the only written reference to this deity is to be found in Amine Avdal's book published in 1957 in Armenian.<sup>138</sup> Nor is any mention made of Milyāk'atē-qanĵ in recordings of Yezidi folkloric texts. Our thorough fieldwork in the Yezidi communities of Armenia, as well as among the northern Iraqi Yezidis, has not added much to the existing data. Most of the female informants, incidentally, tried to avoid this subject altogether, denying the very existence of a phallic deity in Yezidi beliefs.

Still, the information gleaned from our research thus far allows us to reconstruct at least the general idea of this deity, once probably a popular image among the Yezidis. Naturally, Milyāk'atē-qanĵ is far from being the popular Priapus of ancient myth, who had a variety of functions. The Holy Angel is a classic example of an authentic phallic deity charged with the sphere of Eros and impregnation. The comparison with Priapus is significant, for the difference between them points to the more primeval nature of the Yezidi phallic personage. The authenticity of the Holy Angel is one of his most important characteristics. Any religious form that attempts to rid itself of "historical" accretions will tend to gravitate to its authentic archetype.<sup>139</sup> Thus, whereas the humanized god of the ancient world expresses resistance to the sacral, and hence a departure from authenticity, Milyāk'atē-qanĵ in this respect is authenticity itself. He does not merely personify his functions, but is himself the very organ. The Holy Angel is imagined only in a phallic form. In this regard the Yezidi deity can be duly compared with the Indian Lingam, one of the avatars of Shiva, which is also a bare phallus *per se*.<sup>140</sup>

Convinced that a child could be conceived only with the blessing of Milyāk'atē-qanĵ, young brides traditionally wore a silver or stone pendant called *xiyār* ("cucumber"), which was shaped like a phallus to symbolize the deity.<sup>141</sup> "Cucumber" is definitely a metaphoric euphemism, as is the deity's name "Holy Angel". At earlier stages, no doubt, the deity may well have had another name, most probably one that pointed more directly to his functions<sup>142</sup> and was, therefore, formally tabooed later on and replaced by the euphemistic expressions. Milyāk'atē-qanĵ was supposed to cure sterility and to help women conceive a boy. The Yezidi women turned to him with the following words:

*Yā Milyāk'atē-qanĵ, wara hawārā min.  
Bar mi rūnī;  
Da'w ba, risq ba;  
Kur vī, qīz vī.*<sup>143</sup>

O Milyāk'atē-qanĵ, help me [to conceive a child],  
Impregnate me [lit. "Sit upon me"];  
Let me have yogurt, let me have good;  
Let me have a son, let me have a daughter.

According to the same informant, whose data are indirectly substantiated in Adval's materials,<sup>144</sup> the Yezidi women would walk to the mountains after the wedding ceremony and make a sacrifice to Milyāk'atē-qanĵ before large phallic-shaped stones. The sacrifice was considered the guarantee of multiple progeny.

Barren women performed a fertility ritual by sitting down on the stones and making rubbing motions invoking the deity: *Yā Milyāk'atē-qanĵ, mi āvis ka*, "O Milyāk'atē-qanĵ, make me pregnant" (the same informant). This formula, incidentally, offers a very special example of verbal magic. In particular, it should be noted that the word *āvis* (here meaning "pregnant") is normally applied only to cattle. The proper terms to apply to a human pregnancy are *girān*, *duhālī* or *hamla*. And if such an apparent aischrology really occurred in the verbal part of the rite dedicated to the Holy Angel, this could be one of the reasons for the taboo.<sup>145</sup> A similar rite existed also among the Armenians. A woman rubbed her navel against a large phallic-shaped stone called *portak'ar* (lit. "navel-stone" in Armenian), and then hammered a nail into a stone crack, transferring her ailment to the stone.<sup>146</sup> Turkic speaking women living in enclaves in the Zangezur region of Armenia used to perform the same rite.<sup>147</sup>

Generally, a stone as an object of *Sexualkult* is seen in many different cultures. In some, a bride climbs on top of a stone, or obscene gestures accompany a ritual dance, and so on. All such rituals are aimed at curing sterility and ensuring fertility in general.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, stone worshipping in this connection cannot be explained exclusively by the logic of imitative magic, but primarily by the fact that a stone was considered a deity's abode, one of the very common elements of the primitive religions.<sup>149</sup> Present-day rites of this kind, however, have more or less lost their original essence, this communion with the hierophany. What they reveal instead is secondary perception, the result of the symbol's degradation to an object of imitative magic.

Milyāk'atē-qanĵ was obviously supposed to be present during the circumcision ceremony, which is completely forgotten by now. The ceremony was performed by the "Brother of the Next world" of the family,<sup>150</sup> who, upon cutting the boy's prepuce, appealed to the Holy Angel: *Yā, Milyāk'atē-qanĵ, barak'atī bida; birā zēda ba qawatā vī kūř*, "O Milyāk'atē-qanĵ, give prosperity, [and] may the force of this boy be increased". After the ceremony they used to sacrifice a sheep and distribute the meat among the poor.

The Holy Angel, as could be expected, is also traced in the wedding rites. The Yezidis used to adorn one of the trees in front of the groom's house, and put a phallic-shaped wooden stick in between its boughs. They called it Milyāk'atē-qanĵ. Before entering the house, a new-married couple stayed for a while under the tree, and the groom's friends shook it uttering: *Zavā ū būk mīna vē dārē bibār bin*, "May the groom and bride be fertile (fruitful) like this tree", or *Mālā zavē t'iži zārō bin*, "May the groom's house be full of children".

Odd traces of the phallic cult have been preserved in the Yezidi festival *Barān-bardān* or "Releasing of Rams", celebrated on the fortieth day of autumn,

that is, at the end of the first ten days of October. The feast is described by the Armenian Yezidi writer Arab Shamilov in his novel *Šivānē kurd* ("Kurdish Shepherd") and later in his short story *Barbāng* (Day-spring):

This day the whole world is joyful, as if they were celebrating the wedding of their sheep. Young people dance; some of them fight, bubbling over with joy ... The shepherds and wranglers [*dūšivān*] are the most exalted ones, as they receive their payment for the whole summer season [on this day]. During the *Barān-bardān*, they drive ewes into a sheepfold, and then release the rams, which have been grazed separately the whole summer. They do this in order that the sheep will produce their young simultaneously in the spring. The moment the rams are released to the ewes, people start shooting from rifles, as if they wanted to celebrate the wedding of their sheep.<sup>151</sup>

As reported elsewhere:

They hang bunches of coloured wool, small bells and amulets on the sheep's horns and necks – it seems as if the sheep know themselves that this is their wedding: holding their heads high, they jostle each other, then stand quietly for a while, then try to prove themselves again, looking proudly at the shepherds and the gazing folk around. Then young girls take off their kerchiefs and tie them around the sheep's necks, and young lads come and take them off: in this way they reveal their secrets, for by taking a kerchief of a certain girl, a lad shows his intention to marry her (the result of their flirtation during the Summer pasture). The girls' parents look on from afar to see who will take their daughter's kerchief.<sup>152</sup>

They released the rams to the ewes in late evening when the Ram constellation (*Barānī*) appeared in the sky. The Yezidis believed that the Ram was the celestial twin of Mamē-Šivān and could increase the sheep's get. While releasing the rams they used to utter: *Yā Barānī, yā Mamē-Šivān, hūn pazē ma zēdakin*, "O, Ram, O, Mamē-Šivān, increase [the number of] our sheep!" Other details of this feast have been described in the ethnographical literature: red apples are speared on sheep's horns; their foreheads are decorated with pieces of mirror; young girls bring the rams to the ewes, holding them by their horns; in some cases a young maiden straddles a ram; and so on.<sup>153</sup>

Of course, the ceremonies described above are not directly connected with the cult of Milyāk'atē-qanj. Still, to ensure the fertility of the flock and to a certain extent that of the young people attending the feast as well, ample use is made of phallic symbolism: in the indirect means used to deliver kerchiefs to the girls' chosen fellows; in the way the young maidens hold the rams' horns;



in the use of red apples as tokens of defloration and of mirrors to symbolize doubling and fertility; and so on. In earlier times the rite probably involved people's active participation in the "wedding" ceremony as well, if not through outright *coitus*, then at least through ritual (gestural and verbal) obscenity, and so on. In mediaeval Iran this feast was probably called \**gušn-hilišnīh*, the exact equivalent for which in Classical Armenian was *xoy-t'olowt'iwn*, that is, "the releasing of the rams". The Middle Iranian form cited above can be traced to Old Iranian \**waršni-hrdzana*-.<sup>154</sup>

In a short talk, Gulizar Mamoyan, a Yezidi woman of around ninety years from Aragats region of Armenia, added a new detail of utmost interest to the story of the Yezidi phallic cult. She remembered that when she was young, the barren and newly married women, in summer quarters (*wārga*), used to pick up small red mushrooms – *kārīēd sōr* – on the mountain slopes. They strung the mushrooms on threads and hung them on the necks. They believed, she said, that mushrooms could cure sterility and induce the productivity of women's wombs. The women also performed a round dance (*gōvand*) around big mushrooms that appeared after rain, in a secluded place, far from men's eyes. The old lady remembered a short part of the incantation accompanying the rite:

*Kārī, kārī,  
Laz mi bika ārī!  
Zikē mi bika p'ētak,  
P'ētakā mi – jērē ēr,  
Jērē mi bika p'ētak ...*

Mushroom, mushroom,  
Help me soon!  
Make my womb a box [here a wooden box for keeping cereals],  
[Make] my wooden box a flour's jar,  
[Make] my jar a wooden box ...

The significant role of the mushroom in magic and cult is a renowned fact. Mushrooms are universally known as aphrodisiacs. The swelling and growing of a mushroom must have been perceived as imitation of *phallos*. The red colour of the mushrooms used as objects of magic by the Yezidi women is itself an obvious sign of masculinity. The whole complex of cults devoted to Milyāk'atē-qanĵ has been virtually lost by now, yet he may well have been a rather influential deity, who initially had wider functions. It is quite possible that Milyāk'atē-qanĵ was the Yezidi women's deity *par excellence*, a kind of secret fetish that was concealed, formally, of course, from men.



## DAWRĒŠ-A'RD, LORD OF THE EARTH

One of the rare gods in the Yezidi pantheon actually carries in his name the direct explication of his domain, in contrast to others commonly named after mythical or semi-mythical characters. *Dawrēš-a'rd* or *Dawrēšē-a'rd* literally means “Saint (Master or Host) of the earth”.<sup>155</sup> According to some data, *Dawrēšē-a'rd* is identified with Sheikh Abu Bakr (Šēxōbakr), personifying Angel Michael (Mikail), the fourth avatar of Malak-Tāwus. *Dawrēš-a'rd* is mentioned in three sacred texts: *Dirōzga* (“Prayer”), *Du'āya ōxirē* (“Prayer of fortune and bounty”), and *Du'āya t'asmilī (t'aslīmī) a'rd* (“Prayer for committing to earth”) – also called *Du'āya Dawrēšī-a'rd* (“Prayer to the lord of the earth”) – all offered during the funeral rites.

In the first of the abovementioned texts the name of this god was brought up only casually, in the one expression (*Xātirā Dawrēšē-a'rd*, “In the name of *Dawrēšē-a'rd*”), when enumerating the names of some saints. In another text, that is, in the “Prayer of fortune” to be read prior to setting out for travel, *Dawrēšē-a'rd* is addressed for protection along the way, for among other things he keeps the belongings of the traveller from being damaged or lost, in life as well as after death. Note the end lines of this prayer talking about the lord of the earth:<sup>156</sup>

*Yā xwadē, milē Ēzdīd p'arda ba sar ma,  
Yā Pīrā-Fāt, čārā ta sar ma,  
Yā xwadē, Dawrēšē a'rd, ānamatē ma ta.*

Oh god, [may] the shoulder of [Sultan] Ezid be thy curtain over us,  
Oh Pīrā-Fāt, [may] thy help [lit. “seed”] be with us,  
Oh god, *Dawrēšē-a'rd*, [may] our belongings be in thy storage.

Detailed information on the functions of this god can be found in the “Prayer for committing to earth”, read quietly by a sheikh or a pir from among the five spiritual guides of the deceased (*pēnj t'irēqē farzē*)<sup>157</sup> when the body is committed to earth and the funeral train (except the guides) leaves the graveside.

*Du'āya t'asmilī a'rdē*, this prayer of committal to the earth, is one of the most sacral prayers of the Yezidis; its performance is banned not only outside the rite, but also within the hearing range of laymen, all the more so of aliens. Any representative of clerical castes should know the prayer of committing to earth by rote. Here is the text of the prayer as recorded by Margarita Rudenko:<sup>158</sup>

*T'asmilī t'aslīma ta,  
T'aslīmī Dawrēš-a'rd.  
Yā, Dawrēš-a'rd,  
Avī a'vdī, harga žina, harga mēra,  
Bixafirīnī, bisif'irīnī.*

*Sāhibtī ruh'ē wī/wē biki.*  
*Barxē Ezdīda,*  
*Tōqā Tāwūsē Malak stūyē wī dāna.*  
*Banē ādam, wē bēna sar ta Naka ū Mankīna,*  
*Pirskin: "Xwadē ta k'īya?"*  
*Bē: "Xwadēyē min azdā",*  
*Xwadēyē hišyār ū mastāna,*  
*Xwadēyē čōl ū bistāna,*  
*Xwadēyē h'amū xwadāna,*  
*A'vd ū banī nizāna.*  
*Aw xāliqē mawl ū māwiya,*  
*Bē čandara, bē gunaya;*  
*Aw na bīna, na žī bāya,*  
*Aw na awsiya, na nafsīya!"*  
*H'aft xwazilā min vī nafsī,*  
*Awī rah'm lē pirsē,*  
*Waka a'malē ta rah'm xwadē li ta ba.*

We commit you [to earth with] commitment,  
 We commit you to the lord of the earth.  
 Oh lord of the earth,  
 This slave [of god], whether a man or a woman,  
 Shelter and appease [him/her],  
 Take care of his/her soul.  
 [He/she] is a lamb of [Sultan] Ezid,  
 The cord-ring of the Peacock Angel is on his/her neck.  
 Oh offspring of Adam, you will be visited by Naka and Mankē,<sup>159</sup>  
 They will ask [you]: "Who is thy god?"  
 Answer: "My god from the Absolute Beginning<sup>160</sup> is  
 The god of vigilants and inebriates,<sup>161</sup>  
 The god of desert and gardens,  
 The god of all gods.  
 The slaves<sup>162</sup> [of god] cannot comprehend [Him],  
 [As] He is the creator of people and [of all] substances,  
 He is without essence, without sin;  
 He [has] no smell, no breath,  
 He [has] no passion, no soul!"  
 Seven times for the soul [of the deceased]  
 I would beseech to be pardoned by Him;  
 [May] the mercy of god be equal to thy deeds!<sup>163</sup>

Vardan Voskanian cites two more versions of this prayer, more concise than the first one published by Rudenko.<sup>164</sup> The relevant formula of these texts would be as follows:

*Yā Dawrēš-a'rd,  
T'asmilī ta av a'vd,  
Birā tu r'uh'ē vī mirī birah'mīnī.*

O lord of the earth,  
[We] commit to you this slave [of god],  
Let your mercy be over the soul of this dead man.

The lord of the earth is addressed also in mandatory toasts in his honour, right upon the tomb and during the memorial meal after the funeral. The toasts are given by the “Afterlife brother” of the deceased. The toast on the tomb is as follows: *A'šqā Dawrēšē a'rd! Birā Dawrēšē-a'rd řuhē vī mirī birah'mīna!* “To the lord of the earth! Let Dawrēšē-a'rd pardon the soul of this deceased!” The toast in the house of the deceased runs: *A'šqā nāvē Dawrēšē-a'rd!* “In the name of the lord of the earth!” At the ritual memorial meal, toasts are pronounced for Sheikh 'Adi, Malak-Tāwūs, Šixālī-Šamsān (see below) and other divinities of Yezidism, the mandatory number of toasts being odd: three or seven. By the records made by Rudenko,<sup>165</sup> the first cup is drunk to the Yezidi faith (or in another version, to the soul of the deceased and his parents), the second one to Malak-Tāwūs, the third to the lord of the earth, the fourth to the patron of wayfarers (Šixālī-Šamsān), the fifth to the lord of the graves (P'ir Mandī-gōrā), the sixth to Sheikh 'Adi, and the seventh one to the daily bread, to the giver of the daily bread – *qadrē řisqā, yē ku řisq dida sāzā*. The toast to saints, angels or outstanding personalities is named *a'šq* (Arab. 'ašq), while the toast to a person's health is *sālīx* (*sālxiyā ta*). There is also a special manner of drinking: standing, glass in both hands, held using six or all fingers.

An important function of the lord of the earth is preservation of people's possessions either hidden or pawned. *Yā Dawrēšē-a'rd, tasmilī ta av āmanata*, “O lord of the earth, (I commit) to you this pledge”, is the formula uttered when hiding some object in a secret place. They believe that it will remain intact provided the hider's clothes do not include the tabooed colour blue.

It can thus be seen that the basic competence of Dawrēšē-a'rd is safekeeping of entrusted objects within the boundaries of the earth, whether it is a dead body or any object. That may explain the tradition to call for him when planting grain.<sup>166</sup> Mircea Eliade formulates a connection between agriculture and the world of the dead:

Agriculture is concerned with the world of the dead at two different levels, both as a profane activity and as a cult. The former level is chthonic, for only seeds and dead people get into an underground dimension. The latter level is managing the fertility, life, which is self-reproductive. That is the domain of agriculture, while the dead are directly involved with the mystery of revival, with the cycle of Creation, with the inexhaustible fertility. Like a seed lying

dormant in earth's lap, the dead, too, are expecting the return to life in a new form.<sup>167</sup>

As shown by the material, Dawrēšē-a'rd can be described as god of the Earth and of the Underworld at the same time, with all ensuing functions of the deity of fertility and vegetation. Meanwhile he is also accredited with the power of pawn.

In this respect Dawrēšē-a'rd can be compared with Ārma(i)ti (Spṇta Ārmaiti), the Old Iranian goddess of cultivated land, vegetation and fertility, having a link with the rite of inhumation, banned in Zoroastrianism.<sup>168</sup> She is attested in the Middle Iranian period both in eastern and in western Iranian traditions, among the Persians, the Sogdians and the Sakas. To quote the *Bundahishn* (137, 3–5): *Spandārmāt xvēš-kārīh parvartārīh dāmān har ēr ī pat dāmān bavandak bē kartan ut-š gētīk zamīk xvēš*, “the peculiar work of Spandārmāt is the nurture of creatures to make complete all wealth among the creatures, and the material earth belongs to her”.<sup>169</sup> And another text has: *Spandārmāt rōč varz ī zamīk kunēh* – “Am Tage Spandārmāt sollst du das Feld bestellen”.<sup>170</sup> The classical Armenian texts contain two Middle Iranian dialectal variants of this deity's name: with the initial *sp-* and *s-* (going back to the north-western Iranian initial group *\*sp-* and south-western *\*s-*), that is, *Spandaramet* and *Sandaramet* respectively. In the Armenian folk-beliefs reflected by Tovma Arcruni, a ninth-century author, we find the saying: *Erkir pandoki ē Spandaramet astowcoy*, “the earth is the inn of the god Spandaramet”.<sup>171</sup> Dawrēšē-a'rd is the unique example of a chthonic deity of this type, with obvious ancient roots within the whole new west-Iranian area.

### ŠĪXĀLĪ-ŠAMSĀN, THE PATRON OF WAYFARERS

Šēx A'lī Šams (*Šīxālī-Šamsān*) is protector of wayfarers, captives, exiles, or all who are in strange lands. He is son of Sheikh Shams, yet being a mythical character who is one of the seven Yezidi saints (the counterpart of Israfil in the group of the seven avatars of Malak-Tāwūs) and traditionally considered a disciple of Sheikh 'Adi. According to the legend reported by the recognized Armenian Yezidi theologian Sheikh Hasane Kalashe, Sheikh Shams had twelve children – nine sons and three daughters – who are identifiable with the twelve months of the year.

According to the legend, Šīxālī-Šamsān got into captivity, was held in a fortress in Sham (Syria) and released two days before the *'Ayd al-fiṭr* holiday, marking the termination of Ramadan. Being joyous at the return of his pupil, Sheikh 'Adi commanded all the Yezidis to celebrate this day as the holiday of Šīxālī-Šamsān.<sup>172</sup> Our informant reported that this holiday is celebrated on the first Wednesday in April. A hymn dedicated to Šīxālī-Šamsān describes this event as follows:

Čāršama sarē nīsānē,  
 Dang balābū ēzdiyē šarqē ū Šāmē  
 Šixālī-Šamsā k'aramkir hāta diwānē,  
 Žērā kirin a'ydā qurbānē  
 Vakirin daftarā imānē.<sup>173</sup>

On a Wednesday of the month Nisan [April–May],  
 A rumour moved among the Yezidis of Syria and the East  
 That Šixālī-Šamsān came back to the Divan [“Council” of  
 Sheikh ‘Adi],  
 A sacrificial festival was arranged for him,  
 The Tablets of faith were opened.

When having a meal, festive or mournful, they drink to Šixālī-Šamsān. The toast in his honour is called *ašqā Šixālī-Šamsān*. He is addressed particularly before hitting the road, with the following formula: *Šixālī-Šamsān, hara hawārā girtiye hafsā, nafsē tangā, řēviyē řiyā*, “O Šixālī-Šamsān, go to help the prisoners, the aggrieved and the wayfarers” (as reported by Sheikh Hasane Mamud). The legendary tomb of Šixālī-Šamsān is located at Lalish.

#### XATĀ-JŌT, THE SPIRIT OF THE FURROW

The name of the deity (*Xatā-jōt*) means literally “the furrow of the plough”. It is a marginal image, evidence is scarce, except that a piece of the New Year pie is owed to her, and *Xatā-jōt* is almost certainly a female character. The literature makes no references to her; field research has not revealed much: we have not succeeded in recording any addresses, incantations or prayer formulas. Nonetheless, a genuine imaging of her exists, having its own niche in the religious concepts of the Yezidis. Perhaps, the marginal position of this character can be explained by a secondary role of agriculture in the economic life of the Yezidis, who are mostly cattle breeders.

*Xatā-jōt* is commonly assumed to boost the crops and the efficiency of agricultural production. Although the furrow in ancient Iran had no direct protector, a “spirit of the fields” has been attested. That is *šōiθrapaiti*, that later generated amid the Armenians the class of spirits called *šahapet vayrac*’ or “spirits of localities”, featuring mostly in the form of snakes.<sup>174</sup> A parallel of *Xatā-jōt* under the name of *Bobo-dehqon* (lit. “old peasant”) is attested among the Tajiks and the Uzbeks. He is mentioned in the formula pronounced when planting: “Let it (be) our hand and the hand of *Bobo-dehqon*”,<sup>175</sup> Meanwhile the Old Indian folk-beliefs contain an exact match of *Xatā-jōt* in the form of a female spirit of the furrow, named *Sītā* (“Genie der Ackerfurche”), and her favour had to be gained by offerings.<sup>176</sup>

## XUDĀNE-MĀLĒ, THE SPIRIT OF THE HOUSEHOLD

The name of this character, *Xudāne-mālē*, can be translated as “Master of the house”. He embodies the welfare of home and the family, supports the family morals, facilitates cattle breeding and crop yield. *Xudāne-mālē* dwells in the fire-place,<sup>177</sup> but sometimes assumes the form of a serpent and crawls out of the house. Therefore, killing domestic snakes is a great sin that can turn off fortune, cause trouble and adversity. This type of attitude to home-dwelling snakes is almost a universal element in nearly all cultures of the East and West, from India to Europe, Asia Minor, including Armenia and the Caucasus area as a whole.<sup>178</sup>

In his habitual image *Xudāne-mālē* is a human-like creature, sometimes visible to children and those experienced in wizardry. *Xudāne-mālē* has to be given offerings or mentioned at different rites or religious offerings. Some authors<sup>179</sup> call the home spirit *Dawlat*, which is essentially the same “personage”.<sup>180</sup> A very similar spirit having the same functions resides in the pantheon of the Zazas: *Wāyirō čēi* or the “Master of the house”.<sup>181</sup> The Zaza *Wāyir* and the Yezidi *Xudān* are virtually different phonetic reflections of Old Iranian \**xwatāwan-*. The Zaza *čē* “house, home” comes from Old Iranian \**kata-*.

Reverence of the fire-place was widely spread in ancient Iran, when, during the Sassanid period, for instance, any home fire was considered to be a holy altar, although it was placed low in the hierarchy of sacred fires. The Avesta names Atar, the god of the fire, as *vispanam nmānam nmānō-paitīm*,<sup>182</sup> meaning “Master of all houses”.<sup>183</sup> In all, the spirit protectors of the household and fire-place are common to many cultures – Slavonic peoples (cf. Russian *domovye*), Armenians, Georgians, the peoples of the North Caucasus, including the Ossetians, and so on.

## PIRĀ-STĚŘ, THE SPIRIT OF THE BEDDING

*Pirā-stěř* or *Prikī stěř*, lit. “the old woman of bedding”, is a unique deity having no clear parallels, at least in the Near Eastern region and in the Caucasus.<sup>184</sup> *Pirā-stěř* is an old woman, invisible to the eye. She is considered protectress of the bedding or *stěř* (from the Old Iranian \**starya-*; \**star-* “make the bed”); she cares about the welfare of home and family. She dwells in the bedding, getting out to roam about the house at night. Therefore, after sunset the Yezidis withdraw the curtain fencing from the bed so that the “Old Woman” can freely move away from her abode. Roaming about the house, *Pirā-stěř* emits some sounds continually, her talk with other good spirits, for example, such as *Xudāne-mālē* (see above), and so on. She warns the household of danger (fire, etc.), wakes them up when thieves are in the house, and tries to drive them off by assuming the appearance of a night-time monster. *Pirā-stěř* is entitled to good treatment and sweets left on the bedding in a special bowl.<sup>185</sup>

## ŠĚX MAND OR P'ĪR MANDĪ-GÖRĀ, LORD OF GRAVES

This is the son of Malak Faxr ad-din (Farxadīn), brother of Pirā-stēř and probably of Xātūnā-farxā. In one hymn ŠĚx Mand introduces himself in the following way:

*Az pisē Malak Farxadīnim,  
Ba'zīkī čang nurīnim,  
Az sar t'axtē zēřīnim.*<sup>186</sup>

I am the son of Malak Farxadīn,  
I am a hawk with sparkling claws,  
I am sitting on the golden throne.

ŠĚx Mand is an eponym of a sheikhy family from the Shamsani clan (the clan's symbol is a snake), whose members are regarded to be snake charmers, known as healers of snakebites.<sup>187</sup> They are also experts in catching snakes and taming them.<sup>188</sup>

In the religious texts the lord of the graves is posing as ŠĚx Mandē-Farxā (or -Faxrā), with the patronymic definition of belonging to Farxadīn (as his son) or, perhaps, to Xātūnā-farxā (as her brother).

*Birāō, birāē mina a'sāsa,  
Birā ŠĚx Mandē-Farxā řūnī dīwānēd xāsā,  
A'sqē har p'ēnj t'irēqē wī bigērinin dōrān ū k'āsā.*<sup>189</sup>

Brothers, my true [lit. "basic"] brothers,  
Let ŠĚx Mandē-Farxā sit in the Council of saints,  
And you drink to all the five of his spiritual guides.

He was apparently called, among other things, the Black Sheikh, as reflected in one of the most secret hymns, the *Qawlē bōrabōrē*.

*Yā h'ēkimī p'irānō,  
Azē qulē ŠĚx Mandē-Farxā – šĚxē řašīm.*<sup>190</sup>

O wisest amid the pirs,  
I am a slave of the Black Sheikh – ŠĚx Mandē-Farxā.

A cave in Lalish called "the Gorge of ŠĚx Mand" harbours many snakes, and it is regarded as the tomb of their lord.<sup>191</sup> However, as noted by Drower,<sup>192</sup> ŠĚx Mand has one more tomb in the village of Bahzan (Bahzané), where also is the *mazār* of ŠĚx Mūsa-sōr.

A dismal chthonic image, beside the snakes having power over scorpions, spiders and other "creepy-crawly" creatures, ŠĚx Mand understands their language.<sup>193</sup> He is also the spirit of cemeteries overlooking the graves,

which explains his name – P'ir Mandī-gōrā, that is, “P'ir Mand, (guard) of the graves”. In this position he is approached as the one “in charge of the affairs of the dead”, which generally links him with the executor, also visiting the grave as Naka and Mankī, or Niknikīn. Hence the following passage describing Niknikīn's appearance in the grave:

*Niknikīn hāt ū hādirī,  
 Čōmāxē dastē wī p'ēt ū āgiri ...  
 Ta ča'v mīnā ča'vē ma'rā,  
 T'ilī - nōt'lānī bērā,  
 Naynuk - nōt'lān k'ērā,  
 Wē nāvē tištakī nāvēžin xudānī xērā.  
 Ta ča'v nōt'lānī t'ās,  
 T'ilī - nōt'lānī risās,  
 Naynuk - not'lānī da's,  
 We nāvē xudānē xērā haq dinās!  
 Ta ča'va řa'šin mīnānī faqir,  
 Šēbiska řa'šin mīnānī harir,  
 Bandē bivīnin dīndār mīr.<sup>194</sup>*

Niknikīn came and stood,  
 Staff in his hand, burning coals and fire ...  
 Your eyes are like the eyes of snakes,  
 Your fingers are like spades,  
 Your nails are like knives,  
 This name is hardly fit for lord of goodness.  
 Your eyes resemble drinking cups,  
 Your fingers are like lead,  
 Your nails are like sickles,  
 Is that the just lord of goodness?  
 Your eyes are black as eyes of a *fakir*,  
 Your hair is black as silk,  
 Let the devout servants perceive the face of god.

We are, however, not inclined to identify P'ir Mand with the executor. Contrary to the threatening functions of the latter, the management of the affairs of the dead by P'ir Mand is rather the caretaking for the correct burial to be performed, so that the body in the grave should undergo all the necessary ritualization that has to maintain the wellbeing of the soul in the underworld.

The apparent link of P'ir Mandī-gōrā with chthonic entities – snakes and other creatures of this class – is an unambiguous indication of the domain of death and consequently burial. This character, as evident from his name, is rather master or guard of the tombs and manager of the burial process. P'ir Mandī-gōrā is toasted at the ritual meal in the house of the deceased.



## XIDIR-NABĪ (-NAVĪ), THE UNIVERSAL DEITY

This character is attested, apart from among the Yezidis, among many nations of the Near East – the Arabs, the Persians, the Zazas, the Kurds, the Talishis, the Central Asian nations (the Uzbeks, the Tajiks, the Kyrgyzes, etc.) – and is particularly popular in the mystical Islamic doctrines. It is to be noted, however, that in all the mentioned traditions, except the Yezidi and the Zaza,<sup>195</sup> Xidir-Nabī is regarded as a saint. That is natural, since the orthodox Islamic environment, while recognizing sainthood (by no means canonized), admits no deification of saints.

The name Xidir-nabī (-navī) can be translated as Prophet Xidr (Arab. al-Xiḍr, Pers. Xizr, or Xezr). Xidir-nabī is often identified with the Prophet Elijah, which caused the emergence of a character with a double name<sup>196</sup> who in essence is the same figure. The double form occurs also in the Yezidi tradition: Xidirnabī-Xidiraylās<sup>197</sup> or Xirdaylās. Xidir-nabī, having obvious Muslim roots (a hint at him, perhaps without mentioning his name, being in Qura'n: 18: 59–81), has been shaped as a deity among the Yezidis and the Zazas under the influence of Surb Sargis (St Sergius), a popular saint in the Armenian folk-Christian pantheon embodying both a military principle and the control of storms.<sup>198</sup> The saint Xidir-nabī amid the Kurds, having almost the same image as the Yezidi deity, merits the same characteristics.

In all, it can be assumed that both Xidir-nabī of the Yezidis and the Zazas' Xizir are in essence generally reflective of Surb Sargis, yet while bearing his distinctive roles, they have assimilated the universal qualities and functions relevant to other figures of both the pantheons, duplicating them in many aspects (e.g. Xizir is the same Dūzgin in many features). This situation points to a fuzzy type of this image within the popular mind and consequently to its being a secondary figure.

Xidir-nabī is one of the sons of Sheikh Shams; he is a celestial warrior in the first place, a rider on a white horse (*haspē sīyārē bōz*), rushing tirelessly along the mountains and gorges as *mērē gāz-gēdūkā*, “the man of mountains and gorges”. He is also a patron of the young, the travelling, and those in love; he helps those caught in the tempest, helps to live in plenty and to get people out of a mess. While taking care of a travelling friend or kinsman, it is customary to address Xidir-nabī: *Yā Xidir-nabī, tu bēyī hawāra rēvīyā rīyā*, “O Xidir-nabī, be a help to the wayfarers!”

The Xidir-nabī festival is an important event in the Yezidi calendar. It is celebrated on the first Friday after 13 February, and is preceded by a three-day “lent” (*řōžīyē Xidir-nabī*).<sup>199</sup> Another version occurs on the fourth Wednesday after 16–20 February,<sup>200</sup> and here we may note with interest that the Armenian feast of Surb Sargis is celebrated on one of the Saturdays between 18 January and 23 February.

Traditionally, on the day of the Yezidi festivities the main beams of the house were painted with flour, the pictures showing figures of cattle, celestial

bodies, people, and so on. There was a teeter mounted in the house, and the members of the family were given a few swings each saying *Gunē xwa dāwāšīna*, "Shake out your sin". Incidentally, a ritual rocking at a festival is also noted with the peoples of Central Asia. The Turkmens, to illustrate, believed that teetering removes sins accumulated during the year.<sup>201</sup> According to L. Šternberg, such ritual swinging derives from "an imitative sexual act with regard to the deity of fertility".<sup>202</sup>

One day before the festival, young girls baked salted pies, and after eating them did not drink any water for the rest of the day, so as to see their betrothed, the one who would come in their dream to give them water. A bowl with flour made of roasted grains was put on the bedding (*stēr*) for the night in the belief that Xidir-nabī would notch it with his spear or with the hoof of his horse. On the day prior to the festival and during the festival, young men kindled fires (*guřik*, *guřguřik*, or *t'alālōk*), jumping over them and muttering:

*Ādānā giškā dyā minřā,*  
*Ādānā dyā min zēdaba.*

The milk of all is to my mother,  
Let my mother have more milk.<sup>203</sup>

On the festive night, during the late meal named *pařiv*,<sup>204</sup> two dishes of food have to be put out in the courtyard. One is a tribute to the souls of the deceased, while the other one is for the Old Man of the late-night meal – *Bāpīrē-pāřiv*, a Yezidi saint, who when alive had been a righteous man but had no children. It is believed that, after his death, god rewarded him with the capacity to enrich the families who gave alms to him and to the souls of the dead on the eve of the Xidir-nabī festival.<sup>205</sup>

Further, starting with the night of the festivity until the next morning, people visited one another wishing fortune and plenty to the families of neighbours and kinsmen. There was free food and handouts to the beggars. The whole ceremony was named *Laylaqadr*, which was an exclusively Muslim concept, for at *Laylatu l'qadr*, the "Night of Greatness",<sup>206</sup> according to Muslim beliefs, the Qur'an was godsent to people, which is commemorated by a great holiday, *Īd al-qadr*. The night-time visits (*řavā Laylaqadr*) during the Xidir-nabī holiday are an important occurrence in the religious calendar of the Yezidis, being of primary importance for the destiny of a devotional Yezidi, according to the definition of Sheikh Hasane Sheikh Kalashe.<sup>207</sup>

The description of the festival significantly coincides with the celebration of *Surb Sargis* by the Armenians, *Teařnēndařaj* (Candlemas), as well as partially with the Persian festival *Čahār-řambe-sūrī*, following the *Nowruz* (traditional Persian New Year). The motif of a saint leaving a trace on food as a visible sign of his blessing is recurrent in the folk tradition of Iran, not only in reference to *Hazrat-e Xezr*, but also to *Fāteme Zahrā* (Fatima, daughter of

the Prophet Muhammad), Bībī Hawā (mother of Eve), Bībī Sešambe (Mother-Tuesday, Patroness of Weavers), and so on.<sup>208</sup>

In all, it can be stated that Xidir-nabī is a regional character with a very extensive range of functions, an incomer from the Muslim environment, though having been shaped as a pantheon figure against the Armenian cultural and historical background, which is also the case with regard to the figure of Xizir among the Zazas.

### ĪBRĀHĪM-XALĪL, GOD'S FRIEND

From the name of this deity we certainly see the biblical prophet Abraham, who is, like Moses (as stated above), very popular in folk beliefs not only of Muslims but of Christians as well.<sup>209</sup> Including Ībrāhīm-Xalīl (*xalīl*, Arab. “friend”) into the Yezidi pantheon is, of course, quite provisional, for he has neither definitive spheres of influence, nor specific functions in the cultic practice. He is perhaps a deified saint, to be addressed during a meal, a ritual meal in particular. The following prayer is read during the ritual meal after a funeral by the “Brother of the Afterlife” or by the Sheikh of the deceased:

*Sifrayī jalīl –  
Barak'ata Ībrāhīm-Xalīl!  
Harčika dāya av tam;  
Buhušt lē biva miqām,  
Dōža lē biva h'arām!  
Nāv dik're ta,  
Ālēki-ma salām!*<sup>210</sup>

A splendid meal –  
[By] the kindness of Ībrāhīm-Xalīl!  
Who gave this taste [to food],  
Let paradise be his abode,  
[While] from hell let him be banished!<sup>211</sup>  
In mentioning of you,  
Peace be with you!

During meals on the occasions of offerings, the pans containing the meat of offered animals are to be opened by the “Brother of the Afterlife” of the head of the family or the Sheikh of the family.

*Sifrayī jalīl,  
Qurbānē Ībrāhīm-Xalīl!  
Qabūl-maqbūl ba!*<sup>212</sup>

A splendid meal,  
 Let us become an offering to Ībrāhīm-Xalīl!  
 Let [God] accept [this offering]!

Ībrāhīm-Xalīl is mentioned in the following prayer of good wishes:

... *Nānī ži xiznā Šīxādī va,*  
*Hāvēnī ži Kānīyā-spī va,*  
*Sifra bi dastē Jalīl va,*  
*Barak'at gōtinā Ībrāhīm-Xalīl va.*<sup>213</sup>

[Let] the bread be from the granaries of Sheikh 'Adi,  
 Leaven from the White spring-well [a holy spring in Lalish],  
 [And] let the cloth be spread by the Splendid [i.e. Ībrāhīm-Xalīl],  
 [And] abundance at the command of Ībrāhīm-Xalīl.

Ībrāhīm-Xalīl is, as a rule, remembered while taking ordinary meals, like dinner or supper. The head of the family recites the following prayer prior to a meal: *Rahmā Ībrāhīm-Xalīl li vē sifra ba*, "Let grace of Ībrāhīm-Xalīl be on this cloth". He is perhaps associated with plentiful food, probably the only sphere tracing the role of the "Friend of God".

#### JIN-TAYĀR, THE LORD OF THE GENIES

This deity is believed to be the Ruler of the jinns (genies, spirits). However, his name means literally "flying jinn" (Arab. *ṭayyār*). He has obvious links with Sheikh Shams: the latter's shrine in Lalish is believed to be his abode.

Jin-tayār is believed to grant cures to the mentally ill: appealing to him is an effective means of exorcizing evil spirits from the possessed, since he is dominating over all invisible entities. Therefore, the mentally ill and those possessed by the spirits are advised to visit the sanctuary of Sheikh Shams.<sup>214</sup> The sanctuary of Jin-tayār, in the village of Vache in the Ashtarak region in Armenia, is located in the house of a Sheikh belonging to this family (Šēxē Jin-tayārē). Both Jin-tayār and Māma-řaşān are associated with stories of riding a stone or a lion, with a whip, becoming a snake.<sup>215</sup> These common features, probably, explain the fact that the sheikhy Rashan clan (having Māma-xaşān as their eponym) is known also as Ořaxā Jin-tayār (i.e. the family of the lord of the genies). It is believed that this family possesses the capabilities to heal the maladies of the soul.<sup>216</sup> Jin-tayār is a fuzzy image, lacking precise explication within the cult. Perhaps, he is one of the functional manifestations of Sheikh Shams personifying the sun, or Māma-řaşān, the thunder-god.

## PĪRĒ-LIBINĀ(N), THE BUILDER-SPIRIT

Pīrē-Libinā(n) literally means “Pir (a spirit or patron) of unfired brick (Arab. laban)”. The religious tradition ascribes to him the building of many sanctuaries in Lalish during the times of Sheikh ‘Adi. Pīrē-Libinā(n) is also the patron of the household and matrimonial union. He is alleged to arrange marriages. Therefore, he is addressed to facilitate marriages.<sup>217</sup> It is believed that his prayer of intercession for an object of love will always be heard, this being: *du’ā-qabūl P’irē-libnā*.<sup>218</sup> Pīrē-Libinā(n) is named as an embellishment of a number of deities and saints of Yezidism, like Sheikh ‘Adi, Sultan Ezid, Sheikh Mand, and so on. See:

*P’irē libnānō, gyānō,  
Zaynat’ bi suṣṣā Šēx Mandē Faxrānō (or Šēxē Ādiya,  
Silt’ānē Ēzida, etc.)*

Oh beloved P’irē-libinān,  
The ornament of the Mystery of Sheikh Mand, the son of Fakhr  
(The Mystery of Sheikh ‘Adi, Sultan Ezid, etc.).<sup>219</sup>

He is addressed during the Xidir-nabī festival. Pīrē-Libinā(n) seems to be an image imported from the local cults. In Lalish, he has been nearly forgotten, while the Transcaucasian Yezidis ignore him completely.

## CONCLUSION

The material cited above is as inclusive and complete an inventory of divinities comprising the Yezidi folk pantheon we can attain. Most of these figures have long been sunk into oblivion; even among the spiritual castes not all of them form sustainable associations. Because of what is now inevitably irregular or vaguely targeted research, some deities and their associated characters had not been known except by name, with many remaining completely unidentified. That will explain the great difficulties of reconstructing the total picture of the folk pantheon, which has been herein performed by gleaning scattered data and fragmented materials, using comparative techniques.

## NOTES

1. For a preliminary version of this paper see G. S. Asatrian & V. Arakelova, “The Yezidi pantheon”.
2. Arakelova, “Healing Practices among the Yezidi Sheikhs of Armenia”.

3. This label is, *nota bene*, conventionally very specific and not to be compared with the characteristics of the classical thunderers in the Ancient Greek, Old Iranian, or Old Slavonic mythologies.
4. G. Asatrian & V. Livshits, "Origine du système consonantique de la langue kurde", *Acta Kurdica* 1 (1994): 81–109, esp. §§III, 4; XIV, 1.
5. K. Jindy, *Nahwa Ma'rifat Haqīqat al-Diyānat al-Yazidiyya* (Einbeck: n. pub., 1992), 10.
6. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 393.
7. Avdal, "Ezdineri kronakan havatalik'nera", 133.
8. The Yezidi terms for lightning, *birūsk* (< Old Iran. \**wi-rauča-*), *bōbalisk* and *birq*, are generally tabooed, being used mostly in cursing (cf. *Birūsk mālā ta xa*, "Let lightning strike your home") and in some set phrases (like *gīsnē birūskē*, "plough (radiance) of lightning"). The tabooed designation of lightning is substituted by the word *bimbārak*, "blessing, grace" (cf. *Bimbārakē lēdā*, "lightning struck") (see below n. 31).
9. S. Wikander, *Vayu: Texte und Untersuchungen zur indo-iranischen Religionsgeschichte*, Pt. 1: *Texte* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1941).
10. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 115.
11. *Inter alia* mention can be made here of *Siyāh-gāleš*, "the Black Shepherd", the lord of cattle among the Iranian population of the Caspian area; see Asatrian, "The Lord of Cattle in Gilan".
12. Avdal, "Ezdineri kronakan havatalik'nera".
13. Asatrian, "The Lord of Cattle in Gilan", 81–2.
14. Jindy, *Nahwa Ma'rifat Haqīqat al-Diyānat al-Yazidiyya*.
15. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 109.
16. Kurd. *xway-*, *xāy-*, "to reveal, show"; cf. Pers. *huvaydā (kardan/šudan)* "to make appear, to appear, be evident".
17. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 13.
18. Mahmād Rāshi (Mahmad-řāši), i.e. Mahmād-řāšan: Rāshi (-řāši) is rather a hypocorism from Rāshan (*řāšan*) than a tribal affiliation, as suggested by Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 222–3.
19. *Ibid.*
20. I. Mélikoff, *Hadji Bektach: Un mythe et ses avatars: Genèse et évolution de soufisme populaire en Turquie*, Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts, 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 76.
21. V. A. Gordlevskij, *Izbrannye sočineniya* (Moscow: Vostočnaya Literatura, 1960), vol. 1, 265, 363.
22. See Mélikoff, *Hadji Bektach*, 42–3, 59, 62; Gordlevskij, *Izbrannye sočineniya*, 268–9.
23. St Karapet, or Halvori vank', a well-known Armenian monastery equally revered by both the Armenians and the Zazas. The monastery is particularly renowned for its power of healing the mentally ill; see K. Andranik, *Tersim* (Tiblisi: n. pub., 1901), 77–8, 97–108.
24. Incidentally, any dissection of a rock, sometimes a large tree, mostly an oak, is a conspicuous sign of the Yezidi thunder-god.
25. L. Molyneux-Seel, "A Journey in Dersim", *Geographical Journal* 44 (1914): 49–68.
26. S. Safi-zādeh Borakey, *Dānešnāme-ye nāmāvarān-e yāresān* (Tehran: n. pub., 1997), 105–15.
27. Sorevan or Saravan, Baluchistan, Iran.
28. V. A. Žukovskij, "Sekta 'Lyudej istiny' – Axli-hakk v Persii", *Zapiski Vostočnogo otdeleniya Rossijskogo arxeologičeskogo obščestva* 2(1) (1888): 17.
29. For example, Rūmī Jalāl-ad-dīn, *Mathnavī-e Ma'navī* (Tehran: n. pub., n.d.), ll. 2125–8.
30. And we mean here a full-fledged celestial with all divine attributes, not a mere personification of the natural elements, without clear functions and spheres of activities (like the Kurdish P'ir Sulaymān).
31. Cf. the same word, meaning "blessing, grace" (from Arab. *mubārak*), used as a substitute for the tabooed name of lightning by the Yezidis (see above, n. 8).
32. I.e. "you belong to our people; give prosperity to our home".

33. Arab. *haqq*, lit. "truth", and in the mystical Islam "Absolute Truth", i.e. "Allah".
34. In detail M. Comerđ, "Dersim Inancı'nda Duzgin", *Ware* 11 (1997): 84–104; also D. A. Haydar, *Zaza halk inançlarında 'kült'ler* (Ankara: Zaza Kültürü Yayınları, 1994), 12–15.
35. See G. Asatrian, "Nekotorye voprosy tradicionnogo mirovozzreniya zaza", in *Tradicionnoe mirovozzrenie u narodov Perednej Azii*, ed. M. A. Rodionov (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1992), 102–10, 210–12.
36. Here assuming, of course, the above-suggested etymology of *-řaşān* is viable, and that the latter is not a mere patronymic title from *řaş*, "black". Still, even in that case, it is a clear indication of the Yezidi thunder-god's authenticity.
37. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 106.
38. The popular mind perceives pains in the abdomen, legs, arms, joints, back, etc. as caused by wind or air penetrating into the body
39. E. S. Drower, *Peacock Angel* (London: John Murray, 1941), 47.
40. *Ibid.*, 56.
41. Jindy, *Nahwa Ma'rifat Haqīqat al-Diyānat al-Yazidiyya*, 20.
42. A. Tamoyan, *Menk' ezdi enk'* (Yerevan: VMV, 2001), 147.
43. V. Arakelova, "Three Figures from the Yezidi Folk Pantheon", *Iran and the Caucasus* 6(1–2) (2002), 57–69.
44. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 366–8, 438–9.
45. A. 'Abdolī, *Tālešihā Kīstand?* (Tehran: Qoqnus, 1991), 191–2.
46. Nūr 'Alī Shah Elāhī, *L'éso'térisme kurde*, 24, 28.
47. See Chapter 2 above. Remember that the Yezidis' legendary history traces its origin back to the twelfth century AD to Sheikh 'Adi bin Musafir and his community. Sheikh 'Adi was the founder of the 'Adawiyya Sufi order, a part of which, most probably, became the backbone of the first Yezidi community. The leader himself was deified in the Yezidi tradition. Having no children of his own, Sheikh 'Adi passed the leadership to his nephew Faxr Abu'l Barakat, and after the latter's death, the community was led by his son, 'Adi bin Abi'l-Barakat or 'Adi II (Guest, *Yezidis*, 20–21).
48. The deification of Sheikh 'Adi was a well-nigh determined process. The Sufi orders are characterized by the veneration of their founders and successor-leaders, who, according to the Sufi tradition, have special mystical power (*baraka*) (see Trimmingham, *Sufi Orders*, 25, 33–4). Worshipping masters' graves is also a part of the above-mentioned general process, and the case of Sheikh 'Adi is more than illustrative here: his northern Iraqi sanctuary in Lalish became the centre of Yezidism.
49. As argued in Chapter 2, Malak-Tāwūs (the Peacock Angel) is the very quintessence of the Yezidi religion, its *raison d'être*. The Peacock Angel, being the incarnation of *xwadē* himself, simultaneously possesses the characteristics of the Fallen Angel and he has seven avatars: Azrail, Dardail, Israfil, Michail, Jabrail, Shamnail and Turail (see Edmonds, *A Pilgrimage to Lalish*, 4).
50. Using here the authors' own filed materials, written down from Sheikh Titale Abdo, the Ararat region of Armenia.
51. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 98.
52. *Ibid.*, 279.
53. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, vol. 2, 33.
54. *Ibid.*, 34.
55. *Ibid.*, 33.
56. An allusion to a legend recounting the contention of Sheikh Shams with Farxadin, as a result of which Sheikh Shams changed into a button and hid himself in Faxradin's beard (from the authors' field materials, written down from Sheikh Titale Abdo).
57. The same informant's version.
58. Edmonds, *A Pilgrimage to Lalish*, 32.
59. It is possible that H'asan could have his prototype in Sheikh Hasan (Šēx H'asan), a

- historical personality, and, in fact, the father of Sheikh Shams, who was put to death in 1254 by the governor of Mosul.
60. The image of Tōqil (the corrupted form of the Arabic name Tawakkul) could be developed from another popular figure, Tawakkul bin Bazzāz, a well-known Sufi dervish and the spiritual master of Sheikh Safi ad-din Ardabili, the founder of the Safavid dynasty in Iran.
  61. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 107–8.
  62. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 36.
  63. *Ibid.*, 397.
  64. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 258–60.
  65. *Ibid.*, 216–17.
  66. *Ibid.*, 260–61.
  67. *Ibid.*, 197–8.
  68. *Ibid.*, 199.
  69. G. S. Asatrian, *Étudy po iranskoj étnologii* (Yerevan: Caucasian Centre for Iranian Studies, 1998), 25–32.
  70. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 58–61.
  71. F. Cumont, *Les mystères des Mitra* (Russian edn; St Petersburg: Evraziya, 2000), 161, 177, 182; J. R. Hinnells, “Reflections on the Bull-Slaying Scene”, in *Mithraic Studies* (ed. Hinnells; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), vol. 2, 290–312; and on the hangover of this cult among the Armenians, see J. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, Harvard Iranian Series 56 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1987), 264–77.
  72. Hinnells, “Reflections on the Bull-Slaying Scene”, 309. Cf. also W. M. Brashear, “Ein mith-räischer Katechismus aus Ägypten in Berlin”, *Antike Welt: Zeitschrift für Archäologie und Kulturgeschichte* 1 (1993): 2–19.
  73. Dewrēš, *Du'a ū družgē ezdiya*, 11.
  74. G. R. Driver, “The Religion of the Kurds”, 209.
  75. On the solar cult among the Armenians, see A. Lisic'yan, *Zangezuri hayera* (Yerevan: n. pub., 1969), 135–46.
  76. See J. Black & A. Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (London: British Museum Press, 1992), 135.
  77. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 329–37.
  78. “The Black Book” or *Mash'afē řaš*, to reiterate (from Chapter 1), is one of the two so-called Yezidi Holy Scriptures. See M. Bittner, *Die heilige Bücher der Jeziden oder Teufelsanbeter*.
  79. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 266–7.
  80. See in detail Arakelova, “Healing Practices among the Yezidi Sheikhs of Armenia”, 326–7.
  81. A. T'amoyan, *Menk' ezdi enk'*, 148.
  82. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 218–19.
  83. *Ibid.*, 170–71.
  84. R. Drößler, *Als die Sterne Götter waren* (Leipzig: Prizma-Verlag, 1976), 53–4.
  85. Drower, *Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, 252.
  86. *Ibid.*, 392.
  87. *Ibid.*, 78–9.
  88. *Ibid.*, 79.
  89. For the details, E. Spät, “Shahid bin Jarr, Forefather of the Yezidis”.
  90. Bittner, *Die heilige Bücher der Jeziden oder Teufelsanbeter*, 28 (see also Chapter 2 above).
  91. This seems to be the corrupted form of Šahīd bin-Jarr, although in both the Kurdish and Arabic versions of the texts published by Bittner (above) the reading is clearly *šhr 'bn-sfr* (*ibid.*). As for the name Šahīd, “witness”, it is most probably associated with the qur'anic description of Allah's covenant with the souls of non-begotten humans (Qur. 7:171, sura *Al-a'rāf*). In reply to god's question: “Am I your god?” (*alastu birabbikum?*), the answer was: “True, we bear witness” (*balā šahidnā*) (see Chapter 1, n. 11 above).



92. See N. Siouffi, "Notice sur la secte des Yézidis", 259–60; Lescot, *Enquête sur les Yezidis de Syrie*, 59; Drower, *Peacock Angel*, 91.
93. Malak-Farxadīn (Faxr ad-dīn) is the legendary author of the Yezidi religious code. He is also considered the incarnation of Turail, one of the seven avatars of Malak-Tāwūs and simultaneously the personification of the moon (see above).
94. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 109.
95. *Ibid.*
96. Just as, for example, the forms *Malakē/ī Tāwūs* or *Šēxē A'dī*, compared with the correct forms *Malak-Tāwūs*, *Šēx A'dī*, underline the masculinity of the characters.
97. G. Asatrian, "Āl Reconsidered", *Iran and the Caucasus* 5 (2001): 149–57; see also Arakelova, "Al (Spirit possessions – Iran, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Afghanistan)", in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), vol. 1, 52–3.
98. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 434.
99. *Ibid.*, 381.
100. None of the Yezidi sheikhs we interviewed in Armenia was able to give a convincing explanation of this passage. We think, the whole complex is a group of distorted Arabic forms: perhaps, *ti'un* = Arab. *ṭāḥīn*, "flour", *a'ynil-bayza* = Arab. *'aynul-bayḍa*, "gist, essence of egg" (i.e. "yolk and egg white"), which fits the context well.
101. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 434.
102. See Chapter 2 on "The Book of Revelation".
103. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 5–6.
104. B. A. Donaldson, *The Wild Rue: A Study of Muhammadan Magic and Folklore in Iran* (London: Luzac, 1938), 31.
105. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 403.
106. E. A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans* (New York: University Books, 1961), 467–72.
107. Or, rather, with the ancient Iranian concept of the female deity of procreation, fertility and abundance. It would be methodologically quite unacceptable to trace the origin of Pirā-Fāt directly to Anahita, as the latter herself is only one of the manifestations of this concept in the ancient Iranian tradition (cf., for example, Nanai, from the same category of goddesses, see H. von Gall, "Nana(i)(a)", in *Götter und Mythen der kaukasischen und iranischen Völker*, ed. C. Colpe et al. (Stuttgart: n. pub., 1986), 409–11.
108. Ardivisūr-yašt, based on H. Reichelt, *Avesta Reader* (Strasburg: Karl Trübner, 1911), 4.
109. F. Max Müller (ed.), *The Zend Avesta*, Pt I, *The Vendidad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1887), 54.
110. R. C. Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), 75–6; see also Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran*, 28, 481.
111. See Asatrian, "The Foremother of the Yezidis", 323–8. Regarding Zoroaster, cf. *Yasht* 19, 88–96.
112. Asatrian, "Āl Reconsidered", 149–57.
113. Tamoyan, *Menk' ezdi enk'*, 153
114. G. Furlani, "I Santi dei Yezidi", *Orientalia* 5 (1936): 64–83, esp. 76.
115. See in detail Chapter 6 below, under "Comparabilities with Heterodox Shi'ite Sects".
116. See among ancient Gnostic tracts, such as Basilides, *Comment.*, Frag. G; [Anon.] *Apoc. Ion.* 26–7; *Zostrian.* 45–7; etc.
117. Minorskij, *Materialy*, xii, n. 2.
118. B. Layton, "General Introduction", in *The Gnostic Scriptures*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1987).
119. H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), 122–3.
120. *Ibid.*
121. For the full translation of the text, see J. Russell, "The Epic of the Pearl", *Revue des études arméniennes* 28 (2001–2): 29–100; see also Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 125–9, cf. Jonas's comparisons with the Mandaean *Ginza Rba*, *ibid.*, 79–80.

122. Tamoyan, *Menk' ezdi enk'*, 149.
123. Pir Dawud (P'ir Dāwūdē Darmān) is a Yezidi saint, a "loyal servant" of Sheikh 'Adi; see Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 114–15. It is interesting that Pir Dawud also figures in Ahl-i Haqq beliefs: he is one of the seven saints or Haft-tan (similar to the seven manifestations of Malak-Tāwūs, the Peacock Angel, in the Yezidi tradition). Moreover, Pir Dawud is sometimes associated with Malak-Tāwūs in the Ahl-i Haqq doctrine, and regarded as the incarnation (*mazhar*) of Imam Reza – the eighth Shi'a imam. See Nūr 'Alī Shah Elāhī, *L'ésoféisme kurde*, 48, 53.
124. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 31.
125. Pers. *pīr*, "old, elder" also means a saint, or else a tomb of a holy man, a place of worship (a mausoleum, sacred tree, etc.). In the language of the Yezidis, the Kurdish dialect of Kurmanji, this term occurs in two forms: with the initial voiceless *p*- (*pīr*), meaning "old, elder" (*pīrik*, "old woman"), and with the aspirated *p'*- (*p'īr*) in all other meanings, including as a caste-name.
126. Both names are *izāfa* constructions, with -ē masculine suffix. *Mam* is a shortened form of Mahmād (Muḥammad), but *Zarzān* (or *Zarzā*) does not have a convincing explanation. The first element of this name (*zar*-) probably is "gold", the second (*-zān*) could be from *zāyīn* "give birth", the whole compound meaning "producing gold". As for *šivān* "shepherd" (cf. also Pers. *šabān*, *čūpān*), it has a well-known etymology (<Old Iranian \**šsu-pāna*-); *gāwān*, "shepherd of neat cattle", is a secondary formation by analogy with *šivān*, from *gā* (Pers. *gāv*) "cow", with the suffix *-vān* (<\**pāna*-). It is hardly an old compound, from \**gāwa-pāna*.
127. M. Davrešyan, "Andrkovkasyan k'rderi anasnapahut'yan het kapvac havatalik'nerə", *Lraber hasarakakan gitut'yunneri* (Yerevan) 6(415) (1977): 74.
128. *Ibid.*
129. *Ibid.*, 73; see also T. F. Aristova, *Kurdy Zakavkaz'ya (Istoriko-etnografičeskij očerk)* (Moscow: Vostočnaya Literatura, 1986), 175; Asatrian, "Lord of Cattle in Gilan", 83.
130. Avdal, "Ezdineri kronakan havatalik'nerə", 126.
131. This is probably conditioned by the fact that this constellation's name is Barānī (*barān* in Kurmanji means "ram, sheep").
132. Asatrian, "The Lord of Cattle in Gilan", 83–4.
133. Davrešyan, "Andrkovkasyan k'rderi anasnapahut'yan het kapvac havatalik'nerə", 79.
134. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 111–12.
135. G. Asatrian, "Dim(i)li", in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater (New York: Routledge, 1995), vol. 7, pt. 4, 405–11.
136. M. Comerd, "Dersim Inanci'nda Ev ve Aile tanrısı", *Ware* 9 (1996): 69–74. About the interesting parallels of cattle deities among the Lurs (Namad-kāl) and the Caspian population of Iran (Siyāh-gāleš), see Asatrian, "Lord of Cattle in Gilan", 83–4.
137. *Milyāk'at* (*malak*) means "angel" in Kurmanji (Arab. *malak*, *malakiyat*). For the second component of the name, *qanĵ*, as an attribute meaning "holy" (lit. "good, nice" etc.), see Chapter 1. See also Arakelova, "Milyāk'atē-qanĵ – The Phallic Deity of the Yezidis", in *Religious Texts in Iranian Languages*, ed. F. Vahman & C. V. Pedersen (Copenhagen i kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2007), 329–36.
138. Avdal, "Ezdineri kronakan havatalik'nerə", 93–4. The prominence of the phallus as a motif in Hittite myth, however, is worth noting here; see T. Gaster (ed.), *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), 245–315.
139. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 432.
140. J. J. Mattelaer, *The Phallus in Art and Culture* (Arnhem: European Association of Urology, 2000), 54–68.
141. Similar pendants were recorded among the archaeological items from Ancient Mesopotamia; see Black & Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 152.
142. Probably, *kir* or *kilir*, meaning "penis" in Kurmanji.
143. Informant: 80-year-old Xatuna Xajo, Talin region, Armenia.

144. Avdal, "Ezdineri kronakan havatalik'nerə", 94.
145. On the role of aischrology (ritual insult) in phallic cults see, for example, M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, 453; W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 103–5, 242–6; cf. also L. A. Abramian, *Pervobytnyj prazdnik i mifologiya* (Yerevan: Academy of Sciences of Armenian SSR, 1983), 97.
146. S. Lisic'yan, *Zangezuri hayera* (Yerevan: n. pub., 1969), 284–7. Cf. a colourful description of this rite in a novel by a prominent Armenian writer: Sero Khanzadyan, *Portak'ar* (Yerevan: Hayastan, 2001).
147. Lisic'yan, *Zangezuri hayera*, 285.
148. For details, see Meyer, *Trilogie altindischer Mächte und Feste der Vegetation*, pt. 1: *Kama*, 57.
149. For details J. G. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (Russ. trans.), 38–9, 185, 273–80.
150. On this religious institution, see G. Asatrian, "The Holy Brotherhood: The Yezidi Religious Institution".
151. Shamilov (i.e. Erebe Šemo), *Šivanē Kurd*, based on S. Wikander, *Recueil de textes kourmandji*, Uppsala, 1959, 46; S. Wikander, "Ein Fest bei den Kurden und im Avesta", *Orientalia Suecana* 9 (1960): 7–10. Cf. also G. S. Asatrian, "Armenian xoygołowt'wn: Tracing Back an Old Animal-Breeding Custom in Ancient Armenia", *Iran and the Caucasus* 2 (1998): 63–5; G. S. Asatrian, "Arüsiye güsfindân: Târixçe-ye yek jašn-e kohan-e Îrânî", *Îrân-šenâsi* 4 (2000): 859–62.
152. A. Şemîlov, *Berbang* (Yerevan: n. pub., 1969), 60–61; see also a brief reference to this feast in Mahmud Bayazidi, *Nravy i obyçai kurdov* (Kurdish text of 'Rusûmât-nâmayi ek'râdiye), 43, 127.
153. Davreşyan, "Andrkovkasyan k'rderi anasnapahut'yan het kapvac havatalik'nerə", 77.
154. Cf. Avestan: *varšni-haršta-*, "die Zulassung der Widder", according to Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, col. 1381; Asatrian, "Armenian xoygołowt'wn", 63–7.
155. The second part of this name is from the Arabic *aṛḍ*, "earth". For *Dawreš* (dervish), see above, under the introductory remarks of this chapter.
156. V. Voskanian, "Dewrēš E'rd: The Yezidi Lord of the Earth", *Iran and the Caucasus* 3–4 (1999–2000): 159.
157. On the system of five obligatory relationships for every Yezidi individual, see Asatrian, "The Holy Brotherhood", 89, 94.
158. M. Rudenko, *Kurds kaya obryadovaya poeziya* (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), 132; Voskanian, "Dewrēš E'rd: The Yezidi Lord of the Earth", 160.
159. Nakir and Munkar, the names of two angel-executors in Islamic eschatology, attending the deceased in the grave after the funeral. In the Yezidi religious texts they are also presented as a single character – the horrible demon *Niknikin*.
160. We consider *azdā* as an adaptation of *azil-dā*, i.e. "from the beginning (pre-eternity)" (cf. Arab. *Azal*, "eternity without beginning"): it is hardly from *az dā xwadē*, "god granted me", as suggested by Rudenko (*Kurds kaya obryadovaya poeziya*, 135) based on the Yezidi popular etymology of the form.
161. Inebriate is in fact a Sufi term, meaning "one in love with Allah", yet is not really adapted to Yezidism; see V. Arakelova, "Sufi Saints in the Yezidi Tradition: Qawlē Husaynī Halāj", *Iran and the Caucasus* 5 (2001): 190–91, nn. 11, 21.
162. *A'vd ū banī* must be understood as a copulative formation from two synonymic words, *a'vd* (Arab. *ʿabd*) "slave" and *banī* (Old Iran. *\*bandaka-*), with the same meaning.
163. The text and translation of this prayer have been corrected in several places by the authors. Lines 12 and 13 had not been previously translated at all.
164. Voskanian, "Dewrēš E'rd: The Yezidi Lord of the Earth", 161–2.
165. Rudenko, *Kurds kaya obryadovaya poeziya*, 63–4.
166. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 113.
167. Eliade, *Patterns on Comparative Religion*, 331–2.
168. She occupies the fourth canonical place among the six Ameša Spentas (Amahraspands)

- of Ahura Mazdā; see Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran*, 91–93, 109–14; G. Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans* (Stuttgart: Kohl Hammer Verlag, 1964), 11–15; J. Kellens, *Zoroastre et l'Avesta anciens* (Louvain: Peeters, 1991), 27–40.
169. H. W. Bailey, "Saka "Ššandrāmata", in *Festschrift für W. Eilers: Ein Dokument der internationalen Forschung zum 27. September 1966*, ed. G. Wiessner (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967), 140.
  170. Nyberg, ""Texte zum mazdayasnischen Kalender", in *Monumentum Nyberg III*, Acta Iranica 7 (Leiden: Bibliothéque Pahlavi, 1974), 397–480.
  171. Bailey, "Saka "Ššandrāmata", 138.
  172. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 157.
  173. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 305.
  174. R. R. Štaket'berg, "Ob iranskom vliyanii na religioznye verovaniya drevnix armyan", 20–21.
  175. V. Basilov, *Kul't svyatykh v islame* (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1970), 17; A. Krasnowolska, *Some Key Figures of Iranian Calendar Mythology* (Krakow: Universitas, 1998), 121–40.
  176. Meyer, *Trilogie altindischer Mächte und Feste der Vegetation*, pt 3, *Indra*, 159–60.
  177. Kurmanji *ōjāq/x*, or *tandūr*, an open-hearth furnace on which the fuel or dried animal dung is exposed to the flame.
  178. See A. Christensen, *Essai sur la démonologie iranienne* (Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1941), 83–4; R. Seferbekov, "On the Demonology of the Tabasaranians", *Iran and the Caucasus* 5 (2001): 140–41.
  179. Avdal, "Ezdineri kronakan havatalik'nerā", 91.
  180. The attribute of *Xudān* ("master, host"), *māl*, literally means "property, house" (cf. Arab. *māl*); *Dawlat* is also an Arabic loan-word meaning "wealth, welfare".
  181. Comerd, "Dersim".
  182. Tamoyan, *Menk' ezdi enk'*, 151.
  183. W. Eilers, "Herd und Feuerstätte in Iran", in *Antiquitates Indogermanicae: Studien zur Indogermanischen Altertumskunde und zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte der indogermanischen Völker*, Gedenkschrift H. Güntert, Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, 12 (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachen und Literaturen, Abteilung Sprachwissenschaft, 1974), 308–9.
  184. For the "Old Woman" in household ritual contexts in Hatti/Hittite religion, however, see L. Jian, *Hittite Women in Religion* (n.p., 1993), ch. 4.
  185. Written from Gulnara Hajo, 60 years old, Amo village, near Yerevan.
  186. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 312.
  187. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 103–4.
  188. T. Bois, *The Kurds*, 100.
  189. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 332.
  190. *Ibid.*, 451.
  191. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 80.
  192. Drower, *Peacock Angel*, 28.
  193. Tamoyan, *Menk' ezdi enk'*, 151.
  194. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 387–8.
  195. Alongside with *Dūzgin*, *Xizir* is one of the two supreme gods of the Zaza pantheon; see Comerd, "Yitiqatī Dêrsimî de Xizir", *Ware* 12 (1998): 83–100, 113–26.
  196. A. A. Papazyan, "Al'-Xidr i Il'ya: Mifologičeskie istoki analogii", *Palestinskij sbornik* (Leningrad) 28, 91 (1986): 89–97; A. Krasnowolska, *Some Key Figures of Iranian Calendar Mythology*, 141–60.
  197. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 308.
  198. On *Surb Sargis*, see S. Harut'yunyan (ed.), *Surb Sargis: Gitəlovi nyut'er* (Yerevan: Armenian National Academy of Sciences, 2002); cf. also Comerd, "Yitiqatī Dêrsimî de Xizir".
  199. *Šēx K'elešē, Rē-rizma miletē ēzdi angori qirarē dīn*, 33–4.
  200. Davrešyan, "Andrkovkasyan k'rderi anasnapahut'yan het kapvac havatalik'nerā", 73.
  201. Basilov, *Kul't svyatykh v islame*, 17.

202. L. Y. Šternberg, *Pervobytnaya religiya v svete etnografii* (Leningrad: n. pub., 1936), 466.
203. Davrešyan, “Andrkovkasyan k’rderi anasnapahut’yan het kapvac havatalik’nerə”.
204. The Yezidis traditionally have four meals a day: at dawn, *taštē*; at noon, *frāvin*; in the afternoon, at 6–7pm, *šiv*; and late at night, at 10–11pm, *pāšiv*.
205. Šēx K’elešē, *Řē-řizma miletē ēzdī angori qirarē dīn*, 33–4.
206. In different versions it is on the first, the 17th, the 21st, 23rd, or 27th day of the holy month of Ramadan.
207. Šēx K’elešē, *Řē-řizma miletē ēzdī angori qirarē dīn*.
208. Krasnowolska, *Some Key Figures of Iranian Calendar Mythology*, 146.
209. J. Russell, “Our Father Abraham and the Magi”, *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* (Bombay), 54 (1987): 56–73.
210. Informant: Sheikh Hasane Mahmud.
211. Lit.: “Let hell be ritually disallowed for him”.
212. Informant: Arame Chachan, Armavir region, Armenia.
213. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k’urda*, 435.
214. Jindy, *Nahwa Ma’rifat Haqīqat al-Diyānat al-Yazīdīyya*, 12.
215. Tamoyan, *Menk’ ezdi enk’*, 152.
216. K. Ankosi, ‘*Farze bratie’ u ezidov* (Tbilisi: Oraya, 1996), 10; Arakelova, “Healing Practices”, 325.
217. Jindy, *Nahwa Ma’rifat Haqīqat al-Diyānat al-Yazīdīyya*, 32.
218. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 218.
219. *Ibid.*, 236–7.

## CHAPTER 5

# ASPECTS OF NATURE AND CELESTIAL BODIES IN THE YEZIDI TRADITION

The syncretism and eclectic character of Yezidism is supposed to include a deep, thick layer of primitive religious elements, yet distinctions between canon, dogmatics (if we suppose their existence) and primitive beliefs (or “superstitions”) remain very hazy. Still, to complete the religious picture of the Yezidis, it is necessary to consider their pantheistic views, all of them turning out to be reflections of early forms of religion.

Now, we have already considered the cultic importance of the peacock and snake, and because these manifest a rather Gnostic/Sufi substrate of Yezidism, we will move on first to examine the place of other animals in the tradition.

## ANIMALS

The *chameleon* is considered a variety of snake for the Yezidis, and they feel devout fear towards this animal. It is called *mārā a'zmān*, “The Celestial Snake”. In their belief, the chameleon is born in heavens and then falls down to the earth; nobody has ever seen how this animal eats, drinks or supplies its needs. Moreover, it can mysteriously change its colour.

The *rooster* is considered as a variety of peacock that has been mystically respected in the tradition; using cock’s meat as food, especially for a representative of the spiritual caste was strictly prohibited. “Either sheikh and a pupil should never eat cock’s meat in honour of Malak-Tāwūs, (as) Tawus (Peacock) is one the seven divinities who are the same as him (i.e. seven avatars of Malak-Tāwūs) and he looks like a cock”, as “The Black Scripture” (§24) states (see above in Chapter 2). Yezidis believe that the sunrise is possible only by the call of a rooster; this bird brings happiness, especially to newlyweds – a notion, by the way, that is one of the most widespread among Iranian peoples since ancient times. Some Baluchi tribes consider the rooster as a holy bird, with the eating of its meat forbidden.

A white rooster is as well an angel who protects people, assists in wellbeing of a family, and to kill such a bird is banned. One of the most important characteristics of a rooster, mentioned also among the Yezidis, is its apotropaic nature, its presence helping to oust evil spirits and demons.<sup>1</sup> In ancient Iran the rooster was believed to be a divine creature, a bird of Sraoša (in the late tradition Srōš) the deity of religious obedience and order.<sup>2</sup> According to a Muslim legend, most probably of Iranian origin, a rooster was assigned to have divine attributes. It is believed that the Prophet Muhammad favoured white roosters, held one at his home and personally looked after it. A white cock-angel lives under Allah's throne in heaven; it calls every morning and cocks from all over the world echo him and announce time of prayer to true believers.<sup>3</sup> A Christian legend affirms that the rooster was the first living creature who proclaimed the Nativity of Christ in Bethlehem by a call *Christus natus est*, and since then all roosters sing all through the Christmas night. In addition, every rooster that will live on earth on the Judgement Day and every metallic cock on the spires and towers will sing to notify about *Dies Irae* (the Day of Wrath) and dire alarms.

The remains of white rooster's cult can be found in the popular beliefs of the Armenians of Isfahan, Iran. They have inherited legends which say that, if a person comes across a white cock somewhere in spinney (or thorny undergrowth) at sunset and immediately make the sign of the cross, the cock will turn into a pile of gold and gems.<sup>4</sup> Cock artefacts were very important among magic and bewitching accessories in very different traditions, including those of the Armenians: they preferred, however, the black hen – its blood, feathers and beak in a full set – to make up the so-called *materia magica*.<sup>5</sup> It is not inconceivable that the image of Malak-Tāwūs as that of a peacock-divinity accumulated some elements of the rooster's cult.

Then there is the dog. In ancient Iran, it is the most esteemed creature. In Zoroastrianism and Mithraism the dog was considered to be the second significant creature after a human being. In the Avestan *Vendidad* (or *Vidēvdāt*) a whole chapter is devoted to the dog and its varieties, descriptions of its virtues and of those punishments one will suffer if one kills a dog, harms it or even feeds it badly (chapter 13, esp. §§10–16). The Zoroastrian *Book of the Righteous Viraz* narrates about arduous trials which people's souls must suffer if they, during their lifetime, hit or kill a dog, or even begrudge food for shepherd or sentry dogs.<sup>6</sup> In Sassanid Iran it was believed that those who did not like dogs' barking were doomed to spend their days in foreign lands and be unlucky.<sup>7</sup>

The dog was considered a creature that had a direct link with the underworld. One thinks immediately of the dog as the guard at the underworld gate – of Cerberus in Greek mythology. The participation of dogs in funeral rites is also a kind of *locus communis*. Most demonstrable in this regard is the Zoroastrian *sagdit* (*sag-dīt*, lit. “dog's look”), when a dog was specially brought to look at the deceased. It was believed that a gazing dog ousts the *Drug-nasu*,



or cadaveric evil spirit.<sup>8</sup> Here we can clearly see the protective nature of the dog, whose mere presence wards off evil sources. Thus, according to the Iranian concept, dog and evil are in relations of complementary distribution; in this function the dog in Zoroastrianism assists a rooster. In terms of classification the ancient Iranians considered also foxes and hedgehogs as varieties of dog: both had their own place in the complex of Zoroastrian popular beliefs.<sup>9</sup>

Nowadays dog worship among Yezidis does not go beyond the scope of that special attitude this animal enjoys among cattle-breeding peoples in general. Earlier, however, the situation was different. Valuable facts about dog homage can be found in *Siyāhet-nāme* ("Book of Travels") by Evliya Çelebi, the Turkish traveller and official Ottoman historiographer of the seventeenth century:

[The Yezidis of Sinjar] first give to their children milk of a black dog. If somebody dares to hit a dog, he is mercilessly killed. Each Yezidi holds from five to ten dogs in front of the doors (of his house). Food is first given to a dog, and only then, when the dog is satisfied, they eat themselves. One black dog is sold for 1000 *kuruş(es)* and ten mules ... Adding of black dog's hair to the shroud of the deceased is a general tradition [among them] ... In this region they usually arrange great feasts when a black dog is born. And when the dog dies, it [its body] is washed with the sap of [napiform] onion [see also below] and it is buried at a special dog cemetery. For the [peace of the] soul of the dead dog the rest of the dogs are given roasted mutton. The dogs of those people resemble lions indeed. There are no wolves at all in this country. It is strange that the mount Sinjar, known as a blessed land, sheltered such infidels ...<sup>10</sup>

In this short passage, almost all the above elements of the dog cult are clearly marked: dog homage and its top position, its connection with death and funeral rites, and thus its apotropaic nature (also reflected in the fact that its milk is given to a baby, in order to ward off evil spirits), cruel punishment for killing or harming a dog, and so on. Moreover, the colour symbolism is quite obvious here – a black dog has particular religious meaning. The latter can be also seen in the dog worship among the Zaza people (of Central Anatolia). In T. Gilbert's words, "*il adorent un grand chien noir, comme l'image de la Divinité*" (i.e. "they" – the Qizilbash, here meaning the Zazas – "worshipped a black dog as the symbol of deity").<sup>11</sup> This could not last, for the loss of the dog cult among the Yezidis was expectedly conditioned by the influence of Islam, in whose teachings the dog is taken as an unclean animal.<sup>12</sup>

The burial of dogs (and cats) at a special cemetery is another ancient religion element, considering first the similar rite in ancient Egypt mentioned



by Herodotus (*Hist.* II, 66–7). Relics of this tradition are attested also among Armenians. Raffi (or Hakob Melik' Hakobian) the Armenian writer of the end of the nineteenth century, notes that when a dog that had served for a long time dies, they advise *nra gluxe dʿran šemi tak t'ayeleye oyurov ē*, meaning “burying its head under the house threshold will bring luck;”<sup>13</sup> and Anatolian Turks used to hang the skull of a wolf above the house threshold for the same reason.<sup>14</sup> In some popular legends, on the level of the so-called folk Islam, a black dog is mentioned to be a medium, a creature with evident infernal features, and is sometimes a kind of werewolf that can turn into genies.<sup>15</sup> Yezidis as well as Armenians of some regions (those of Mush-Bulanykh, for example) believe that the long dog howl means a forthcoming death, as a dog can supposedly see the angel of death, while for the Karabakh Armenians a night howl of a wolf is considered a good sign.<sup>16</sup>

While it is not an object of worship, it would be remiss if we did not mention Yezidi attitudes to the donkey, since, as one of us has argued elsewhere, a misunderstanding arose about it.<sup>17</sup> A curious story about traces of donkey-worship among the Yezidis still haunts the thoughts of Kurdologists. The authors of this theory were Jean Przyluski and Basile Nikitine, the whole idea being formulated by the latter in his 1956 monograph on the Kurds.<sup>18</sup>

On Nikitine's account, Przyluski once visited a Yezidi sanctuary in a village called Malatia, where on the walls of a house he saw depictions of a hippoccephalic creature and a bird, which was identified later as Malak-Tāwūs, the Yezidis' supreme deity. Later on Przyluski found in the Jaba/Justi dictionary<sup>19</sup> a word entry *k'arnāmūt*, explained as “*l'âne ne meurt pas*, a feast celebrated by the Kurds on the 20th of March (i.e. 'Nawruz')”, and commented on *k'ar-nā-mūt*, “immortal donkey”. Such data became the basic arguments for *le culte de l'âne*, the donkey-worshipping tradition allegedly once practised by the Kurds. Przyluski actually tried to substantiate this theory by tracing etymological parallels between the ethnonym Kurd and the Sanskrit and Dravidian terms for “ass, donkey”, *garda(bha)*, *gadaboī*, *karuda*, *kadi*, and so on. Nikitine, in his turn, adds the name of a Kurdish mosque near Ushnu in Iran, *K'ar-xōrān*, as if meaning “donkey-eaters”, and alluding by that to a certain reverence towards this useful beast of burden.

As a matter of fact, however, the donkey has always been a despised animal among the Kurds, and among the Yezidis – as a *terminus comparationis* for illogical behaviour and feeble-mindedness. The whole set of conjectures is mere fantasy and a misunderstanding, as we have already explained there is no Yezidi sanctuary outside Lalish, and the depiction of Malak-Tāwūs, even of its name, are strictly taboo. *K'arnāmūt* is an Armenian borrowing in Kurdish, from Armenian dialectical *k'arnamut* (literary *garnanamut*), “the advent of spring”; *K'ar-xōrān* is a derogatory label given not to the mosque, but to the inhabitants of the village itself; and so on.

## PLANTS

There is no explicit *tree* cult in Yezidism such that can be viewed as dendrolatria, despite the existence of a cultic complex connected with the so-called *Dārā mirāzā* or “the Trees of Desire”. The sacred character of these particular trees does not depend on their sort, but on the place where they grow, their age, shape or any other attributed features. Usually, in late autumn, festivals with some sacrifice (*bindārūk*) are celebrated under these trees.

This kind of tradition has been recorded among many nations of the region, and should be considered more as an element of the cult of “the cosmic channel” (like worship of the holding beam of the house or central pole of the marquee, but with a different interpretation) or connecting the lines of three worlds – underworld, our world and heaven. The cult complex concerned with worship of such trees also involves hanging rags on the branches of a tree in memory of the dead or for the fulfilment of a wish. To clarify, the worship of huge trees like oak, especially the black ones, or that of juniper, as attested among the Zazas in Central Anatolia, is never recorded either among Yezidis or Kurds.<sup>20</sup>

As for the wider world of flora, the most esteemed plant bearing evident cultic significance is the *onion* (Lat. *allium cepa*) or *pivāz*. The earliest evidence of onion worship among the Yezidis can be found in the same passage by Çelebi that discusses the worship of black dog (see above). The Yezidis of Sinjar, he writes,

carry onion and *jajezil* [a sort of cheese with pungent flavouring]. If anybody smashes or squashes onion, his head will be smashed and he will be killed by them. And the most important is that if a rich person dies, he is washed with onion juice and onion is planted on his grave. I asked the captives [Yezidis] several times about it, but never got a straight answer. “Onion is good”, they said. There is a parable. It says that a Yezidi was asked what he would do if he became a king. I would eat onion, he answered. And indeed, Kurds [here: Yezidis] like onion very much.<sup>21</sup>

Leaving aside the gastronomic partiality towards onion, which is traceable among Yezidis and Kurds even now, the cultic significance of this plant cannot be doubted, judging from Çelebi’s information. The fact of killing a human because of an improper ritual handling of this plant directly bespeaks its sacred character and the presence of a certain cultic complex connected with it, an aspect of life unfortunately now no longer mentioned among the Yezidis, but very probably once existing. The washing of a deceased person with onion juice and the planting of onion on the grave is apparently part of this complex, which protected the dead’s soul against dark forces. Together with congener garlic and also parsley, onion is a well-known protective means

against evil spirits. Sion Archimandrite Ter-Manuelian, an Armenian intellectual of the beginning of the twentieth century, narrates about Yezidis' particular passion for onion that

Onion is their whole-hearted love, which they will never change for anything else; this love and worship came to such an extent that it turned into parable. In their words: *Az pīvāz na-dixōm, dibēža šak'ar bixō* ("I [even] do not eat onion, and [he] says 'eat sugar'"). Onion is a permanent adornment of Yezidi traditional meal, and its big bunches are always put in the middle of a table.<sup>22</sup>

Garlic and onion often appear as characters of Yezidi tales – as Pīvāz and Sērō.<sup>23</sup> One notes also the registered Yezidi tribal name Pīvāzī, with the Armenian family name Pivazyan evidently originating from there.

Elements of onion worship can be traced in various traditions. In Egypt, for instance, people celebrate *šām an-nasīm* ("the Breath of Breeze"), when from the very morning, they eat onion and dye eggs. The French litterateur Gérard de Nerval documented the direct worship of the onion in Egypt from the second half of the nineteenth century. "Imagine my amazement", he writes, "when once I entered my (Egyptian) slave's room and saw a long garland of onions, hang aslant the door, and other onions symmetrically hang over the sofa she sleeps on, and she was making acts of worship".<sup>24</sup>

Onion is an important part of *materia magica*, used both in the so-called white and black, harmful magic for bedeviling purposes. In some regions of Persia, in order to make harm or do a bad turn to a neighbour, the onion is pierced with a needle, and then it is pointed towards a definite house and left in this position for a night as sorcery.<sup>25</sup> Talishis (traversing the Republic of Azerbaijan and Iran) also believe that an onion tied to the heel relieves toothache.<sup>26</sup> The Kurds of Khorasan (northeastern Iran and Central Asia) say that if one eats an onion on Saturday, one will become rich.<sup>27</sup> And according to a Zaza tradition, to eat onion on Friday is a serious sin, in fact in Zaza popular beliefs it is even forbidden and considered a grave sin to eat garlic or onion at all.<sup>28</sup> Onion has certain ritual and magic significance among Armenians as well.<sup>29</sup>

Another plant having a kind of universal mystical fame and inspiring reverential attitude in many traditions, including the Yezidi one, is *mandrake* (Lat. *Mandragora*). Mandrake is widely used in folk medicine as antihypertensive and diuretic, as well as to subdue a fever, remove pain, stop bleeding, and so on. But first of all mandrake is considered to be a means of stimulating the desire of lovemaking and it is believed to ensure conception, characteristics incidentally reflected in mandrake's Persian name *mehrgyāh*, that is, "love plant". In the Bible (Gen. 30:14-16), it is also mentioned with the same meaning.

Mandrake (Grk. *μανδραγόρας*) is a Mediterranean narcotic plant of the nightshade family (*solanaceae*) and its tuber-like root resembles a human figure. The Yezidi folk tradition considers it has the colour of human skin. Yezidis believe

that at night mandrake glitters and its leaves look like silver, but as soon as somebody is approaching it, mandrake hides below the ground. In order to call it out, one should splash some drops of a woman's urine on it. And when one tries to uproot mandrake, it supposedly shouts so shrilly that the one who digs it up dies at once. In order to avoid death, the soil must first be dug round the root, then a hungry dog or a goat is tied to it. Having moved away to a reasonable distance, a person should show food to the hungry animal to coax it to follow him and pull up the plant. The animal is believed to die afterwards.

The same procedure is mentioned among different peoples of various regions.<sup>30</sup> Armenians call mandrake *loštak*, *mardaxot* or *manragor*, and apparently it unites two denotations – *Mandragora* and *Brionia* (in Latin). In the Armenian folk tradition, mandrake is considered to be “the king of all plants”, or *t'agawor amen xotic'*. Its obvious sacred meaning among Armenians and its high estimation as real panacea is proved by the existence of a special prayer-praise called *Ayot'k' vasn loštakin*, the “Prayer to Mandrake”:<sup>31</sup>

You are the king of all the plants!  
 Almighty God created you and endowed you  
 [With talent of] healing of people and nations  
 From all the known illnesses in the name of  
 Invisible and eternal God,  
 Kind and beneficial Creator  
 And [in the name of] His Apostles,  
 Prophets, martyrs, patriarchs,  
 Hermits, saint virgins,  
 Warriors [for faith] and saint angels,  
 And archangels and the whole heavenly hosts,  
 And all the more so, through the mediation of all-merciful  
     blessed Holy Mother.  
 Be blessed, you, Mandrake!  
 By the power of Almighty, by the spear-hand of Invisible,  
 By powerful hand of Mighty, let all the afflictions disappear,  
 The demons be prostrated, and intrigues come out,  
 And the assemblage of demons be scattered,  
 And the foundations of those evil be ruined,  
 And you be blessed  
 From here to eternity.

It is recommended to recite this prayer seven times before digging mandrake out.

An Armenian legend tells how this plant (*loštak*) appeared:

Once upon a time there was an ostiary-servant (a monk of the very lowest order), Loshtak by name. Constantly oppressed by the

monk he attended upon, once Loshtak poured some lamp oil over the sleeping monk's beard and set it on fire. The monk awoke in horror and bawled at Loshtak: "Let the earth swallow you up!" and at the same moment Loshtak sank into the ground. But the monk regretfully added: "Be the panacea for all diseases". However, some time later, suffering from the pain, he again cursed Loshtak, wishing that if anyone tried to dig him out, would sink into the ground himself. That's why people are digging out Loshtak, tying it to a dog's tale.<sup>32</sup>

There are no other unequivocally sacred plants among the Yezidis.

A popular legend tells about a kind of herb in the mountains whose smell makes a person blind. But there is always an antipode growing right next to it, which will bring your eyesight back. Another legend tells about a tree which once grew in the mountains of Sinjar and people used to put a new *xarqa* over its branches, to make it acquire its particular colour. Now it is believed that these trees are no more to be found, and that "the Kurds cut them all down".<sup>33</sup>

## CELESTIAL BODIES

The interpretations of natural phenomena in the Yezidi beliefs are as a whole typical for the Near Eastern region, yet some of them are not devoid of interest.<sup>34</sup>

The *lunar eclipse* is caused by a dragon (or, in some versions, by a big cat) trying to swallow the Orb of night. He will never manage to, but, on the off-chance, just to be sure of evil's defeat, the dragon should be frightened by a big noise – shoots, shouts, clanging, and so on.<sup>35</sup> There is also another explanation for this phenomenon. The Brother-Moon is said to be in love with his Sister-Sun. In order to catch her, he covers his face with a veil. But angels snatch the veil off, unmasking the Brother-Moon, thus helping the Sister-Sun escape. *Lunar phases*, too, have their popular explanation. Brother-Moon, suffering from his one-way love, gets old, dies, and relives again. There is even a riddle referring to this: *Av k'îya, ku mahê jārākê kâl diva, dimira û disā dizê?* "Who (is the one) gets old, dies and is born again each month?" The Yezidis look upon the lunar eclipse as an ill omen threatening epidemic, drought, war and other disasters.

*Earthquakes*, *bîbalarz* (*a'rdhažîn*), the Yezidis say, happen when the huge red bull carrying the earth moves his ears or wags his tail. According to another version, the bull is constantly disturbed by a fly whirling over his head. When the fly approaches the bull's eye, he blinks, thus making the earth tremble. The folk-belief says if one day the fly sits on the bull's belly, he will move from his place, the earth will collapse and Doomsday will come.

The rainbow, or *k'askasōr* (lit. “green-red”), is the belt of Prophet Solomon (*Silēman p'ēxambar*). If someone ever stands right under it, all his desires will come true. And if someone walks under it, he will change his sex, a man becoming a woman and vice versa. A similar belief exists among Armenians. In newer Armenian tradition the rainbow is also called “green-red” (*kanač-karmir*), while in the classical version is *ciacan*, a word of obscure origin.

In the Yezidi folk beliefs, *thunder* and *lightning* are sent by Mama-rašān, Šēxē-birūskē, or Āba-birūskē, the atmospheric deities of the Yezidi pantheon discussed in Chapter 5. *Raining* is the will of *xwadē* himself, with the Prophet Solomon being a mediator in this connection. The latter, being versed in the language of the feathered race, orders the birds to take water from the sea into their beaks and drop it on the earth. That is why raindrops are of different size, as Yezidi tradition has it. *Hail* (*tayrōk*, New Pers. *tagarg*) is believed to be the punishment of god for sins and various delicts committed by people inhabiting the area involved.

The Yezidis, like other peoples of the region, believe that *stars* appear and die together with men's birth and death. Everyone has his own star in the sky; when it falls, they say, the person dies at that moment: *stayrikā wī ži a'zmānā řižīya*, “his star has fallen down”, or *stayrikā wī vēšīya*, “his star flickered out”. A man's health, his destiny itself, is directly connected with his star: *marī hana stayrā wāna gaša*, *marī hana stayrā wāna čilmisī* (i.e. “There are people, who have bright stars, and others, whose stars are flickering”), as a Yezidi proverb says.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, during a wedding ceremony the mother of the groom used to hold up her hands to heaven, asking Malak-Tāwūs, the Yezidi supreme deity, to keep the newly-married couple's stars shining: *Yā Malakē Tāwūs, birā stayrē būkē ū zavā gaš bin*. And the young girls dancing round, used to address the following prayer to the stars:

*Stayrnō, stayrnō, stayrnē gaš!*  
*Ma binhēřin, ma vē šāya,*  
*Řahmā wa li sar būk ū zavē.*

Oh, stars, stars, bright stars!  
 Have a look at us, at our joy,  
 Let your mercy be upon the bride and the bridegroom!

An appearance of a star in the daytime is another bad sign, hence the warning: *stayrā řōžē bē dītinē, wē sālē diva šař*, “If a star is seen in the daytime, a war will start”. A comet, *stayrā bi bōčik*, that is, “a star with a tail” (cf. Armen. *gisastł*, “a hairy star”) is another dreadful phenomenon spelling catastrophes and adversities, and filling people with consternation.

There are but very few notions fixed in the Yezidi folk perception of the celestial map. The Yezidis call the Milky Way “the road of a straw reaper (or thief)” (*Rīyā kādiziyē*). It coincides with the names *via lactea* among almost all

the peoples of the region: the Armenians with their *hardagoyi čanaparh*, the Persians, *rāh-i kah-kašan (kāhduzd)*, the Turks, *samanyolu*, and so on.<sup>37</sup>

One finds Venus, the morning star (*Stayrā sibē*); Sirius (*Galāvēž*, lit. “[the star] bringing people to perdition”), which is supposed to lead travellers astray (to their perdition); as well as the constellations of Libra (*stayrā Mēzīn*), Pleiades (*Pēwir*), and Aries (*Barān*). The Pleiades, as a sign of good fortune, are especially venerated. Thus the saying: *Pēwirē f-kē xūyā būn*, “Someone’s Pleiades have appeared”, or *Pēwirē f-kē hiltēna*, “Someone’s Pleiades have risen”.<sup>38</sup> This constellation is often mentioned together with Libra, as in the poignant song:

*Šavē dirēža dāyī*  
*Pēwir u Mēzīn a‘zmānā būna qāyī,*  
*Az miskīn būm harī hāyī.*<sup>39</sup>

It is a long night,  
 Pleiades and Libra are set in the sky,  
 [Still] I am unhappy forever.

The name of Pleiades in Kurmanji, *Pēwir*, is one of the lexical archaisms having its Avestan parallel, *Paoiriiaēnī*, going back to the Old Iranian *\*parwya-*, “first”.<sup>40</sup> Aries, which the Yezidis call *Barān* (= Kurd. *Barān*, “ram”), appears in the sky late in the evening, when shepherds usually drive their sheep into the fold. This constellation is the symbol of fecundity and simultaneously the protector of Mamē-šivān, the patron deity of small cattle, as well as the latter’s celestial counterpart.<sup>41</sup> The spirit of Mamē-šivān is believed to represent the constellation of Ram on the earth.

## NOTES

1. See F. Meier, “Nizāmī und die Mythologie des Hahns”, 66–9.
2. Geiger, *Ostiranische Kultur im Altertum*, 365–8; Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran*, 66–7; cf. also M.-J. Yāhaqqī, *Farhang-e asāθir va dāstān-vāre-hā dar adabiyāt-e fārsī* (Tehran: n. pub., [1386] 2007), 324–9.
3. Palacios, *La Escatologia musulmana en la “Divina Commedia”* (Madrid: Real Academia Español, 1919), 50–58.
4. From the authors’ field material, Boloran village, Isfahan region, Iran, 2001.
5. See Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 921–3 for a cock’s role in religious and ritual practice of different nations.
6. See F. Vahman, *Ardā-Vīrāz Nāmag. The Iranian “Divina Commedia”* (London: Kurzon Press, 1986), 141–3.
7. See Inostrancev, *Sasanidskie etyudy*, 92.
8. See Müller, *The Zend Avesta*, Pt I: *The Vendīdād*, lxxxvi–lxxxviii; F. Vahman & G. Asatrian, *Notes on the Language and Ethnography of the Zoroastrians of Yazd* (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy of Sciences, 2002), 55.
9. See H. Willman-Grabowska, “Le chien dans l’Avesta et dans les Védas”, *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 8 (1931–2): 30–67 for more information about the dog for indo-Iranians.



10. E. Çelebi, *Seyahatname* (Ankara: Akba Kitabevi, 1944–5), vol. 1, 188; based on Asatrian, “The Holy Brotherhood”, 83–4.
11. T. Gilbert, “Note sur les sectes dans le Kurdistan”, *Iran and the Caucasus* 1 (1997): 203.
12. On dog’s role in folk beliefs and Islam, see “Dog”, in J. Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), vol. 1, 511–13.
13. Raffi, *Erkeri žolovacu* (Yerevan: Haypethrat, 1955), vol. 1, 110.
14. F. Türkmen, “De la naissance a la mort: sur quelques croyances anatoliennes”, in *Altaic Religious Beliefs and Practices*, Proceedings of the 33rd Meeting of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference, Budapest, 24–29 June 1990, G. Bethlenfalvy *et al.* (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1992), 391.
15. From field material of the authors.
16. See Bense, *Hark’ (Mšo Bularnyx)* (Yerevan: Academy of Sciences of Armenian SSR, 1972), 42, along with field material of the authors.
17. G. S. Asatrian, “Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds”, *Iran and the Caucasus* 13 (2009): 18.
18. Nikitine, *Les Kurdes*, 252–4.
19. A. Jaba & F. Justi, *Dictionnaire kurde-français* (St Petersburg: Commissionaire de l’Académie Impériale des sciences, 1879), s.v.
20. See G. S. Asatrian, “Nekotorye voprosy tradicionnogo mirovozzreniya zaza”, 107.
21. Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, vol. 1, 188, based on Asatrian, “The Holy Brotherhood”, 84.
22. S. Tēr-Manuelean, *Ezidi kurmanj’* (Akhaltskha: n. pub., 1910), 28.
23. For example, S. Wikander, *Recueil de textes Kourmandji* (Uppsala: A.-B. Lindequistska Bokhandeln, 1959), 33–4.
24. G. de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient* (Russian edn; Moscow: Nauka, 1986), 137–8.
25. According to the authors’ field notes from the Kashan region (central Iran), 2000.
26. B. V. Miller, *Talyshskie teksty* (Moscow: n. pub., 1930), 146, 152.
27. S. A. Mīrnyā, *Ilhā va tāyefehā-ye ‘āšayerī Xorāsan* (Tehran: n. pub., 1991), 201.
28. A. Kaya, *Tunceli kültürü* (Istanbul: Aydinlar Matbaasi, 1995), 44.
29. See A. Vardanian, “The Assyro-Babylonian *Xumbaba* and the Armenian Plant Name *Xembaba*”, *Iran and the Caucasus* 3–4 (1999–2000): 207–9.
30. See Fr. J. Simoons, *Plants of Life, Plats of Death* (London: Diane, 1998), 101–35.
31. G. Sruanjteanc’, *Erker* (Yerevan: n. pub., 1978), vol. 1, 285–6.
32. A. T. Ganalanyan, *Armianskie predaniya* (Yerevan: Academy of Sciences of Armenian SSR, 1979), 103.
33. Both legends are recorded by the authors from *Faqir Tayar*, Armavir region, Armenia.
34. This section is mainly based on field materials from the Yezidi communities in Armenia.
35. We shall not touch here upon the moon and solar cults, since they have been discussed above in Chapter 5, and also elsewhere by Arakelova, “Three Figures from the Yezidi Folk Pantheon”, 57–69.
36. For stars in ancient Gnostic texts, note the discussion by G. W. Trompf, “Jude, Irenaeus, and the Gospel of Judas”, *Biblica* 91(4) (2010): 577, 581.
37. W. Eilers, *Die vergleichend-semasiologische Methode in der Orientalistik* (Wiesbaden: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1973), 16.
38. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k’urda*, 303. For comparison, consider the Mandaean Book of the Zodiac; cf. E. Rochberg, “The Babylonian Origins of the Mandaean Book of the Zodiac”, *Aram* 11–12 (1999–2000): 237–47.
39. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k’urda*, 304.
40. C. Bartholomae, “Der indogermanische Name der Plejaden”, *Zeitschrift für indogermanische Sprach- und Altertumskunde* (Strassburg) 31 (1912): 40–48; M. N. Bogolyubov, “Zvezda α Tauri v drevneiranskoj mifologii”, in *Literatura, yazyk, kul’tura*, ed. G. V. Stepanov (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1986), 7–8.
41. One can be allured into comparing the Yezidi *Barān* with *Bharanī*, the name of a constellation in the Indian tradition; cf. K. G. Zysk (trans., ed.), *Conjugal Love in India: Ratisastra and*



*Ratiraman* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), and see also Abū al-Reyhān al-Bīrūnī (Abu Rejxan Biruni), *Al-Hind (Indiya)*, ed. A. B. Xalidov *et al.*, Russian trans. (Moscow: Russian National Academy of Sciences, 1995), 211–70, 417, 419, 446; but the obscure origin of both names, the different position data of their *signifiés* on the celestial map, as well as differences in functional interpretations of the two constellations, leave almost no ground for further judgement.

## CHAPTER 6

# YEZIDI RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM

Despite its unique and extremely original character, Yezidism reveals a number of striking parallels with other syncretic religions, in particular, with the heterodox Shi'a sects. Such common features can be revealed on different levels: the mentioned traditions can share both important basic ideas and marginal elements. A part of these parallels simply consists of common elements deriving from Islamic mysticism. The most interesting point here is that in many cases such parallels cannot be the result of mutual influences of these traditions and are rather the common markers of the Near Eastern "heretic" milieu inherited from earlier, pre-Islamic layers (e.g. elements of long-lasting Gnostic teachings) and/or shared by different non-dogmatic traditions (including Yezidism) as derivatives of that "heretical" milieu.<sup>1</sup>

### COMPARABILITIES WITH HETERODOX SHI'ITE SECTS

The extreme Shi'a sects, generally known as *ghulāt* (*ṡulāt-i šī'a*), are distinguished, at least formally, by their specific attitude towards 'Ali, the Fourth Caliph, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, glorifying him as an object of worship and as of supreme worth.<sup>2</sup> Admittedly the pattern of things is complex, for in some of them 'Ali is a rather marginal figure, even if retaining the obvious traits of an epic hero. Among these sects, the largest number of parallels bearing on Yezidism are found with the Ahl-i Haqq (People of the Truth), mainly in the province of Kurdistan, Iran, and in the religion of the Zazas, centred in the uplands of Central Anatolia.

Among the main points of comparison, especially between Yezidis and these two groups, is, first and foremost, the religious institution of "Brother and Sister of the Next World",<sup>3</sup> as well as a number of other *common characters*, such as 'Ali and Fatima, who are in any case deified by most heterodox Sh'ites. With regard to the Ahl-i Haqq, one of the sect's autonymics is Yāresān

or Yārsān (the Iraqi Ahl-i Haqq are commonly named *Kakāi*),<sup>4</sup> while the Yezidis' self-denomination is *Ēzdīxāna* (i.e. "the abode of the Yezidis"). The term Yārsān is perhaps going back to *yārestān*, "the abode of those in love [with god]", with the suffix *-stān* indicating "place", and *yār* "beloved". The formation of these two terms, *Ēzdīxāna* and *Yāres(t)ān*, in fact, is based upon one and the same principal concept, the idea of community as the abode (home) of co-religionists (the faithful). Like the Yezidis, the Ahl-i Haqq must have spiritual masters; with the latter these are *pīrs* and *dalīls* from among the hereditary caste of religious leaders or *seyyeds*, who shape the life of the *xāndān*, or families, as spiritual tutors drawing their disciples from among the caste of laymen or *murīds*. A similar hierarchy, social structure of society, and the institution of spiritual tutorship can be observed in that other comparable heterodox Shi'ite group, the Alevi Zazas.<sup>5</sup>

Parallels are also traced in the *cosmogony* of the Ahl-i Haqq and of the Yezidis: the One God, the primeval Creator initially created a pearl, which contained all elements of the universe. In the religious doctrine of the Ahl-i Haqq there are seven images or *hafttan*, being effectively analogous to the avatars of Malak-Tāwūs in the Yezidi religion. In both cases, they are the seven great angels; particularly visible is the position of the four angels governing the four elements: fire, water, earth and wind. The concept of the seven angels penetrated to Yezidism from the combined biblical-Zoroastrian-Muslim axis. And in a very similar form and functional meaning it occurs in the religious beliefs of the Extreme Shi'a sects in general.<sup>6</sup> In Gnostic tradition, too, there is an idea of the Seven Creator Angels, often being associated with the Seven Days of Creation, although this was only one line of interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

Of special interest is the problem of *reincarnation*. In contemporary Yezidism the concept of *tanāsux* (reincarnation, re-embodiment) is somewhat vague; it is present, but not dominating.<sup>8</sup> This idea may *prima facie* seem antagonistic to the tradition of paradise and hell, as the latter rules out the need for reincarnation. In any case, the idea of reincarnation, coexistent with the tradition of paradise and hell, is widespread within the esoteric trends of Islam, in particular, in a number of extreme Shi'a sects. To illustrate, in Ahl-i Haqq concepts human beings have to pass through a thousand and one reincarnations (depending upon their deeds in previous incarnations). The Ahl-i Haqq perception of *tanāsux* clearly illustrates the absence of any antagonism between the idea of reincarnation and that of paradise and hell. The single-shot *tanāsux-e malakūtī*, they say, is a general eschatological idea, shared by all Muslims, including the "People of the Truth" themselves. Thus, the essence of the eschatology of the Ahl-i Haqq still turns out to be the Last Judgement (*sān* "review") as a result of which the Good shall enter paradise, and the wicked shall be annihilated. The successive transmigration of a human being's soul, called *tanāsux-e melkī*, lit. "earthly, material reincarnation", is approached by the sectarians as a means to perfection and purification.<sup>9</sup> The Nusayris,

another heterodox Shi'a sect, recognize the reincarnation of men only. A parallel notion is attested in the Gnostic tradition.<sup>10</sup>

At this point we should note some parallels between the *religious practice* of the Yezidis and the Ahl-i Haqq and other relevant groups. Both, for instance, keep the three-day "Lent", unknown to Islam, the Yezidis prior to the birthday of Sultan Ezid, and the Ahl-i Haqq in honour of Soltān Sohāq. The ritual of community assembly (*jam*) practised by the Ahl-i Haqq, the Zazas, as well as by other extreme Shi'a sectarians, most probably existed also in Yezidism at the early stage of its formation, considering not only its mystical roots but the fact that joint community meetings with women admitted is an inalienable part of esoteric sects.<sup>11</sup> Essentially, mystical Islam became the only niche wherein a woman could fulfil herself in a Muslim society, although the Yezidis today have retained only the annual general assembly (*jamā'at*) of the community, with women participating. The place of assembly (*jamxāna*) for Shi'ite sectarians is sacred; on its threshold everyone had to fall prostrate, and the Yezidis do the same when entering the shrine of Sheikh 'Adi. During the ceremony of recollection of Allah (the *zikr* and *samā'* rituals), the Ahl-i Haqq and a number of other extreme Shi'a sects prefer the so-called loud *zikr*. They also make use of a sacred musical instrument, a sort of a tambourine (*tambūr*), while when performing their religious hymns, the *qawwals*, the Yezidis use a big tambourine (*daf*) as well as a flute (*šibāb*).<sup>12</sup>

Incidentally, it was most probably the admitting of women into their general assemblies by the sectarians that gave rise to various incriminations against the Extreme Shi'ites and the Yezidis that they held night-time orgies. Quite naturally this type of alleged conduct was abhorred within the Islamic environment, women being separated from men during the congregational prayers. Even more suspect was the esoterism of Yezidi doctrine itself (and those of other associated communities): they possessed a closed communal character and imposed a severe ban on revealing secrets of their cultus to outsiders. At any rate, the accusations of nightly orgies and even promiscuity amount to a typical manifestation of intolerance toward esoteric sects and all sectarians on the part of the orthodox. Used as a *corpus delicti*, there is usually one and the same plot with slight variations: the story of a night-time orgy with commonly condemned moral violations and supposed promiscuous contacts after extinguishing the light, and so on. Such accusations, however, were completely groundless, as multiple objective authors and researchers have attested.<sup>13</sup> Despite categorical denial of the sectarians, mainstream believers have generated derogative stigmas, which have become a leading feature of popular ideas about non-orthodox religious trends in the Near and Middle East in general.<sup>14</sup>

## GNOSTICA, OR Gnostic FILAMENTS IN YEZIDISM

Of course we should acknowledge that similar incriminations, not completely unlike those against the Shi'a sects and not always quite groundless, were also levelled in the past against Gnostic sects, whose members were reproached by the Christian Church for violating the human and divine prescripts. Some of the Gnostics' mysteries stunningly disregarding any taboos, even sexual ones, evidently did not contradict the worldviews held, because the act of copulation, for instance, was symbolic of a sacred marriage overcoming isolation and ascertaining unity. The soul, accordingly, had to experience all temptations of evil, to self-actualize all activities, both good and evil. The charge that such cult activity would lead to promiscuity, as described in the apocryphal source *The Secret Book of Noria*, however, could not dissuade Gnostics from practising in other ways – by self-denial and abstinence, even down to celibacy, as preached in such apocryphal gospels as *The Gospel of Thomas* and *The Gospel according to the Egyptians*.<sup>15</sup> The divergences over behavioural issues, however, cannot be said to clinch a disunity of views or target settings for different Gnostic sects. Rather, we see the same general attempt in the different ways, some very extravagant, to remove all restrictions holding back the aimed-for ecstatic experience or all interferences preventing the arrival at the condition of mystical unity, light, and consequently, for a Gnostic – the Truth.

With regard to religious philosophy more generally, the various, even contrastive, behavioural models of the mystics can be explained as different means of approaching the sacral. Since between the profane and the sacral there is always a gap,<sup>16</sup> and the religious experience is based upon the transition between them, that is, upon the attempt to bridge that gap, there appear two ways of accomplishing that transition: either by sanctifying the profane, or inversely, by profanation of the sacral (the way of anti-asceticism). Very indicative in this latter case is the philosophy of the Mahasiddhis in India, “the great perfect ones”, who erased the borderline between the sacral and the profane by profaning sacrality in stunning, and therefore, more demonstrable fashion. These eccentric yogins had never observed the accepted standards, opposing their lifestyle to that of the monks and even pious laymen. For the Mahasiddhis the basic line of conduct was the recognition of the fundamental non-duality of reality, or its non-hierarchical structure. More often than not, later religious tradition, on a popular level in particular, can sanctify this type of behaviour as a special way of spiritual development for the select, for the special members of a spiritual elite. Sanctified in this way, for example, was the saffron colour of clothing of the Buddhist clergy, which had originally been the colour of the lower *varnas* of the Indian society, even of the *pariahs*, thus becoming the symbol of submission and renunciation of the conventional values.<sup>17</sup>

Muslim mystics and members of the esoteric sects, while their behavioural profile is not as extreme as found among certain Gnostic libertarians or Indian Mahasiddhis have taken on distinctive aspects. And by the same token, despite

the ambiguity surrounding their attitudes and behaviour, and in spite of continuous persecution on the part of official Islam, they have come to acquire considerable popularity in the wider society. Their spiritual authority for a Muslim layman would often exceed the authority of an orthodox clergyman, despite the latter's strict Shariat observance, for a mystic can trespass many religious prescripts by openly disregarding them or by providing them with a different interpretation (some sectarians, for instance, drinking wine).<sup>18</sup> In a way comparable to complicated Gnostic ethics *vis-à-vis* normative Christianity and its dogmas, Muslim sectaries sit in contradistinction to orthodox Islam. Both have attracted to themselves auras of elite and esoteric status. Moreover, in both cases we are dealing with special members of the communities, with the chosen ones who possess exclusive access to the True Knowledge, and thus with an absolute esoterism. All kinds of ritual assemblies have a related purpose – of attaining a mystical unity by the community members, the faithful, who ideally achieve overall communion with the Truth – both in the esoteric sects of Islam and in the Gnostic milieu.

It is quite probable that the earlier suspicious attitudes towards the Gnostic and Gnosticizing sects was simply later transferred to the esoteric streams in Islam, since many of them clearly showed Gnostic elements or conceptual parallels with Gnosticism. The ethics of both is conditioned by mystical experience, so that some behavioural patterns generated in this spiritual milieu drop out of the set of rules prescribed by the orthodoxy. In both cases there are formal allegations of trespassing upon the public standards, as contended by Epiphaneus, the son of libertarian Gnostic Carpocrates, in his composition *On Justice* (c.150s): “The private character of the laws is cutting and gnawing at the alliance established by the divine law”, for the Creator established the laws “in accordance with His justice, no distinction being made of the feminine from the masculine”.<sup>19</sup>

The idea of *xwadē* (one god) in Yezidism, who had delegated all his functions to the triad except perhaps the function of the demiurge (though periodically this role is also ascribed to the incarnations of *xwadē*), is to a certain degree reminiscent of the Gnostics' image of the demiurge, who had created the world by the lesser god's assignment. The Yezidi *xwadē* is also a typical example of a *deus otiosus*, who, through being the creator of the world, remains completely indifferent to its destiny.<sup>20</sup> Is not it also reminiscent of another problem, also related mostly to the Gnostics: “Why did so many people come to deny the value of the world and to attribute its creation to an inferior, blind demiurge?”<sup>21</sup> A peculiar feature of Yezidism is that in the tradition *xwadē*, due to the absence of a strict dogma, comes forth as the supreme god who both acts as blind demiurge himself and transfers his demiurgical functions to the triad, and in both cases *xwadē* does not interfere with the affairs of the world after its creation.

Some images and symbols of Yezidism also find parallels both in the Extreme Shi'a and the Gnostic traditions. Malak-Tāwūs, the Yezidi supreme

deity combining the divine elements with the features of the fallen angel, is attested also among the Ahl-i Haqq and the Mandaeanes.<sup>22</sup> One of the conspicuous, although tacit, symbols of Yezidism is the *serpent*,<sup>23</sup> which is practically never mentioned explicitly in any Yezidi religious text, oral or written. The only manifestation of this symbol is in the two-metre image of the black serpent at the entrance to the shrine of Sheikh 'Adi in Lalish. Meanwhile, the Sheikhy clan Dārā Mirāzā (in Armenia) has preserved a figure of a dragon serpent made of brass as an important relic, although with no detailed explanations provided by the relic holders. In this connection it is to be noted that the Mandaeanes, too, feature the serpent in the same two forms – as a reptile, headless and legless, and as great earthly dragon. The serpent as a symbol of life and as an amulet is carved by the Mandaeanes above the door of a new house, overhanging the entrance with blue beads (also being amulets) and decorations made of clay. A serpent woven of blue cotton is suspended from a conjugal bed, and there is a design among the Mandaeanes that includes a serpent, a scorpion and a lion, although this is most probably of zodiacal significance, keeping in mind interpretations that have been made of the similar Mithraic bas-reliefs.<sup>24</sup> In all, however, in the whole region an image of a serpent, sometimes paired with a peacock or a dove, is a widespread motif in art.<sup>25</sup>

There is every reason to believe that we deal here with a striking instance of so-called symbol degradation. Before becoming a mere element of decoration, the serpent was presented at least as a patron, protector, and amulet. It would be quite reasonable, considering the important function of the serpent in Gnostic knowledge, to suggest that the serpent-amulet is a secondary interpretation of the image. In effect, the serpent was originally one of the main symbols of Gnosis and, quite naturally, in most traditions affected by Gnosticism this symbol had to be preserved, either in a degraded form (as with the Mandaeanes), or in formal representation with no dogmatic context (as among the Yezidis).

The Gnostics approached the serpent from the point of view of pneumatic contradiction, underscoring its role in cognition: having tasted from the tree, Adam and Eve acquired the Knowledge, the power beyond the bounds, and turned their faces away from the Creator.<sup>26</sup> That destroyed the principle of concealing the Knowledge from Man. The action of the serpent (resp. Malak-Tāwūs with the Yezidis) is viewed in effect as the inception of Gnosis on earth.<sup>27</sup>

Even Jesus could be regarded by the Gnostics as an embodiment of the supreme serpent. In the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John* Christ presses the man to taste against the commandment by the Chief Archon (II,1 [22]), thus assuming some functions of the serpent. In Manichaeism the link of Jesus with the paradisiacal plot is so solid and natural that a new myth is born: the serpent cedes his place to Jesus completely.<sup>28</sup> As to the mighty serpent-dragon 'Ur, on him, according to the Mandaean tradition, rests the physical world: over him are seven firmaments, below him are seven underground worlds of darkness (it is to be noted that Yezidism also deals with as many as fourteen spheres of

the world). The serpent-dragon has fiery breath, while his belly is now fire and now ice.<sup>29</sup> His mouth is like an absorbing whirlwind; sometimes he is depicted as holding his tail in his mouth. The serpent with his tail in his mouth is the universe in the Gnostic tradition; its dark head is earth and the light-coloured tail is heaven.<sup>30</sup>

The Gnostic image of serpent as one of the elements of the universe is also ambivalent. In the form of the earth-girding dragon of the primeval chaos, he is featured as the principle of evil and darkness, in contrast to light: "The outward darkness is a giant dragon, his tail being in his mouth."<sup>31</sup> The same is true with regard to the serpent "as the king of the earth's worms, with its tail in its mouth", the serpent who misled the angels and the first Adam.<sup>32</sup>

Another important element enabling parallels to be drawn between the Yezidi religion and some Near Eastern syncretic doctrines, as has been mentioned above, is the *pearl*.<sup>33</sup> However, the pearl in different hypostases has been manifested in very differing and remote traditions. Prior to degrading down to a mystical-religious symbol, then with a magico-medical attribute, and eventually as a merely aesthetic and economical form, the pearl carried crucial metaphysical significance as cosmological symbol. Since a pearl is contained in a shell, *qua* deep symbol, it can become the cause of its own conversion into a cosmological centre, including all the elements of the universe within its substantial, quintessential part.<sup>34</sup> The Yezidi cosmogony endows the (white) pearl with this very status, as the quintessence of the universe, coexisting with the divine in eternity, prior to everything else.<sup>35</sup> Ahl-i Haqq goes even further. In the Ahl-i Haqq doctrine the sanctity of pearl lies not in its affiliation with any particular symbol. It is sanctified by hierophany directly: in the eternal existence the divine has been enclosed in "the Pearl".

The pearl becomes so polysemantic through the relevant symbolism of water, the moon, of creative femininity, and so on. It is very significant in this respect that, according to the Yezidi tradition, the primeval liquid, the seed that had generated the Yezidi people, had also been created by god out of a pearl.<sup>36</sup> In Gnosticism, we find the pearl has another interpretation and is a metaphor for soul. In the so-called Gnostic "plots" the search for the pearl is the search for one's own lost soul, one's own true Self, while its acquisition is the contingency of coming back to god.<sup>37</sup> For the Yezidi case an interesting point in this regard is their legend that they take origin from the seed of Adam alone, an anthropogonic story traceable to a Gnostic *sujet*.<sup>38</sup> With the Yezidis there is thus a suggestion of a whole people capable of recovering the divine.

It becomes increasingly obvious, then, that the Yezidi religion, along with the basic concepts of Islamic mysticism (later transformed within the already closed community), incorporates a number of elements from Gnosticism and of "Oriental mysticism" in the broad sense. Similar elements have also been discovered in other non-orthodox doctrines developed in the same multicultural area of northern Mesopotamia, each distinguished for multiple manifestations of syncretism.



## ON SUFI HERITAGE IN YEZIDISM

Sufi elements in the Yezidi tradition belong to the layer actually rooted in Islamic mysticism. The most obvious elements of Sufi heritage in Yezidism are the figures of two central personages of the latter: Sheikh 'Adi himself, a once Sufi leader and later a Yezidi saint, and Malak-Tāwūs, whose cult was mainly developed upon the Sufi idea of the apology of Iblis.<sup>39</sup>

But some other specific elements could be also mentioned as connecting to Sufi practice. The particular mystical role of a circle in the Yezidi tradition, for instance, is likely among them. A circle, even an imaginary one, drawn around a Yezidi by anyone, allegedly can not be trespassed unless it is erased (or, if imaginary, deleted, "cancelled"). An interesting description of this phenomenon among the Yezidis of Alexandropol (present-day Gyumri, Armenia) is given by George Gurdjieff, a mystic and popular theosophist of the early to mid-twentieth century.

I saw a boy who was standing surrounded by children, crying and doing strange movements. The other kids were laughing. I came closer, asked what happened and found out that the crying boy was a Yezidi, that around him they drew a circle, which can not be crossed unless it is erased. The kid was doing his best to go out of the circle, but he failed. I approached and erased a part of the circle, that allowed him to go out.<sup>40</sup>

Leaving aside the veracity of this description, it must be particularly noted that the mysterious attitude towards a circle still occurs among the Yezidis.

Another point is Sufi terminology in the Yezidi religious lore, attested primarily in early *qawls*, and requiring special interpretation within the present-day tradition.<sup>41</sup> Even the term "Sufi" itself can have opposite connotations depending on the period of the creation of a *qawl*. For instance, in *Qawlē Šēx A'rabaḡi Ant'ūzī*, verse 16 runs very negatively as follows:

*Tālib, sofi, aw mallana,  
Aw darawā xangaranā,  
Roḡā āxirātē sarē wān davē doḡē, ja'nimēvā dijāma.*<sup>42</sup>

The Talibs, sufis and mullahs  
[They are] liars, stupid,  
On the Doomsday their heads will be thrown to hell.

Such a disparaging attitude towards both the Muslim clergy and mystics, however, points to the late origin of this piece of lore, one estimates not earlier than the fifteenth or sixteenth century, when the Yezidi community no longer associated itself with Islam and was then already persecuted in the Muslim

milieu as “devil worshipping”. However, even in the late tradition, especially on the popular level, the initially positive attitude towards Sufis persisted and can still be traced. One of the most vivid examples is the popular game, a kind of dicing, in which each side of the cube has its name. Two opposite sides are called *diz* and *sof* (i.e. “thief” and “Sufi”), emphasizing thus two opposite qualities – negative and positive. Yet, the latter can be hardly explained by a kind of collective memory of the Sufi roots of the community; most probably, it reflects one of the general trends in the “Oriental world” – showing respect towards dervishes, mystics in general, whose behaviour, be it even contradictory and asocial, is usually sanctified on the popular level in various traditions.<sup>43</sup>

Another case to note is the adaptation of popular Sufi saints to the Yezidi tradition. There are *qawls* dedicated to the historical personalities, like Husayn al-Hallaj<sup>44</sup> or Rabi’a Adawiya,<sup>45</sup> in which the prominent Sufis are approached as righteous Yezidis defending their faith. These *qawls* can be definitely dated back to the Sufi period of the ‘Adawiyya community, which can be easily proved by a number of Sufi terms that have gained no additional interpretation up to the present days of Yezidi tradition. One of these terms is *yār*, usually used by the Muslim mystics (both in the Sufi orders and the Extreme Shi’a sects)<sup>46</sup> while addressing each other, and here occurring in the passage when a woman Khaja, asks al-Hallaj *Ma ži t’av yār, birāka* – “Reckon me among your followers”.<sup>47</sup>

Another relevant example relates the term *mast*, “drunk”, which has a convincing interpretation in the Sufi tradition, particularly in regard to the personality of al-Hallaj. The latter’s “extreme” character was actually opposed to the behaviour of the so-called “sober” mystics. The allusion to this conflict can be also seen in the same Yezidi *Qawlē H’usēyīnī H’alāj*, where we come across *Mastā malōmīnīn*, meaning “Let us not distress those drunk”.<sup>48</sup> There can be little doubt that in the context of al-Hallaj’s story, the term “drunk” could have been referred only to the Sufis, but later in Yezidism it lost its initial meaning and gained no other special one. The term *mast* is alien to the present-day tradition, it is never used in its figurative sense; in the modern Yezidi lexicon, this word now has the profane and obviously negative connotation of the drunken state.

## NOTES

1. For details see V. Arakelova, “On Some Essential Markers of the Near Eastern ‘Heretic’ Milieu”.
2. See M. Milani, *Sufism in the Secret History of Persia*, Gnostica 7 (Durham: Acumen, 2013), chs. 5–6; cf. R. Hamzehee, *Iran: Land of Revolutions* (Göttingen: Edition RE, 1991); M. Moosa, *Extremist Shi’ites: The Ghulat Sects* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988).
3. See Asatrian, “The Holy Brotherhood”, 79–97.
4. *Kākā* (*kā*, *gagū*, *gaū*, etc.) is a common term (along with *barādar*, *birā*, etc.) for “brother” in the vernacular Persian, as well as in Kurdish, Gurani and Luri. The name of this sect

- as Ahl-i-Haqq may have resulted from Christian influences; see W. Ivanow, *The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan* (Leiden: Brill, 1953), 56.
5. See Asatrian, "Dim(i)li".
  6. See Minorskij, *Materialy*, 4, 81; Nûr 'Alî-shâh Elâhî, *L'ésotérisme kurde*, 22–6; Mokri, *Cycle des Fidèles Compagnons à l'époque de Buhlûl*, 29–30.
  7. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, "On the Origin of Gnosticism", 351. On the meaning of the figure seven in different traditions, including the Old Iranian religions, as reflected in Zoroastrianism (cf. seven Ameshaspentas), see A. Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 145–50.
  8. See Drower, *Peacock Angel*, 32–3, 91; Lescot, *Enquête sur les Yesidis de Syrie*, 67–8. See also Chapter 4 above, under "Šêx-kirâs, The Spirit of the Garment".
  9. M. Khaksar, "Reincarnation as Percieved by the People of Truth", *Iran and the Caucasus* 13 (2009): 117–24.
  10. See Arakelova, "Three Figures from the Yezidi Folk Pantheon", 70–73.
  11. See V. Arakelova, "Notes on the Yezidi Religious Syncretism", *Iran and the Caucasus* 8(1) (2004): 19–28.
  12. See Layard, *Discoveries among the Ruins*, 75; Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 53–6.
  13. On the literature in detail, Asatrian, *Étyudy po iranskoj étnologii*, 104–6.
  14. *Ibid.*
  15. M. K. Trofimova, *Istoriko-filosofskie voprosy gnosticizma* (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), 53.
  16. M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), esp. ch. 4.
  17. E. A. Torčinov, *Religii mira: Opyt zapredel'nogo* (St Petersburg: Peterburgskoe Vostokovedenie, 1998), 20. For the Mahasiddhis, D. G. White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Tradition in Medieval India* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
  18. Thus, on Ahl-i-Haqq, V. A. Žukovskij, "Sekta 'Lyudej istiny' – Axli-hakk v Persii", 4. Of interest regarding 'non-normal' gender relations in Middle Eastern cultures, note also the signs of sexual liberalism in heterodox (pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian) Mazdakism; see Milani, *Sufism in the Secret History of Persia*, ch. 6.
  19. Trofimova, *Istoriko-filosofskie voprosy gnosticizma*, 53–4.
  20. See Chapter 1, based on Asatrian & Arakelova, "Malak-Tāwūs", 7–8.
  21. Duchesne-Guillemin, "The Religion of Ancient Iran", 349–50.
  22. For a detailed account of Malak-Tāwūs and the genesis of this character, see Chapter 1; cf. also Ivanow, *The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan*, 46.
  23. The snake is also manifested in the ritual practice of the Zazas (see G. S. Asatrian & N. K. Gevorgian, "Zaza Miscellany: Notes on some Religious Customs and Institutions", in *A Green Leaf*, J. Duchesne-Guillemin et al. (eds), *Acta Iranica*, vol 12(28) [Leiden: Brill, 1988], 508).
  24. For example, by W. M. Brashear, "Ein mithräischer Katechismus aus Ägypten", 2–6; cf. B. Nasoraia & G. W. Trompf, "Mandaean Macrohistory", 404–5 on the Mandaean zodiac.
  25. Drower, *Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, 37, 40, 50.
  26. For background, start with E. Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (London: Penguin, 1990).
  27. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 95.
  28. *Ibid.*, 94–6.
  29. Drower, *Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, 253.
  30. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 70.
  31. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 117.
  32. Reitzenstein, *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium*, 77–8.
  33. See, for example, Ivanow, *The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan*, 42.
  34. Eliade, *Patterns on Comparative Religion*, 398–405.
  35. Cf. the first statement of the Yezidi "Black Scripture": "At the beginning God created the white pearl from His kind substance ..." (see Chapter 2 above, "The Book of Revelation", and see Chapter 1 above).

36. Asatrian, "The Foremother of the Yezidis".
37. See Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 116–18; Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 29, 261; Arakelova, "Three Figures from the Yezidi Folk Pantheon", 71–2. But there is also a background in Syriac monasticism, reflecting on Mt. 13:45–46; see B. Colless (trans., ed.), *The Wisdom of the Pearlers: An Anthology of Syriac Christian Mysticism*, Cistercian Studies Series 216 (Kalamazoo: Cistersian, 2008).
38. See E. Spät, "Shahid bin Jarr, Forefather of the Yezidis and the Gnostic Seed of Seth".
39. See Chapters 2 and 3.
40. G. Gurdjieff, *Vstreči s zamečatel'nymi lyud'mi* (Moscow: Fair-Press, 2007), pt. 3.
41. See, for example, the interpretation of the term "hol" in Chapter 4. On the specific interpretation of the Yezidi lore's terminology, including Sufi terms, see V. Arakelova, "On Some Peculiarities of the Yezidi Lore Translation".
42. Celil & Celil, *Zargotina k'urda*, 6.
43. V. Arakelova, "On Some Derogatory Descriptions of Esoteric Religious Groups", *Cahiers de Studia Iranica* (Paris), 45 (2010): 33–44.
44. Arakelova, "Sufi Saints in the Yezidi Tradition 1: Qawlē Husēyīnī Halāj", *Iran and the Caucasus* 5 (2001): 183–92.
45. Bayt'ā Rābiē, written from Sheikh Hasane Mamud.
46. On *yāresān* as one of the autonyms of the Ahl-i Haqq, see above, p. 122.
47. Arakelova, "Sufi Saints in the Yezidi Tradition 1", 184–5.
48. *Ibid.*, 185; see also *ibid.*, 190, nn. 6, 11.

## CONCLUSION

There have been numerous publications on Yezidi history and religion, but we can dare to conclude that this has been first attempt to probe the core aspects of the Yezidi religious outlook and to do so in a systematic way. We have presented all the characters we can detect that are and have been worshipped by the Yezidis, and through them, especially the major spirit beings, we are now able to approach the quintessence of their cosmic vision. The process of this research allows a better determination, as one key result, of Yezidism's place in the intricate system of Near and Middle Eastern non-dogmatic trends in general.

By viewing Yezidi beliefs comparatively *vis-à-vis* the varieties and derivatives of heterodox Islam, as well as Gnostic currents and other “heresies” in the region, multiple parallels have been uncovered both on the level of central ideas and of many filaments both significant and marginal. Some of the comparabilities had been mentioned before us in various academic publications, especially similar features of religious-social hierarchism or specific feasts, and so on, that the Yezidis share with heterodox Shi'a sects. Some of these parallels have been further explored in this particular work, including such apparently marginal elements as the dog cult or the idea of *tanasux*. Only some of these similarities can be explained either by common origin or by mutual influence; many of them simply remain in their earlier impulses and nature-specific shibboleths typical of the Near and Middle Eastern “heretic” milieu, helping to define its constituents but not offering enough clues to historical linguists and historians of religion to settle questions of beginnings or cultic transference.

To have carried out this multifaceted analysis of the Yezidis' beliefs, we nonetheless dare to claim, has enabled us to do some reconstructing of how their syncretic tradition probably crystallized, and more particularly how their special community with its manifestly Sufi backbone could transform into a quite new form of religious identity – incorporating ideas and practices

that at first glance appear utterly incompatible. In the numerous details provided, in any case, and specific features of all the characters, their interrelations and hierarchy, their functions, spheres of influence and niches in the so-called folk pantheon, we feel satisfied that a more complete picture of the Yezidi religious *Weltanschauung* has now been built up, and hope our findings offer a solid basis for further researches in this fascinating field.

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